



**HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN THE CAUCASUS:
A GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS**

Greg Hansen

Humanitarianism and War Project & Local Capacities for Peace Project

Published by

The Thomas J. Watson Jr.
Institute for International Studies
Brown University, Box 1970
2 Stimson Avenue
Providence, RI 02912
USA

Telephone: (401) 863-2809
Fax: (401) 863-1270
E-mail: IIS@Brown.edu
http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Watson_Institute/

Thomas J. Biersteker, Ph.D., Director
Frederick F. Fullerton, Writer/Editor
Nancy Soukup, Writer/Editor
George Potter, Staff Assistant

Statements of fact or opinions are solely those of the authors; their publication does not imply endorsement by the Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies.

Copyright 1998 by the Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies. All rights reserved under International and Pan American Convention. No part of this report may be reproduced by any other means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior written permission from the publisher. All inquiries should be addressed to Publications Group, Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies.

CONTENTS

Preface	v
Author's Note	ix
Acronyms	xi
Political Map of the Caucasus	xii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Humanitarian Landscape	7
The Context of Conflict	7
The Nature of Warfare	9
The Conflicts	12
Tension Areas	22
The Social Context for Humanitarian Action	25
Chapter 2: Adapting to the Environment for Humanitarian Action	31
Security	31
Lessons Learned and Spurned	34
Humanitarian Professionalism	46
Chapter 3: Humanitarian Action	51
Assistance Needs	51
Protection Needs	54
Supporting Indigenous Capacities	56
Humanitarian Action and Politics	57
Frozen Conflicts: Implications for Humanitarian Action	58
Donor Policies	61
Humanitarian, Diplomatic, and Peacekeeping Synergies	62
Maximizing the Space for Humanitarian Action	65
Chapter 4: Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance: Interactions in Practice	69
Limits to Local Traditions of Conflict Resolution	69
Avoiding Negative Interactions	70
Resource Transfers	71
Implicit Ethical Messages	77
Supporting Local Capacities for Peace Through Aid	81
Chapter 5: Toward Normalization: Post-Emergency Humanitarian Action	83

Appendix I: Regional Chronology of Major Events	87
Appendix II: Sample Capacities and Vulnerabilities Analysis	91
Appendix III: A Framework for Considering the Impact of Aid on Conflict	92
Appendix IV: The Providence Principles	93
Appendix V: Resources For Further Reading	94
Appendix VI: About the Author and the Sponsoring Projects	95

PREFACE

The idea of preparing an aid worker's guide to the Caucasus evolved from earlier research, publication, and training activities of the Humanitarianism and War Project and the Local Capacities for Peace Project.

In recent years, the Humanitarianism and War Project published as part of the Watson Institute Occasional Paper series three related case studies: *Armed Conflict in Georgia: A Case Study in Humanitarian Action and Peacekeeping*, by S. Neil MacFarlane, Larry Minear, and Stephen D. Shenfield in 1996, *Humanitarian Action in Chechnya*, by Greg Hansen and Robert Seely in 1996, and *Humanitarian Action and Politics: The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh*, by S. Neil MacFarlane and Larry Minear in 1997.

During the same time, the Local Capacities for Peace Project focused one of its set of case studies about aid in conflict settings on the Caucasus ("International Assistance to Civilians: The Abkhaz-Georgian Civil War," by Kenny Gluck, March 1995) and conducted several "feedback workshops" with aid providers in both the northern and the southern Caucasus, most recently in mid-1998. Project findings from the Caucasus and other areas have been summarized in a booklet entitled *Do No Harm: Supporting Local Capacities for Peace through Aid*, by Mary B. Anderson (1996). Citations for both sets of publications appear in Appendix V.

Greg Hansen, who authored this *Guide*, has been closely involved in both projects. He brings to this work a strong commitment to seeking out practical lessons that will enable aid providers to do their jobs more effectively, even under the complex conditions of civil war. He has broad experience in conflict settings, recently buttressed by an additional four months conducting extensive interviews in the Caucasus and participating in a series of roundtables convened by aid agencies in Tblisi, Yerevan, and Baku to reflect on their experiences. His Author's Note does not name his important contributions to the increasing understanding that aid providers in this part of the world have been able to gain from such reflection and collaboration.

The *Guide* is not an ivory tower document. Faithful to our inductive, experiential approach, it seeks to provide practical information and guidance to humanitarian personnel in the Caucasus. It is designed to help them to deal with issues that, properly addressed, can make for effective humanitarian action while, if ignored, may cost dearly in programs and lives. Yet there are limits to its practicality. It is not a directory of organizations working in South Ossetia or Nagorno-Karabakh, a Who's Who for the UN Observer Mission in Georgia or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or a map of downtown Tblisi or Grozny.

The text provides invaluable background to the conflicts in the region (Chapter 1) and to humanitarian activities there (Chapters 2 and 4). Chapters 3 and 5 offer insights, analysis, suggestions, cautions, and ideas for further exploration that will inform and inspire future aid workers in the Caucasus. Underscoring the objective of utility to practitioners, we are departing from the normal format of Watson Institute occasional papers in favor of a more user-friendly product for those on the front lines of conflicts.

This *Guide* contains no easy answers. As Hansen indicates, they do not exist. Yet the text is posited on the belief that answers—though not easy—can be found to the most

challenging and confounding of aid dilemmas. This book is offered in the expectation that when aid providers work together with local people to meet immediate, war-induced needs, as well as to forge new approaches to future problem-solving, they can make important contributions to people's immediate survival and longer-term prospects. This expectation is based on the experiences of the past from which this *Guide* has been assembled.

In addition to building on past efforts, the *Guide* connects with our ongoing work. Tensions between assistance and protection and links between emergency relief and longer term assistance are central to current research of the Humanitarianism and War Project. The connections between conflict, aid provided in conflict, and longer-term disengagement from and resolution of conflict are continuing foci of the Local Capacities for Peace Project.

We saw the utility of producing a volume that identifies lessons to be learned from the manifold experiences of aid agencies in the region. The *Guide* presents the specific challenges they face in confronting the particularities of individual conflicts. At the same time, it makes links to such challenges as preserving humanitarian space and functioning with professionalism that have resonance well beyond the Caucasus. Since the text reflects, but does not recapitulate, our earlier work, we encourage readers to seek out those volumes. They offer more detailed discussions of matters such as the politicization of aid to Armenia and Azerbaijan, the absence of direct UN aid presence in Chechnya and Nagorno-Karabakh, and the multiple connections between aid and conflict.

This is a moment in the post-Cold War period when the complexities of the terrain and the risks of doing harm are increasingly used to rationalize international disengagement from assisting and protecting vulnerable populations. This *Guide* makes a strong case for continued—but more discerning—engagement. Its attention to security issues is designed not to discourage international involvement but to inform it. The monograph presents the landscape of the Caucasus in all of its bewildering complexity yet illuminates ways that humanitarian action may become more sustained and effective. It recalls lessons spurned as well as lessons learned.

We wish to express appreciation to organizations and individuals who have played a role in making this initiative possible. We acknowledge with gratitude financial contributions from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, and the regional office in Tblisi of the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (now the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Activities). We owe a particular debt of gratitude to agencies that sponsored and participated in the roundtables in the region noted earlier. S. Neil MacFarlane's comments on the draft manuscript have strengthened the finished product. We also note with thanks the ongoing contributions to our two projects of the institutional contributors listed in Appendix VI.

We are in the process of launching a series of dissemination and training activities inside and outside the region, also with special encouragement and assistance from Sida and the U.S. Department of State. A Russian translation is planned for later in the year. Information regarding upcoming events will be posted at the Humanitarianism and War Project's website, www.brown.edu/Departments/Watson_Institute/H_W, from which copies of the volume may also be downloaded directly.

We welcome comments and reactions.

Larry Minear, Director
Humanitarianism and War Project

Mary B. Anderson, President
Collaborative for Development Action

July 1998

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Previous work conducted in the Caucasus since late 1994 by the copublishers of this volume has provided me with firm foundations in compiling this guide. Three monographs produced by the Humanitarianism and War Project examined humanitarian responses to conflict in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Chechnya. I am grateful to the authors of these earlier publications for laying the groundwork. I have also drawn heavily on the work in the Caucasus and elsewhere of the Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCPP) of the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA) Inc. and have appropriated the inductive approach of both Projects for much that is contained here. I am grateful to Larry Minear of the Humanitarianism and War Project and to Mary B. Anderson of the LCPP for their counsel, patience, and moral support throughout.

Although responsibility for the final product is mine alone, in keeping with the philosophies of the two Projects many of the readers of this volume will also have been its direct or indirect contributors. I have inflicted myself upon countless organizations and individuals over the course of the work. Four months were spent in the region toward the end of 1997 interviewing representatives of UN agencies, the ICRC, international and local NGOs, UNOMIG, the OSCE, and numerous local experts and academics in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the northern Caucasus in the Russian Federation. The in-kind support and thoughtful input which they provided to the guide were tremendous.

I am especially appreciative of the time taken by the 60 participants at forums held in Tbilisi, Baku, and Yerevan where we grappled with some of the major concerns and dilemmas facing the aid communities in these three settings. A special note of thanks is due to MERLIN, UNHCR (now OCHA), Save the Children (U.S.), MSF-France, and UNHCR for convening the roundtables, assisting with visas, and getting me in and out of difficult places. I'm grateful to Kenny Gluck and Neil MacFarlane for reviewing early drafts of the guide and providing constructive suggestions. Likewise, special thanks to Jim White and Nick Angus for their generous help with security issues, to Catherine Dale for her input on "Bounded Populations," and to Misha Khutsishvili and his family for their friendship and bottomless hospitality. A hundred other individuals helped in ways large and small. One of those individuals is Vincent Cochetel, who at this time is still being held hostage in the northern Caucasus.

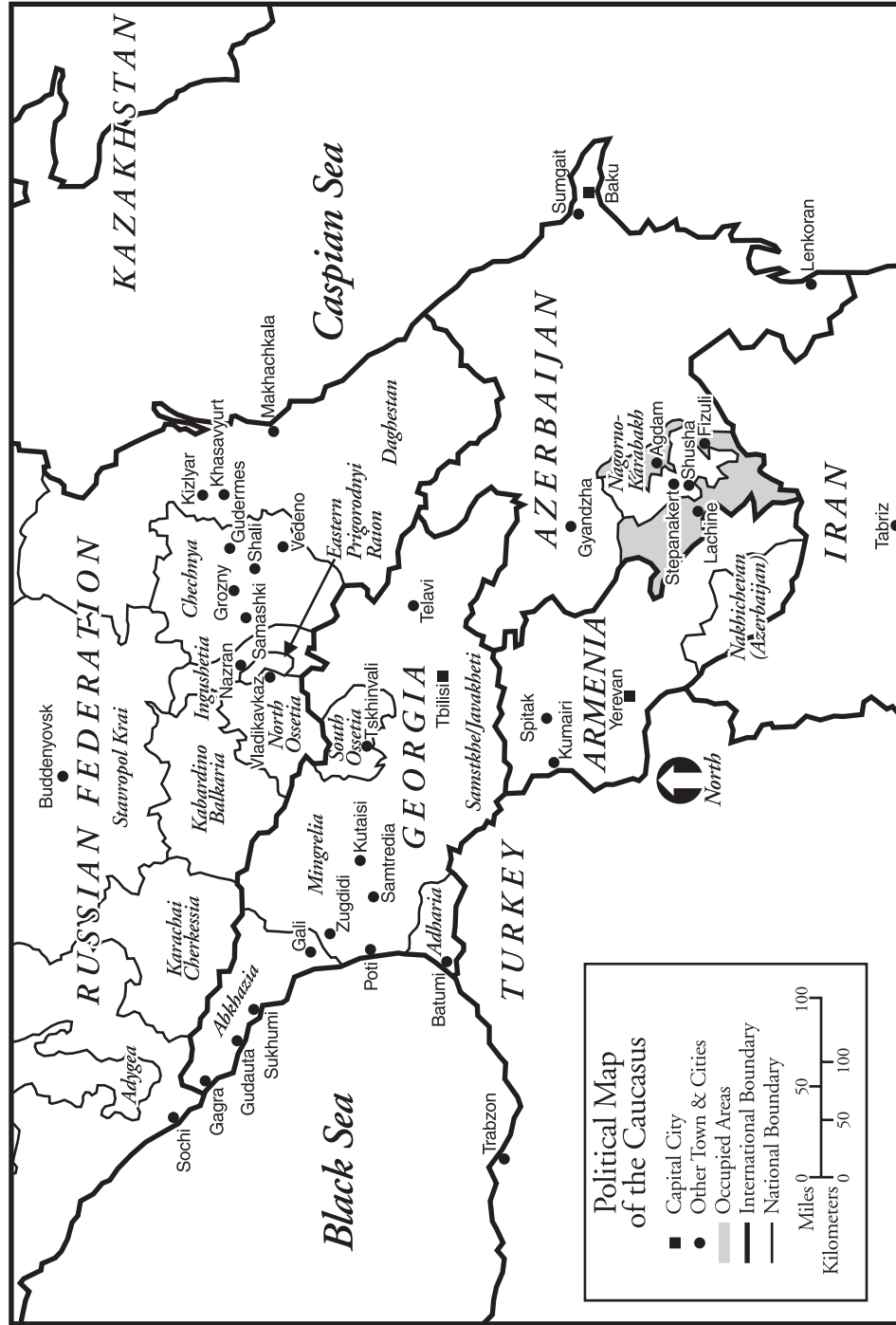
Since early 1995, at least 26 humanitarian workers have been killed aiding the victims of conflict in the Caucasus. Others have been seriously wounded or held in captivity for months. This guide is dedicated to them.

Greg Hansen
Ottawa, July 1998

ACRONYMS

ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CISPKF	Commonwealth of Independent States Peacekeeping Force
CMSP	Caucasus Media Support Project
ECHO	European Community Humanitarian Office
HLPG	High Level Planning Group (OSCE Minsk Process)
ICHR	International Center for Humanitarian Reporting
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JCCPKF	Joint Control Commission Peacekeeping Force
LCPP	Local Capacities for Peace Project
MERLIN	Medical Emergency Relief International
MSF	Médecins sans Frontières
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PKF	Peacekeeping Force
QPA	Quadripartite Agreement (Georgia, Abkhazia, Russia, UNHCR)
UNDHA	United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs (now OCHA)
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMO	United Nations Military Observer
UNOMIG	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
UNOY	United Nations of Youth Net
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

POLITICAL MAP OF THE CAUCASUS



Compiled from various sources by the author. The international boundaries shown reflect borders presently recognized by the international community.

INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian action in the Caucasus is shaped by the political, social, and security contexts of the region which, in many ways, constitute a case study in the lasting legacies of forced migration and social engineering. Without discounting the historical underpinnings of conflict that often date back several centuries, fears of persecution and deeply-rooted feelings of injustice are contemporary sources of tension and have been overlaid and complicated in the past decade by profound upheaval in the economic, social, and political spheres.¹ The collapse of the Soviet system left the economies of the region in tatters.

Seventy years of enculturation to the Soviet system and the more traditional feudal or tribal cultures of the Caucasus are now forcing a reinvention of the whole notion of community. Previous patterns of authority and deference, primarily those based on rigid hierarchy and authoritarianism, are being increasingly discredited amid aspirations to modern statehood. Over the past decade in the Caucasus, small minorities of armed combatants, whether from Russia or the Caucasus, have been nested—sometimes tentatively, and frequently by means of their own manipulation—within populations at large. While there are possibly some autonomous actors holding civilians hostage to their violence, prevalent racism, intolerance, and especially fear among the many provide the implicit or explicit grassroots validation for the violence of the few. For the moment, the past has left the societies of the Caucasus ill-equipped to meet the challenges of regional instability and to reassemble the pieces of systemic collapse.

None of the conflicts in the Caucasus has been resolved yet and the unfinished business of the region will continue to demand the attention of humanitarian organizations for some time to come, even if new conflicts do not emerge. The area between the Black Sea and the Caspian is characterized by region-wide political instability, precariously apprehended conflicts, a growing likelihood of renewed violence, large-scale pending returns of increasingly restive internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, and a downward spiral of insecurity for aid operations and personnel. Meanwhile—and to the chagrin of official Russia—American and European bilateral assistance to the southern Caucasus has increased dramatically coincident with mounting Western interests in the exploitation of Caspian Sea oil and emerging markets. Transnational oil enterprises are themselves becoming actors in the humanitarian sphere. This guide comes off the press at a time when, from a birds-eye view, virtually the entire configuration of the humanitarian response in the region is adjusting to—or poised for—major change in response to unfolding events.

By early 1998, the security situation in the northern Caucasus, including Daghestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria, had degenerated to the point where aid operations were seriously curtailed despite undiminished post-war need in Chechnya and Prigorodnyi Raion. At least 24 humanitarian workers were killed in the north between early 1995 and 1998. Others were taken hostage. “Assistance by remote control,” largely the art of working through local staff and organizations, showed some promise of becoming at least a marginally viable alternative to the presence of expatriates in an

¹ Some excellent sources on historical background to the Caucasus are provided in Appendix V.

environment where local staff and organizations tend to be less vulnerable to targeted attack. However, even this option grew more untenable for all but the most determined of agencies as humanitarian operations and personnel were repeatedly targeted for hostage taking and other violence in areas increasingly distant from the places where assistance and protection were needed.² The lack of tangible progress in official peace processes and the returning of close to a million displaced persons and refugees from conflict in Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh continued to contribute to instability and low-level violence in the southern Caucasus,³ with few prospects for sustainable peace on the horizon.

The goal of this guide is to provide a concise resource for humanitarian responses to conflict against the backdrop of comprehensive transition in the Caucasus region. The guide has been fashioned primarily as a distillation of what the aid community has learned and reflected upon in the sometimes withering struggle to do its job well. It aims at a broad audience including field workers, desk officers, policymakers, and donors, crossing the spectrum of policy, programming, and operations. The guide proceeds from the internationally recognized right of victims of conflict to receive protection and assistance and the corresponding right of international humanitarian agencies to provide it. Its premise is that humanitarian action that begins with an appreciation of past experience and clearly articulated principle stands a better chance of success—and poses less of a risk for doing inadvertent harm—than more reflexive approaches. In the Caucasus, this experience has been hard-won, and unqualified success has been difficult to attain. Although nearly a decade has passed since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, humanitarian actors in the Caucasus still face a steep and sometimes dangerous learning curve.

The approach taken in the guide is inductive rather than didactic. During interviews conducted in the region, the need for better access to institutional memory was repeatedly expressed. Many lessons have been learned by aid agencies in the region over the past several years but these lessons generally have not been well-dispersed among the larger humanitarian community. This volume thus represents an attempt to formalize some of that learning. Wherever possible, concrete examples have been drawn from experience in the region to illustrate what tends to work well and what does not. The content has been compiled based on consultations with aid workers and others who were asked to anticipate what kind of information will prove to be most useful to humanitarian actors in the coming few years. This has suggested an emphasis on several key threads that infuse the text and that are both implicit and explicit throughout.

The first of these threads concerns the security environment, a judgment call that deserves explanation given the ostensibly calm conditions facing aid agencies in Armenia and

² By early 1998 even remote control activities in Chechnya had been suspended by all agencies other than the ICRC.

³ Running east to west between the Black Sea and the Caspian, the Caucasus mountain range forms a geographic and political boundary between the Russian Federation and the newly independent states of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Throughout the text “southern Caucasus” refers to the region comprising Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, including the disputed territories of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. “Northern Caucasus” comprises Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, the disputed Prigorodnyi Raion, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia, and Adygea, all of which are within the borders of the Russian Federation as accepted by the international community. The more commonly used “TransCaucasus” describes the southern Caucasus states as viewed from Moscow and is therefore not used.

Azerbaijan, and a generalized (though still tentative) reduction of emergency humanitarian operations throughout the southern Caucasus. The reasoning for an emphasis on security is this: although doing everything right does not guarantee immunity in hostile settings, aid agencies in the region often tend to disregard the security environment until someone gets hurt, and so are ill-equipped as a community to respond to increased threats judiciously. The insecurity of aid operations and personnel in the northern Caucasus has been unprecedented by world standards both in brutality and scale, and in some parts of the region, this insecurity has led to the near-cessation of aid activity. The well-being of those in need of assistance and protection clearly rests to a great extent on the ability of aid communities to deal effectively with security problems.

The conditions that conspired to ravage humanitarian action in the northern Caucasus will not be so easily replicated elsewhere in the Caucasus. However, troubling indications from Western Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia suggest an acute vulnerability of aid operations in these settings for many of the same reasons as in the north. Increasing militancy among some elements in the southern Caucasus and the possibility that hostilities will continue to be manipulated by vested interests and make the denial of assistance to civilians an attractive option in some quarters. The long-prevailing political uncertainty over the disposition of Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh, the continued limbo of displaced populations, and the Caucasus-wide similarities in the social, cultural, and perhaps political underpinnings for attacks on humanitarian actors are all reasons why aid agencies in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan need to be prepared for a much more difficult working environment.

The second thread reflects the convergence of politics and humanitarian action in the region. In the first instance, only the most earnest efforts of domestic and international political actors can undermine impunity, provide effective protection for civilians, and ultimately resolve the conflicts in the Caucasus. Experience has shown that in addition to playing decidedly negative roles—not the least of which is the recurring phenomenon of humanitarian *realpolitik*, where humanitarian action serves extraneous political agendas—political actors can also play important positive roles by increasing the space for humanitarian action, energizing humanitarian efforts, and opening up access to civilians in need. Other challenges to humanitarian action, notably insecure conditions for aid operations and personnel, can benefit significantly from effective political backstopping from international organizations and states alike.

Although they may be independent, nonpartisan, and neutral beyond reproach, humanitarian organizations responding in conflict environments do not operate independently of the social, economic, political, and ethical forces that sustain or discourage conflict. Like it or not, they operate within them. The complexities of the conflicts in the Caucasus are such that, by the way that aid is provided, there is ample potential for aid to make existing tensions worse or to create new ones. In settings where ethnic demographics, acute language sensitivities, lackluster peace processes, and geopolitics converge, nearly every aspect of humanitarian operations, programming, and policy—from staffing decisions, to procurement, to the resettlement of IDPs and the availability of donor funding—can be infused at some level by a wide range of extraneous agendas. The eventuality of stepped-up return, reconstruction, and rehabilitation activities in all conflict areas of the Caucasus, as well as renewed donor interest in insurgent areas, calls for an acute awareness of the interactions between political environments and humanitarian action. These realities need not negate the humanitarian

imperative, provided that aid agencies resist acquiescence in them. Well-executed aid that anticipates positive and negative interactions between aid and conflict can help reduce tensions among hostile groups, without requiring aid agencies to move beyond humanitarian mandates.

The third thread reflects the importance of awareness of the social context in the region to effective humanitarian action. Nearly a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Caucasus in many ways is still a proving ground for innovations and adaptations emerging out of the humanitarian community's own period of *perestroika*, or restructuring. Many of the challenges and opportunities endemic to the region are different from those encountered previously on other continents, where there are decades of aid experience.

Some readers may question the utility of a guide that encompasses such a diverse humanitarian landscape as the Caucasus. Indeed, effective and safe humanitarian responses need to be localized. The focal points of humanitarian activity in the Caucasus vary widely in terms of difficulties encountered and opportunities presented. The environment in Armenia, which has not recently been afflicted by armed conflict, is radically different from that in perennially unstable Abkhazia to the north. Work among the IDP population in Azerbaijan differs greatly from activity on behalf of IDPs in Georgia, due to the greater degree of political mobilization and, on average, the better living conditions among Georgian IDPs. Donor support and evolving NGO-friendly legislation in Armenia and Georgia have given impetus to rapidly evolving nongovernmental activity, whereas in the northern Caucasus only a handful of nascent NGOs have progressed beyond the idea stage.

The urban mentality that prevails in Baku, Tbilisi, or Yerevan contrasts sharply with the rural values encountered in remote areas. The security environment for aid operations and personnel in Armenia and Azerbaijan has been quiet, whereas in the northern Caucasus many aid workers have been killed and aid operations forced to close. Beneficiary populations in the better-traveled parts of the southern Caucasus tend to be familiar with the work of aid agencies, and foreigners are not the oddities they were a few years ago. However, in less accessible areas of the southern Caucasus, and throughout most of the northern Caucasus, suspicion of outsiders still prevails.

Despite the idiosyncrasies of each locale, an analysis of the region's conflicts and the humanitarian responses to them reveals the benefits of a regional approach. First, the conflicts in the region can be traced to similar or identical foundations. Notable among these are the Stalinist deportations of nationalities and problematic management of ethnic relations under the Soviet system. Second, the way that war and ethnic cleansing have been executed in the region is strikingly similar from conflict to conflict. Subsequently, the human consequences of these conflicts are also similar, eliciting similar responses from the humanitarian community and resulting often in similar humanitarian dilemmas.

Third, the flows and potential returns of refugees and displaced persons are often connected to one another in the region and show like qualities. Throughout the region, continued dislocation is both an active destabilizing factor and an impediment to conflict resolution. In all settings, but particularly in Georgia and Azerbaijan, protection and assistance activity among IDPs is complicated by the use of IDPs as the most visible pawns in political processes. Fourth, insecurity of aid operations and personnel has been at times regional, the most notable example being the spread of hostage taking from the northern Caucasus to Georgia.

Finally, and most generally, the political, social, economic, cultural, and attitudinal dynamics of each of the aid focal points in the Caucasus provide a common backdrop for humanitarian action.

The guide progresses from a survey of general background to specific programming and policy issues. The text is interspersed with a series of boxes that encapsulate illustrative experiences or thought-provoking observations, gathered from the aid community during research in the region. Chapter 1 looks at the humanitarian landscape in the Caucasus, surveying the persistent influences of forced migration and other factors before examining the nature of warfare in the region and the conflicts themselves. Thumbnail sketches of tension areas are also provided. Attitudes toward outsiders and observations on the prevailing humanitarian ethos provide an additional perspective on the lay of the land. Chapter 2 considers the security challenges to humanitarian action in the region and conveys key lessons learned and lessons spurned about how aid agencies have adapted to these challenges. It includes a brief look at the provision of assistance in untenable security conditions amid the potential of renewed conflict, posing questions about assistance by remote control. Personnel issues are addressed against the unique backdrop of the Caucasus environment.

Chapter 3 opens with a survey of the needs and programming priorities in the Caucasus, specifically concerning assistance, protection, and indigenous capacity. Citing concrete examples from the region, a discussion of interactions between politics and humanitarian action leads from an analysis of the implications for assisting in situations of “frozen” conflict to an exploration of the interactions, both positive and negative, between and among various humanitarian and political actors. Shifting the focus to the programming and operational level, Chapter 4 focuses on these interactions in practice. Drawing heavily on the methodology and work of the Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCPP), positive and negative interactions are illustrated with concrete examples drawn from recent experience in the Caucasus.

Chapter 5 is a brief synthesis of much of the previous material as it relates to post-emergency humanitarian action. Specifically, drawing on past experience in the region, it captures some key issues related to facilitating the safe return of IDPs as well as reconstruction and rehabilitation activity in a normalizing environment. The Humanitarianism and War Project and Collaborative for Development Action, Inc. provide a number of analytical “lenses” that are included in the Appendices at the rear of the guide. These are meant to help users think systematically, and perhaps in some new ways, about their own experiences and challenges in the Caucasus.

CHAPTER 1

THE HUMANITARIAN LANDSCAPE

THE CONTEXT OF CONFLICT

The mountains and plains between the Black Sea and the Caspian comprise one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse regions of the world. For its geographic size, the Caucasus is also distinguished by recurrent armed conflict and intercommunal tension. There have been seven armed conflicts in the Caucasus over the past decade. Although cease-fires are in place, none of the conflicts has been resolved. Official peace processes, with the one exception of the Georgia/South Ossetia dialogue mediated by the OSCE, have been lackluster. The “no peace, no war” situations that have prevailed have spawned continuing insecurity and spreading criminality, which themselves make the resumption of large-scale hostilities more likely and render the prospects for reconciliation more remote. Worrisome tension areas also contain the potential to break out into large-scale violence. The latter represent “conflict resources” that, in the absence of adequate mechanisms for preventing and controlling violence in the region, are prone to manipulation.

Pre-Soviet societies in the Caucasus were feudalistic or, in the case of the Chechens and Lezgis, were structured according to lateral, clan-based relations. There is no tradition of pluralism in the Caucasus other than as enforced by the Soviet system. Democratic governance is fragile throughout the region and will undoubtedly remain so as political cultures evolve. Aging political leaderships and the lack of clear succession procedures raise short-term concerns.

Although each of the conflicts in the Caucasus has distinctive features and historical underpinnings, all share a common backdrop. When the Soviet Union ceased to exist, a reassertion of suppressed identities and grievances found expression in xenophobia, chauvinistic nationalism, and political opportunism. The Caucasus provided fertile ground for these forces that were often nourished by “memories” of genocide and lesser victimizations. In the chaos of the moment, people tended to become slaves to their own histories, drawing upon centuries of conflict to justify the resort to force. Indigenous capacities to resist slides into radicalization, self-interest, and violence had been rendered weak under Soviet rule, but many of the worst Soviet habits in the practice of politics and the use of force were retained. Nonstate mechanisms for mitigating conflict and controlling violence were nonexistent, or at least were impotent in the face of privatized violence easily suborned by warlords and geo-political chess players alike. The stakes of Caspian Sea oil and pipeline royalties justified, and apparently continue to justify, the manipulation of regional animosities, political peace processes, and the fates of millions of war-affected people.

Soviet Nationalities Policy and Forced Migration

Many of the current challenges facing humanitarian action in the Caucasus have their roots in the persistent effects of forced migration during the Soviet era and the ways that relations between ethnic groups were managed under the Soviet system. Both have been key factors

in the vehemence of resurgent nationalism and the recurring explosions of violence during and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which have themselves resulted in further crystallization of ethnic identities and renewed fear.

Soviet policies established a hierarchy of nations according to their perceived importance, reliability, and loyalty, mirrored by the political status conferred upon each ethnicity. Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia had preferred status as “union republics.” Minorities within union republics, such as Karabakh Armenians in Azerbaijan and Abkhaz in Georgia, were allowed their own “autonomous republics” and the status of “titular nations” in their regions. Control of semiautonomous political and party structures was generally in the hands of the titular group, but these were subordinated, to varying degrees, to the governments of the union republics. “Autonomous regions” (*oblasts*) such as South Ossetia enjoyed little autonomous political control but were afforded degrees of administrative and cultural autonomy.

To promote Russification, industrialization, and collectivization, and to suppress groups

Box 1 The Politics of Self-Determination—A Primer

An aid worker whose activities regularly led him into discussions about the origins of conflicts in the Caucasus noted that these discussions frequently became mired in one-sided histories and mutually exclusive polemics on self-determination which, typically, were blind to the human consequences of ethnic nationalism as practiced in the last decade. He used the following device to reorient discussions to an awareness of the chauvinistic basis of many of the common arguments, and to shift the focus to their human costs.

The Seven Rules Of Nationalism

1. If an area was ours for 500 years and yours for 50 years, it should belong to *us*—you are merely occupiers.
2. If an area was yours for 500 years and ours for 50 years, it should belong to *us*—borders must not be changed.
3. If an area belonged to us 500 years ago but never since then, it should belong to *us*—it is the Cradle of our Nation.
4. If a majority of our people live there, it must belong to *us*—they must enjoy the right of self-determination.
5. If a minority of our people live there, it must belong to *us*—they must be protected against your oppression.
6. All the above rules apply to *us* but not to *you*.
7. *Our* dream of greatness is Historical Necessity, *yours* is Fascism.

Formulated by David C. Pugh

Reprinted with Permission of the Norwegian Refugee Council⁴

⁴ See Daniel Heradstveit, *Ethnic Conflicts and Refugees in the Former Soviet Union* (Oslo: Norwegian Refugee Council, 1993): 4.

that were deemed to be potentially disloyal, Moscow manipulated demographic, linguistic, cultural, economic, and political aspects of minorities questions from the early years of the Soviet Union. Internal borders were sometimes drawn in ways that provoked and heightened tensions between ethnic groups. Forced relocations and resource allocations that were meant to engineer ethnic demographics played important roles, as did the promotion or suppression of cultural identities. Stalinist purges of the intelligentsia and religious elites were similarly designed to weaken or eliminate national consciousness among minority groups.

Soviet nationalities policies were most brutally manifested in a series of mass deportations between 1942-1944. Although many men from the Caucasus served as loyal soldiers in the Soviet Red Army, the advance of the German army in 1942 gave Soviet leader Joseph Stalin the pretext for ordering the deportations of “unreliable” ethnic groups. The Karachai, Ingush, Chechen, Balkar, Kalmyk, Crimean Tatar, Volga German, and Meskhetian peoples were forcibly rounded up on the basis of their ethnicity, with little or no advance warning. Carrying only their essential belongings, deportees were loaded into unheated boxcars for travel to barren parts of Soviet Central Asia and Siberia. Although casualty estimates vary widely, up to one-quarter of the Chechens and one-third of the Karachai are believed to have died. Few resources were provided in the places of exile for subsistence, health, or education, which undercut capacities for recovery in later years. Many Chechens turned to seasonal migrant labor for subsistence, laying the groundwork for the later development of criminal under-grounds. The territories of the deportees were dissolved and their lands turned over to Russian and other nonindigenous settlers. Cultural symbols and graveyards were destroyed. Books, maps, and street signs were rewritten to erase evidence of past inhabitants.

After the death of Stalin, the Supreme Soviet passed laws in 1956, rehabilitating most of the deported peoples and their territories. Returning deportees often found their homes and lands occupied by Russians and other settlers from elsewhere. Clashes between settlers and returnees recurred sporadically during the following decades. The formerly Ingush lands now comprising Prigorodnyi Raion, which had been ceded to North Ossetia, were not returned. The Meskhetians, an estimated 115,000 of whom were deported to Uzbekistan from southern Georgia, were not rehabilitated by Khrushchev and remained in exile until ethnic clashes in 1989 sent them into further limbo. Approximately 48,000 Meskhetians presently have refugee status in Azerbaijan and others are scattered throughout the former Soviet Union, awaiting repatriation to Georgia.

THE NATURE OF WARFARE

Since the late 1980s, there have been seven cases of open warfare in the Caucasus and numerous other instances in which armed force was used against civilian populations. In addition to their conduct in the war in Chechnya, Russian military forces also have been observed in peacekeeping roles in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Whether in active conflict, suspended conflict, or peacekeeping operations, clear and consistent patterns have emerged in the behavior of those under arms in the region, which affect all aspects of humanitarian action (see Box 2).

In general, wars in the Caucasus have been fought without humanitarian pretensions. Although the same observation could be made about many recent wars in other regions,

several factors specific to the Caucasus are noteworthy. Under the USSR there was no tradition in Soviet military doctrine for placing limitations on the use of force. As in other professional armies, restraint was dictated by the Soviet military's own understanding of military necessity and the rational use of resources. When the Soviet military disintegrated with the collapse of the USSR, its centralized command, control, communications, and logistics capacities were thrown into disarray, as was the accountability of military force to political masters. The resulting fragments were extremely well-armed with modern weaponry and were conditioned by Soviet military doctrine to employ overwhelming force. The use of force was no longer tempered by the understanding of military necessity that is nurtured by professional armies.

The past decade seems to suggest that the post-Soviet military or paramilitary forces active in the Caucasus are largely unrestrained by institutionalized military values of honor and service or by the Geneva Conventions and other international norms of conduct. The bombing of Grozny, the shelling of Stepanakert, and the use of artillery by Russian forces in the attempt in 1996 to free hostages taken by Chechen fighters at a hospital in Buddenyovsk serve as reminders of a readiness to unleash indiscriminate violence that is uninformed by military necessity. Similarly, the often brutal disregard for human rights under the Soviet system has been transposed to the present era in violent and arbitrary behavior by the military, police, riot troops, and other forces throughout the region.

On a slightly more positive note, some individual military commanders and soldiers have exhibited degrees of military professionalism, taking initiatives to moderate the use of force or safeguard civilian populations. Less frequently, others have appeared restrained in their actions out of deference—genuine or affected—to myths of the “noble warrior.” Appeals to military professionalism and cultural precedents for restraint may be useful in some situations.

For aid agencies, experience has shown that headway can be made on specific humanitarian issues such as prisoner exchanges and humanitarian access. However, these successes have been localized and often depended on the persistent cultivation of working relationships between aid agency staff and local commanders. Understandings and agreements of this sort typically have proved fragile, rarely outliving the frequent and sudden turnovers among personnel of aid agencies and military command structures alike. During the war in Chechnya, several villages took the initiative to negotiate agreements with Russian and Chechen combatants not to enter, thus saving them from the destruction that would result from reprisal attacks. The arrangements collapsed as soon as the local Russian commander was replaced. Individual undertakings by military officers in support of humanitarian action also were undermined by higher ranking officers in the command structure. A Russian officer consented to an evacuation corridor being opened before the bombing of a Chechen town in 1996, but he was soon relieved of his command and, according to one reliable report from the scene, was later executed for his efforts to spare civilians.

In all settings, a lack of understanding—or more simply, a lack of recognition—among combatants of the identity, roles, and mandates of humanitarian organizations has led to varying degrees of suspicion, denial of access, physical obstruction, accusations of spying, and sometimes violent targeting of aid operations and personnel. The dissemination programs of the ICRC throughout the Caucasus represent an important effort to inculcate an awareness of basic humanitarian values and obligations among those under arms. However, these activities are seen as long-term strategies that are neither intended nor expected to yield short-term effects.

Box 2 The Nature of Warfare in the Caucasus

The following patterns have emerged that are common to the violent conflicts in the region:

- Lack of accountability of military and paramilitary forces to political structures. Autonomous military action by individual units, without consent or knowledge of legitimate authorities, and a readiness to take hostile action in response to rumors (such as reports of atrocities);
- Uncommonly poor command, control, and communications, and unclear, weak, or nonexistent chains of command within and between formations;
- Extensive cross-fertilization of criminal and military activity, profiteering within and often between armed formations at all levels, sometimes across the lines of conflict;
- Employment of mercenaries, contract soldiers, poorly trained conscripts, and the proliferation of undisciplined, untrained, and often uncontrollable militias and factions, sometimes under the guise of civilian organizations;
- Poor or nonexistent logistics and supply capacities leading to looting for subsistence and other abuses of the civilian population;
- Prolific drunkenness often leading to unrestrained, arbitrary behavior;
- Indiscriminate artillery, rocket, and aerial bombardment of built up areas, including civilian residential areas and infrastructure;
- Intentional targeting or commandeering of civilian locations and infrastructure including schools, hospitals, waterworks, religious symbols, historical archives, museums, etc.;
- Soviet-style counterinsurgency strategy which places the onus for maintaining order and nonbelligerency upon civilian heads of administration, elders, and others who are subsequently perceived as partisan and drawn into conflict;
- Intentional disruption of essential services including food distribution, electricity, water, and natural gas supplies;
- Intentional provocation of displacement of civilians through military action;
- Indiscriminate mining with little or no record-keeping of mined areas;
- Use of civilians, including women, children, the elderly, and those in flight from conflict, as human shields to mask or “protect” combat operations;
- Extensive hostage taking and arbitrary detention;
- Systematic destruction or looting to render depopulated areas uninhabitable in the long term;
- Physical and administrative obstruction of access for humanitarian organizations to civilian populations before, during, and after military action;
- General disregard for international humanitarian law and other recognized restraints on the conduct of warfare.

As elsewhere, the qualities of warfare and the behavior of combatants in the Caucasus have major implications for humanitarian action. These range from the nature of need to operational and political questions of protection, humanitarian access, and security of aid operations and personnel. In the first instance, humanitarian cease-fires to allow for the delivery of assistance or the evacuation of wounded have been difficult or impossible to negotiate and to secure due to weak or unclear chains of command, lack of accountability, poor communications, and undisciplined troops. Implications of the nature of warfare for humanitarian protection and assistance are addressed in more detail in Chapter 3.

The way that agencies and aid workers present themselves to combatants is important. A confrontational approach is counterproductive, as is openly showing a lack of respect for those in uniform. Chapters 2 and 4 describe proven strategies for dealing constructively on a local level with combatants on issues of security and access respectively. However, general and recent characteristics of the behavior of post-Soviet military, paramilitary, and police forces in the region, whatever their affiliation, should not be overlooked until local experience shows that these can be discounted.

THE CONFLICTS

The following section summarizes the armed conflicts that have elicited humanitarian responses in the Caucasus. The Narrative is designed to provide basic information for the benefit of practitioners. Additional detail is available from the sources listed in Appendix V.

Nagorno-Karabakh

Although historical arguments over the political disposition of Nagorno-Karabakh predate the twentieth century, the experience of the Armenian genocide under Ottoman Turkey, the Russian Revolution, and the onset of the Soviet Union provide more contemporary historical underpinnings of the present dispute. Armenian-Azeri clashes early this century grew out of deep-seated fears among Armenians, still recovering from fresh memories of the genocide, that Azeris were closely associated with Turkey. During the brief period of independence for Armenia and Azerbaijan at the close of World War I, the two states went to war over Nagorno-Karabakh until the Soviet Red Army imposed control and the two republics were annexed into the USSR. Nagorno-Karabakh, despite its predominantly Armenian population, was awarded to Azerbaijan as an autonomous republic. Armenians deeply resented Karabakh's political subjugation to Baku and were suspicious of what they perceived as efforts to undermine their demographic advantage in Karabakh under Azerbaijani rule.

Armenians and Azeris lived side-by-side in Nagorno-Karabakh throughout the Soviet period. Tensions remained mostly latent in everyday life until the advent of perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union when, coincident with systemic breakdown, economic collapse, and growing insecurity, official histories and Soviet-imposed borders were openly called into question by intellectuals and nationalist politicians. Resurgent Armenian nationalism led to demands that Karabakh be placed under Armenia's jurisdiction. The Nagorno-Karabakh Supreme Soviet passed a resolution to that effect on February 20, 1988. Mass demonstrations in Yerevan supported the move and Karabakh quickly became the favored

locus of post-communist political movements in Armenia. Escalating violence quickly followed, first in Azerbaijan, when ethnic Armenians were attacked by rioting mobs in the industrial city of Sumgait. The faltering USSR and Azerbaijan itself rejected any change in status for Nagorno-Karabakh. Riots followed in Stepanakert and, shortly after, the substantial Armenian and Azeri minorities in Azerbaijan and Armenia respectively were expelled en masse. During this exchange of minorities, a severe earthquake, centered on Gumri (formerly Leninakan) in Armenia, killed 25,000 people and left 500,000 homeless.

In a failed attempt to restore order in Nagorno-Karabakh, Soviet troops assumed direct rule amid intercommunal clashes and a series of general strikes. Growing Azeri nationalism—which had a strong chauvinistic, anti-Armenian component—fueled hard-line politics in Baku in late 1989 and led to renewed victimization of the remaining Armenian population. Azerbaijan imposed a rail blockade on Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh in November, cutting off vital fuel supplies at the onset of winter and further undercutting Armenia's rapidly folding economy. Soviet troops intervened in Baku in early 1990, attacking Azeri Popular Front protesters and killing at least 160 people in bloody street battles that helped to crystallize Azeri notions of independence from the USSR. Meanwhile, intercommunal violence grew inside Karabakh and became more organized as militias formed on both sides. 17,000 Soviet troops were deployed to impose order in and around the enclave, but as attacks on police and military forces increased into the spring of 1991, they quickly became enmeshed alongside Azeri interior forces in an ethnic sweep of 24 villages on Nagorno-Karabakh's perimeter. Thousands of Armenians were forced to flee, hundreds were arrested, and resistance was met with indiscriminate force.

Full-scale war began in September 1991, following the attempted coup in Moscow. Armenia and Azerbaijan both proclaimed independence from the USSR, which was soon to collapse in December. Unrestrained warfare characterized by the indiscriminate use of heavy weapons, hostage taking of civilians on both sides, and complete ethnic separation of Armenians from Azeris, continued off and on until a cease-fire in May 1994. Meanwhile, several revolts and coups led by various warlords through 1993 and 1994 contributed to general chaos in Azerbaijan's first few years as an independent state and seriously undercut Azeri fortunes on the battlefield. In Armenia, the imposition of Azeri and then Turkish blockades deprived civilians and industry of electricity and heat; the economy went into a tailspin.

The five years of war and ethnic cleansing killed an estimated 25,000 people, displaced 600,000-650,000 Azeris to other parts of Azerbaijan and another 15,000 Armenians inside Karabakh. A less-than-voluntary population exchange between Armenia and Azerbaijan resulted in another 500,000 refugees. When the cease-fire eventually took hold, Karabakh Armenian forces had occupied extensive areas of Azerbaijan surrounding the enclave, extending to the Iranian border in the south and between Karabakh and Armenia (the Lachin Corridor) in the west.

The border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the well-entrenched front line between Karabakh Armenian and Azeri troops in occupied areas around Karabakh, is heavily militarized. There are regular exchanges of small arms fire and, on occasion, artillery. Front line areas are depopulated but farmers continue to suffer mine injuries in nearby grazing areas and fields. A single OSCE observer rotates through Nagorno-Karabakh every three months and reports to an ambassador based in Tbilisi on behalf of the OSCE's Minsk group. UNHCR

Box 3 An Impressionistic Account of Conditions in and around Nagorno-Karabakh

The prevailing politics have deterred most aid agencies from entering Nagorno-Karabakh and the occupied areas. An OSCE-brokered cease-fire went into effect in May 1994, but no comprehensive assessment of need—the precursor of contingency planning for an eventual return and resettlement of displaced Azeris—has been allowed in the occupied areas comprising approximately 20 percent of Azerbaijan's territory.

Driving into Karabakh from Armenia, one has the impression of entering a national park. Weather permitting, Stepanakert can be reached by road from Yerevan in little more than six hours. The "Lachin Corridor," Karabakh's lifeline to Armenia, has been reengineered and reconstructed with Armenian diaspora funding. It is the most modern highway in the Caucasus and is heavily traveled by trucks carrying cargoes from Armenia and Iran. Busloads of Armenian tourists make trips to the enclave to visit the newly constructed Armenian Orthodox Church at Shusa, which sits on the highest point in the town.

In late 1997 aid agencies reported few unmet humanitarian needs inside Nagorno-Karabakh. Massive funding for reconstruction of Stepanakert has been supplied by diaspora organizations in the U.S., Canada, and Western Europe. Little evidence remained of war damage in Stepanakert itself, although the nearby town of Shusa was badly damaged but sparsely populated. Population figures for Nagorno-Karabakh's now exclusively Armenian population are a matter of political debate, but estimates in late 1997 ranged from a low of 40,000-60,000 to a high of 170,000.

Unrepaired damage in some areas in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, predominantly those formerly populated by Azeris, may be the most extensive of anywhere in the Caucasus, apart from downtown Grozny. In Agdam, 20 minutes from Stepanakert, the mosque appears to be the only building that has not been destroyed beyond repair. No comprehensive landmines data is available, but because front lines kept moving during the war the problem is extensive. The ICRC has estimated that 30,000 mines contaminate agricultural areas away from the present front line. Occupied areas remain strewn with unexploded ordnance. The Karabakh Armenian military reportedly provides demining services for payment. The heavily militarized enclave feels like a well-ordered garrison state: virtually all young males are in uniform and appear unusually well-disciplined for the Caucasus. Aid agencies reported no security problems but had taken pains to ensure that their mandates and missions were understood by authorities. Both MSF and the ICRC, having worked in Nagorno-Karabakh during the war, were well-respected by the administration and military.

Karabakh Armenian forces and civilians continued systematically to loot depopulated areas as late as December 1997, stripping ruined buildings, digging up water mains, and trucking the material off to Stepanakert for sale. Many IDPs have memories of palls of smoke rising for days from the direction of their towns and villages, but few may fully appreciate the extent of destruction. Most Azeri IDPs have found shelter in communal centers and tent camps. These often retain a village or town identity and composition. Others have erected jury-rigged mud or tarp shelters. Many Azeri IDPs live in squalid conditions unparalleled elsewhere in the Caucasus. Minor returns have been effected to some formerly occupied areas in southwest Azerbaijan, notably the Fizuli district.

The ethnic demographics resulting from repatriation will play a role in any eventual peace settlement. The Karabakh administration has reportedly embarked on a diaspora-funded drive to repopulate cleansed areas with Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan and others settlers from Armenia. In late 1997, USAID was requested by the U.S. State Department at the behest of the U.S. Congress to allocate \$8.5 million for humanitarian assistance inside Nagorno-Karabakh in an apparent attempt to lubricate the peace process and placate diaspora groups in the U.S. If this assistance extends to home reconstruction, aid agencies will need to be particularly vigilant against pressures to assist in reconstruction and settlement efforts that manipulate the demographic landscape in the enclave and reinforce the bias of existing policy.

has adopted integration as a durable solution to refugee problems in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Georgia/South Ossetia

Ossetians are a distinct ethnic and linguistic group on either side of the Caucasus range, straddling a strategic pass through the mountains that form the present border between Georgia and Russia. Their location conferred special importance, and at times favorable status, under Russian colonial interests. Ossetians generally sided with Czarist forces, deepening a historical cleft between ethnic Ossetians and Georgians. Under the Soviet system, South Ossetia had the status of an autonomous region within Georgia. Urban centers had mixed Ossetian, Georgian, and Russian populations, while rural villages were either mixed or monoethnic. Nationalist rumblings emerged simultaneously among Ossetians and Georgians with perestroika. Demonstrations in the South Ossetian administrative center of Tskhinvali, sparked by a typhoid outbreak and discontent over the decrepit state of the city's water system, led in early 1988 to a Georgian assertion of political control. Protests and strikes turned into violent ethnic clashes, which became worse with the involvement of loose-knit Georgian gangs in 1989.

A decree issued by the Georgian Supreme Soviet stipulating Georgian and Russian as the official languages of the region helped crystallize secessionist rumblings in South Ossetia, ultimately leading to a proclamation of independence—from Georgia but still within the Soviet Union—in September 1990. Georgia dispatched interior ministry troops to Tskhinvali and surrounding areas, counter to Moscow's wishes. Clashes escalated as the ragtag Georgian National Guard and paramilitaries imposed a sporadic economic blockade on Ossetians, which included preventing the passage of essential goods from North Ossetia through the tunnel at the Russian-Georgian border. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and Georgia's 1991 declaration of independence, the internationalization of the Russian-Georgian border effectively bisected the Ossetian population into North and South Ossetia.

Coincident with a series of earthquakes that inflicted serious damage on housing and infrastructure in and around Tskhinvali and Djava, violence and hostage taking continued sporadically for much of 1991, peaking with the prolonged shelling of Tskhinvali by Georgian forces. An estimated 500 people were killed. Approximately 100,000 ethnic Ossetians fled from South Ossetia and other parts of Georgia mainly to North Ossetia in the Russian Federation, while an estimated 11,000 ethnic Georgians fled as IDPs to other parts of Georgia. Armed hostilities waned as Georgian fighters gravitated toward conflict in Tbilisi and eventually Western Georgia and Abkhazia, but South Ossetia proclaimed sovereignty in May of 1992. A Georgian-Russian-Ossetian peacekeeping force was established under the Joint Control Commission (JCC) in June of 1992. The OSCE became involved in promoting political negotiations in December 1992 and later responded with an expanded observer mission to monitor the peacekeeping force. Low-level, back-and-forth violence, much of it with criminal overtones, continued for several years.

As in Abkhazia, most pressing humanitarian needs in South Ossetia were met by the ICRC and a small number of international NGOs, but the region did not receive the same level of assistance provided in Georgia proper and was more severely affected by economic collapse. For several years, major donors and UN agencies tended to steer clear of assistance to South Ossetia, fearing that their relations with the Georgian government would be jeopardized and

the region's claims to independence legitimized. This led to perceptions among many Ossetians, clearly and repeatedly voiced by their leadership in Tskhinvali, that aid was being withheld as punishment. Donor attitudes shifted in 1997 and funds were made available for reconstruction and rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure (see Box 10).

The depth of intercommunal tensions resulting from war in South Ossetia has been difficult to gauge. Although there is no doubt that some of those who were directly affected by the war continue to harbor animosities, the bigger picture has been more encouraging. As early as 1994, Georgian and Ossetian villagers traded freely together at a market north of Tskhinvali, under the watchful eye of Russian troops who extorted protection money from market vendors, customers, and suppliers. By early 1998, Georgian president Shevardnadze had visited Tskhinvali. Private Georgian and Ossetian cars could traverse the front lines with little difficulty. A substantial warming of political relations between South Ossetian and Georgian authorities in 1997 increased the space for both aid and peacebuilding and enabled the long-awaited repatriation of Ossetian refugees and Georgian IDPs to begin. Donor support for reconstruction and economic recovery programs in and around South Ossetia reflected a growing optimism that the OSCE-brokered peace process was making good headway.

A 1997 survey conducted by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) among refugees from South Ossetia indicated that the lack of economic opportunity in home areas was the most significant factor in the reluctance of the 25 percent of respondents who expressed an unwillingness to return, although most indicated that they could be self-sufficient if provided with basic reconstruction assistance, seeds, and tools. A parallel survey conducted among Georgian IDPs in 1997 found that 87 percent of respondents wanted to return home, with the majority of the remainder citing fear as the deterrent. Mafia activity connected to the raw alcohol trade, as well as banditry, continued in 1998 to threaten the consolidation of peace.

Georgia/Abkhazia

Abkhazia is a fertile area sandwiched between the Black Sea and the Caucasus mountain range. The area has significant economic potential from agriculture and tourism and in Soviet times was a major rail and communications link between Russia and the southern Caucasus. War and ethnic cleansing in Abkhazia between mid-1992 and late 1993 resulted in an estimated 10,000 deaths, the displacement of some 250,000 (predominantly Mingrelian) Georgians, and an as yet unknown number of Abkhaz and smaller minorities. Widespread destruction was inflicted on residential areas. Although a formal cease-fire came into effect in May 1994, low-level violence and insecurity prevailed into 1998, precluding an organized return of those who had fled their homes and allowing animosities to fester.

The conflict over the autonomy of Abkhazia is atypical in the region because, in the event of the mass return of the ethnic Georgian (or Mingrelian) population, ethnic Abkhaz will again comprise a small minority relative to other ethnic groups. Before the war, Abkhaz-Georgian tensions evolved in ways that tended to be localized and variable but were rooted in historical fears, ethnic demographics, real and perceived injustices, and Soviet social engineering. Language, a highly personalized and central feature of national identities, has played a key and frequent role as flashpoint (see Box 12). Amid a growing ethnic Georgian majority, the Abkhaz had long been a minority along with Russians, Armenians, Greeks, and others. An

Abkhaz alphabet based on Cyrillic was created in 1862. Some Abkhaz had adopted Islam under Ottoman influence during Czarist times, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries leading to Russian-imposed deportations of many Abkhaz to Turkey and elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire. Abkhazia was restive under Russian rule, but primarily sided with Bolshevik forces against independent Georgia early this century. Latin script was adopted by the Abkhaz in 1918.

After Bolshevik forces consolidated control over the Caucasus, Georgia was absorbed into the Soviet Union. Following a brief period as a Union Republic, Abkhazia was placed in late 1921 as a titular Abkhaz region within Georgian borders. By 1926, ethnic Abkhaz constituted less than one-third of the population of Abkhazia, and steadily diminished in relative numbers as the “Georgianization” policies of Stalin’s intelligence chief Lavrenty Beria, himself a Georgian, encouraged settlement of ethnic Georgians and others in Abkhazia. An edict in 1938 replaced Latin script with Georgian characters as the basis of the Abkhaz language. Abkhaz generally resented subjugation of their culture and identity to growing Georgian influences.

The death of Stalin led to attempts to right some of the wrongs of his rule. Abkhaz were allowed to make greater use of their own language in education and publications. Cyrillic script was once again officially adopted. Demographic changes were accelerated by the development of resort areas on the Black Sea coast, however, and by 1959, the Abkhaz made up only 15.1 percent of Abkhazia’s population. Sporadic ethnic riots surfaced in the 1950s through the 1970s. A growing sense among the Abkhaz that their identity was being threatened was fueled by increasing settlement of Armenians in Abkhazia and subtle Georgian Communist Party policies of assimilation. Moscow responded to Abkhaz fears in the 1970s by granting increased cultural autonomy and economic benefits to the Abkhaz, who also had autonomous political institutions. These factors in turn led to resentments among the ethnic-Georgian majority that the Abkhaz were unfairly advantaged.

The advent of perestroika loosed repressed ethnic tensions in Abkhazia and Georgia proper. Encroaching systemic collapse paved the way for extremist ethnic chauvinism to take hold amongst the populace. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, an intellectual later to become independent Georgia’s first president, took an openly chauvinistic approach to ethnic questions, which effectively mobilized minority fears and eventually led in Abkhazia, Adjara, and South Ossetia to closer identification with Russia and nascent secessionist movements. In mid-1989, as the Soviet system fell deeper into disarray, serious intercommunal violence ensued following the language-centered decision taken in Tbilisi to bolster educational opportunities for Georgians at the Abkhaz State University in Sukhumi. Meanwhile, Tbilisi took increasingly strident measures to marginalize minority-led political structures in Georgia’s autonomous regions, leading first to civil war with South Ossetia. Abkhazia’s Supreme Soviet issued a declaration of Abkhaz sovereignty in August 1990, within the faltering USSR.

At the end of 1991 another civil war broke out in Georgia between followers and opponents of Gamsakhurdia and quickly moved from Tbilisi to the Samegrelo district in Western Georgia. As fighting abated in South Ossetia, self-styled warlords threw their weight behind Edouard Shevardnadze, former Soviet foreign minister and the new de facto head of the Georgian government. Shevardnadze, keen to distance himself from his Soviet past, ceded to Georgian nationalist pressures by abolishing Abkhaz autonomy and annulling an ethnic compromise between the Abkhaz and Georgian parliaments. As fighting continued in west

Georgia, “Zviadists” were forced closer to and eventually into the southern reaches of Abkhazia. A hostage taking of Georgian government officials served as a pretext for fighters aligned with Tbilisi to enter Abkhazia in August 1992. Encountering little resistance, they continued to Sukhumi, seizing the Abkhaz capital and forcing the leadership to flee. Full-scale civil war ensued, with atrocities on both sides well-documented by human rights organizations. Aided by Russian forces based in Abkhazia and volunteers from the nearby northern Caucasus, the Abkhaz eventually recaptured Sukhumi and the remainder of Abkhazia in September 1993, expelling Georgian fighters in a humiliating defeat.

During the war, the brutal nature of the violence was characterized on both sides by ethnic sweep operations, terror, expulsions, extensive looting, and rape inflicted on civilians of the “other” ethnic group. Taking on an increasingly ethnic imprint, violence extended into villages and even families where Abkhaz and Georgians had previously found a *modus vivendi*. Deeply personal experiences of ethnically-based violence led to cycles of retribution and vengeance attacks, many of which were interrupted—but by no means finished—when an official cease-fire was instituted in May 1994. The outcome of the war was an almost complete separation of Abkhaz and Georgians, many of whom now harbored deep mutual hostility. A Separation of Forces Agreement established a security zone in Gali and Samegrelo (Zugdidi) regions, patrolled by a nominally CIS peacekeeping force of Russian troops and monitored by the small, unarmed UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). The Quadripartite Agreement (QPA) was also signed by representatives of Russia, Georgia, Abkhazia, and UNHCR, stipulating mechanisms for political negotiations and the repatriation of IDPs.

A large-scale repatriation effort to the Gali region under UNHCR auspices, regarded by many in the humanitarian community as dangerously premature, failed in September 1994 due to the absence of security for returnees and Abkhaz attempts to screen returnees for alleged participation in the war. Most Georgian IDPs have been maintained in displacement status by international and government assistance, and the IDP community is highly politicized (see Box 9). Since 1995, tens of thousands of predominantly Mingrelian IDPs have spontaneously returned to their homes in Gali region and, more recently, to areas slightly north of Gali that are outside of the security zone. Spontaneous returnees have received UNHCR and other assistance to rebuild homes and community infrastructure, but serious deficits in protection—including the reluctance of the Commonwealth of Independent States Peacekeeping Force (CISPKE) to adopt a policing role—have contributed to recurring abuses of returnees by Abkhaz police, paramilitaries, and Georgian partisan groups. Although most pressing humanitarian needs were being met elsewhere in Abkhazia by the ICRC and a handful of international NGOs, UN and U.S. donor policies proscribed significant assistance to insurgent-held areas until relatively recently. The rationale for this was that withholding aid would help to affirm Georgia’s territorial integrity and exert pressure on the Abkhaz leadership to adopt a more moderate stance in political negotiations.

In 1997 there was significant movement in the official peace process, including the establishment of a Coordinating Council with working groups for refugees and IDPs, and socioeconomic problems. These developments, along with renewed donor interest in funding humanitarian and post-war recovery programs in Abkhazia, led to growing recognition among aid agencies of the need to think ahead to the programming implications of an eventual repatriation for at least some of Georgia’s remaining 250,000 displaced people. However,

growing militancy among some elements of the IDP population (the so-called “White Legion”), a deterioration in the situation for spontaneous returnees within the security zone, and more frequent targeted and random attacks against civilians in Abkhazia and Western Georgia posed mounting threats to this progress. Insecurity of aid operations and personnel in these areas deteriorated steadily since 1995. These conditions formed the backdrop for renewed violence in and around the security zone in May of 1998, resulting in more than 100 deaths and the extensive burning of homes. An estimated 35,000 people fled to Zugdidi from Gali Raion, many for the second or third time.

Demographics will play a key role in an eventual settlement to the conflict, since a full repatriation of displaced Georgians will again put ethnic Abkhaz in a precarious minority position. There are strong and well-placed fears among the Abkhaz that post-return security guarantees will not be enough to prevent uncontrolled Georgian fighters from seeking revenge for events during and after the war. These fears have not generally been recognized by Georgians or addressed substantively by the official peace process. In addition, land disputes can be expected to loom large once repatriation gets underway, since many Abkhaz have reportedly moved into the homes of displaced Georgians. The numbers of Abkhaz and other ethnic groups who are displaced within Abkhazia, or who have fled as refugees, have been an under-investigated problem that will add to the difficulty of managing safe return and rehabilitation programs.

Prigorodnyi Raion

The conflict area of Prigorodnyi Raion extends from the suburbs of Vladikavkaz in North Ossetia east to the present Ingush border, less than 20 minutes from Chechnya. Like the Chechens, the Ingush were forcibly deported under Stalin in 1944. When Khrushchev signed a decree rehabilitating the deported peoples in 1956, the lands presently comprising Prigorodnyi Raion, which had been ceded to North Ossetia, were not returned to the newly reconstituted Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) despite their 90 percent Ingush makeup prior to the deportations. Administrative and practical obstacles, many of them engineered by Ossetian authorities, prevented many Ingush from again taking up residence on their former lands.

Tensions between the Ingush and Ossetians rose and fell through the 1970s and 1980s but exploded into the open with perestroika. Mass demonstrations and growing unrest led the Ossetian authorities to declare a state of emergency in Prigorodnyi in April 1991. Intercommunal violence rose steadily in the area of Prigorodnyi east of the Terek river, despite the introduction of 1,500 Soviet interior troops to the area. On April 26, 1991, in the last months of the Soviet Union, the Russian Supreme Soviet passed the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples that pledged a return to predeportation boundaries. Fearful of losing Moscow’s support for a return of Prigorodnyi, Ingushetia opted to remain in Russia when Chechnya claimed independence. By this time, some 16,000 refugees from the conflict in South Ossetia, but who had primarily lived in other parts of Georgia, had fled north and took shelter in Prigorodnyi, significantly adding to the prevailing tensions. Ingush-Ossetian violence worsened and both sides began arming in earnest. According to human rights investigators, many of the worst incidents of intimidation and forced eviction of Ingush occurred at the hands of South Ossetian refugees. In some cases, North Ossetian locals

protected Ingush from those refugees.

Open warfare broke out in October 1992. Approximately 500 people died in a week of concentrated violence during which many homes, primarily belonging to ethnic Ingush, were destroyed or taken over. Russian interior forces actively participated in the fighting and sometimes led Ossetian fighters into battle. Estimates of displacement from Prigorodnyi vary widely, but between 34,500-64,000 Ingush were forced to flee to Ingushetia and 9,000 Ossetians to North Ossetia. Most Ossetians had returned as of 1998, but only a handful of Ingush had done so. IDPs from Prigorodnyi who found refuge in Ingushetia would later compete for space and aid with massive influxes of Chechen IDPs.

The conflict in Prigorodnyi Raion remains frozen amid low-level, back-and-forth violence against police officers and civilians, widespread hostage taking, and deepening animosities. New hope for peace and resettlement was kindled in 1997 with Russian-brokered agreements that set out plans for return and resettlement. However, at the time of this writing, IDP returns have been stalled by continued violence and have been further undermined by the curtailment of UNHCR's presence due to untenable security conditions.

Chechnya

Chechnya experienced 21 months of warfare between December 1994, when some 40,000 Russian troops entered the rebellious republic, and August 1996 when a cease-fire took hold. An estimated 50,000 people, mostly civilians, were killed. Indiscriminate bombing and artillery attacks destroyed large areas of the Chechen capital Grozny in the first two months of the war, forcing up to 400,000 people to flee to other areas of Chechnya and to the frontier regions of Ingushetia, Daghestan, North Ossetia, and southern Russia. As the war continued into the surrounding countryside and southern mountain areas, entire villages were destroyed, resulting in further displacement.

The war was the most recent manifestation of the historical inability of Chechnya and Russia to find a workable *modus vivendi*. Chechnya's history over the past 200 years has been defined largely by Russian and Soviet attempts to subdue the Caucasus. In Czarist times, an uncontrolled northern Caucasus was considered to be Russia's Achilles' heel against incursions from the Persian and Ottoman Empires. From the second decade of the nineteenth century, Russian armies began their push into the mountains meeting fierce, well-organized, and Islamicized Chechen resistance. During a 25-year campaign of resistance led by the Imam Shamil between 1834-1859, Russian forces opted for a scorched earth strategy, destroying the lands and villages that gave the Chechen fighters sustenance and forcing the population to flee to the relative safety of the mountains. Russian armies won a titular military victory in 1859 with Shamil's capture, but resistance continued for the remainder of the century and well into the next. In modern times Shamil, who was an ethnic Avar from Daghestan, remains a venerated folk hero in both Chechnya and Daghestan.

Upon the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, Bolsheviks promised independence, cultural autonomy, and religious freedom to Chechens and others in the northern Caucasus. However, the Soviet Red Army consolidated its power in the Caucasus soon afterward. Forced collectivization and attempts at Russification led to renewed unrest and rebellion in Chechnya, culminating during the Stalinist 1930s with brutal repression, forced famine, mass arrests, exiles, and killings. Chechnya was united with Ingushetia as an ASSR in 1934. The Ingush

and Chechens, who together comprise the Vainakh people, are ethnically related, speak a similar language, and often share kinship ties.

With the advent of World War II, as German forces advanced into the Caucasus, small numbers of anti-Soviet guerrillas mounted attacks against Soviet forces. This provided Stalin with a pretext to punish the “unreliable” ethnic groups of the northern Caucasus. With great loss of life, Chechens and Ingush were deported en masse to Soviet Central Asia and other far reaches, and their lands were divided up among Russians, the Laks of Daghestan, and North Ossetians. The Chechens and Ingush remained in exile until 1957, when it was decreed by Khrushchev that they could return to their homes. The return was badly managed, however, and recurring clashes between the returnees and settlers continued for many years.

Perestroika in the late 1980s allowed for the resurgence and open expression of national identities in the Caucasus, leading in Chechnya as elsewhere to a declaration of independence from Russia. With Ingushetia opting to remain within Russia, Chechen leader Djohar Dudayev, a former Soviet Air Force General, proclaimed Chechen sovereignty on November 2, 1991, shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Relations between the struggling democracy in Moscow and the Chechen capital Grozny were difficult from the outset. Moscow refused to recognize Chechnya’s secessionist aspirations and mounted both covert and overt operations to weaken Dudayev’s position and replace him with a more tractable regime.

In Chechnya, the pervasive socioeconomic ills brought about by the collapse of the Soviet system and Dudayev’s own increasingly autocratic style of leadership sent the territory into a spiral of fragmentation and instability. These conditions were exacerbated by the emptying of jails, the proliferation of small arms, and burgeoning criminal activity. Like his successor Aslan Maskhadov, Dudayev’s challenge was to impose a hierarchical state system atop a society more closely organized along lateral, clan-based relations. Amid a worsening breakdown of law and order, some 100,000 Russians, many of them holding highly skilled, essential jobs in Chechnya’s infrastructure and industry, departed for more hospitable surroundings. Russian military leaders promised Yeltsin that Chechnya could be quickly subdued. Amid protests from Ingushetia and liberal circles in Moscow, a Russian invasion force was mustered in the northern Caucasus and entered Chechnya on December 11, 1994.

The Russian advance on Grozny promptly stalled on the city’s outskirts. Grozny was indiscriminately bombed and shelled until March 1995, killing 15,000 people and destroying an estimated 30 percent of housing beyond repair. Appeals for a humanitarian cease-fire from ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga went unheeded by Russian officials. Dudayev and his loose-knit bands of fighters left the city to continue a guerrilla war from towns and villages in the rural south. Dudayev enjoyed increasing popular support, and the ranks of fighters swelled as the effects of the war expanded outwards from Grozny. Collective punishment emerged as a central feature of warfare: towns and villages suspected of harboring separatist fighters were encircled by Russian forces, then issued with ultimatums demanding the surrender of fighters and weapons under the threat of destruction. Interior troops were then sent in to “clear” the area, which often resulted in serious abuses of civilians. Russian commanders compelled elders or town administrations to sign “peace protocols” stipulating their responsibility for the maintenance of order and nonbelligerency. For locals, this was an undertaking that was seldom within their capacity to ensure given the propensity of Dudayevist fighters to take shelter and launch attacks from within civilian areas. Such attacks

evoked unrestrained responses from Russian forces on dozens of occasions, and many towns and villages were completely destroyed.

Reputable human rights organizations have documented a consistent lack of regard for the welfare and protection of the civilian population throughout the war. Chechen fighters regularly sought shelter among civilians, drawing fire into their midst from Russian forces who were increasingly disinclined to distinguish civilians from fighters. Chechen warlords led bloody hostage taking raids into Daghestan and southern Russia, inflicting many casualties and eliciting unrestrained responses from federal troops. For its part, the Russian officer corps repeatedly used unrestrained aerial bombardment, artillery, and helicopter attacks against civilian targets. Both sides—but particularly Russian forces—seriously obstructed the assistance and protection work of humanitarian agencies, with security and access difficulties often forcing their withdrawal.

Although an OSCE mission with fewer than 10 diplomats and military observers was dispatched to Grozny in June of 1996, the mission's political marginalization by OSCE member states and its size meant that it could achieve little tangible result over the course of the war. Russia was given largely free reign by the international community in its prosecution of the war, in deference to Russian sovereignty and its key roles in other pressing international foreign policy issues. Fighting eventually ended in August 1996, following an all-out attack in Grozny on Russian forces, who were forced out in a humiliating defeat by a much smaller separatist force. Russian President Yeltsin's national security advisor at the time, former Soviet general Alexander Lebed, concluded a cease-fire agreement with the separatist leadership. The terms of the cease-fire stipulated the withdrawal of Russian forces and a five-year hiatus for discussions on Chechnya's future political relationship with Russia.

From the cease-fire to the time of this writing, Chechnya has remained unstable. Despite presidential and parliamentary elections and repeated accommodations of radicals and militants by the elected leadership, the warlords and factions rather than politicians have continued to control events. Criminality has deepened in Chechnya following the cease-fire, partly a consequence of large numbers of unemployed former fighters and the destroyed economy. Specifically, humanitarian actors have been increasingly targeted for attack, the most tragic instance of which was the assassination, with possible political motives, of six expatriate ICRC employees and the serious wounding of a seventh in an ICRC hospital compound south of Grozny on December 17, 1996, just prior to elections. Although the aid community drastically scaled back its presence in response, a rash of hostage takings targeting expatriate aid agency staff continued in and around Chechnya to February 1998, when the kidnapping of the UNHCR head of office in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia, led to a further reduction of humanitarian action in the northern Caucasus. Since the scaling down of international aid operations, the Russian Federation has responded with emergency assistance to several ecological disasters in Chechnya. Insecurity has precluded any comprehensive assessment of post-war need.

TENSION AREAS

In addition to these unresolved conflicts, a number of areas are experiencing tension. The Caucasus as a whole is characterized by fledgling democratic and state institutions, aging heads of state, weak civil societies, geopolitical pressures and intrigues, continuing displace-

ment of over a million people, and the persistence of some politicians in exploiting the potential of chauvinistic nationalism. These vulnerabilities are not yet effectively counterbalanced by mechanisms to prevent or contain outbreaks of violence.

The following is a list of potential problem areas. In addition, latent tensions persist in Karachai-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria in the northwest Caucasus, where decades-old grievances of minority populations affected by the Stalinist deportations have yet to be effectively addressed. Periodic secessionist rumblings in Adjara in southwest Georgia and Talysh areas in southern Azerbaijan also bear watching. The situation in Azerbaijan's enclave of Nakhichevan, contiguous with Armenia, Turkey, and Iran but not with Azerbaijan itself, may also destabilize if events in either Armenia or Azerbaijan deteriorate.

The Lezgis in Northern Azerbaijan and Southern Daghestan

Some estimates indicate that one million ethnic Lezgis live in roughly equal measure on either side of the river Samur, which now forms the new international border between Daghestan (Russian Federation) and independent Azerbaijan. Most are Sunni Muslim, and there is a distinct Lezgi language. Under the Soviet system, assimilation policies impinged less upon Daghestani Lezgis, whose culture was recognized and promoted, than on Azerbaijani Lezgis, who lost official recognition of their language and were often subject to arbitrary treatment by Baku.

Living astride a proposed pipeline route and transport infrastructure, Lezgis constitute a potential ethnic "resource" which is prone to manipulation. The chaotic post-Soviet political culture in Daghestan allowed the emergence—if not the full realization—of a Lezgi political movement which initially sought a unified Lezgi homeland within a federal Daghestan. The movement enjoyed some popular support due to resentments at being formally cut off from fellow Lezgis in Azerbaijan, where land tends to be better. Self-organization among Lezgis was given impetus by influential and wealthy businessmen within their ranks, who perceived their financial interests to be placed in jeopardy by the internationalization of the Daghestan/Azerbaijan border and the imposition of customs and visa restrictions. These fears may have been heightened by Russia's exercise of tighter control over the border in response to the war in Chechnya and ensuing concerns that cross-border refugee flows should be prevented.

Lezgis in Azerbaijan, meanwhile, have not had their grievances as a minority effectively redressed by Baku. At times, they have expressed dissatisfaction at being conscripted into the Azerbaijani military, and on some occasions have been singled out for blame for some of the military setbacks in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Seven ethnic Lezgis have been convicted by Baku courts for their roles in the bombing of a Baku metro station in 1995.

Like Chechens and Ingush, social relations among Lezgis are traditionally lateral and clan-based, rather than hierarchical. As such, a conflict involving Lezgis would most likely be difficult to contain.

Daghestan

Other potential problems in restive Daghestan merit monitoring. An autonomous republic within the Russian Federation, Daghestan's population of nearly two million is comprised of 10 major ethnic groups who share power in a precariously balanced multiethnic system.

Although large-scale bloodshed has been averted so far, the potential for violent conflict is high and violent criminality has gained ground in recent years. Moscow and some factions in Chechnya have shown a readiness to manipulate ethnic and religious tensions in Daghestan in recent years. Some Daghestani politicians themselves are not averse to playing the ethnic card.

Due in part to a legacy of the Stalinist deportations, animosities have proved to be particularly close to the surface among Daghestani Chechens living in the border areas and other ethnic groups, notably the Laks, who were resettled on lands vacated by Chechens deported in 1944. Many Chechens feel a strong sense of affinity with Islamic Daghestan due to ties of kinship and the fact that the Imam Shamil, the preeminent hero of Chechnya's resistance against Russian incursions in Czarist times, was an ethnic Avar from Daghestan. However, relations between the two republics have been tense since the outbreak of war in Chechnya in 1994. Tens of thousands of Chechen IDPs seeking refuge in Daghestan were uneasily accommodated by their Daghestani hosts. Tensions came to a head in early 1996 when Chechen fighters seized 2,000 hostages, several of whom were later killed, in the Daghestani town of Kizlyar. Chechen fighters made numerous incursions into Daghestan during the war, and it is believed that many were sheltered among ethnic Chechen sympathizers living in Daghestan. During and since the war in Chechnya, Daghestani elders and Muslim clerics have been effective at defusing potentially explosive situations, preventing the escalation of violence, and at times making successful appeals for restraint among Russian federal forces.

The transit of Caspian oil may become a flashpoint in Daghestan. Russia has commenced construction of an "alternate" pipeline route, which will allow oil exports to bypass Chechnya and may deprive Chechens of badly-needed revenues from transit tariffs. Similarly, the east-west rail link formerly transiting Chechnya instead now bypasses through parts of Daghestan.

Expatriate and local staff of aid agencies have been taken hostage in Daghestan since the cease-fire in Chechnya, and it is believed that most of these have been moved to Chechnya. Sporadic attacks on police and military targets, as well as hostage takings, continue at the time of writing.

Samegrelo in Western Georgia

Since Zviad Gamsakhurdia was ousted as Georgian leader in 1992 and replaced by Edouard Shevardnadze, the gulf between "Zviadists" and the new regime in Tbilisi has been allowed to fester. This has been exacerbated by low-level, sporadic, but continued violence and the widespread perception among many Western Georgians that Tbilisi has been repressive and undemocratic. Increasing militancy among elements of the restive IDP population, which significantly is of predominantly Mingrelian ancestry, may in part be a consequence of a crystallization of a shared Mingrelian identity (see Box 9). Zugdidi has become an epicenter for IDP activism, with frequent demonstrations and disruptions in the city and on the nearby bridge over the Inguri river. Meanwhile, the more visible and internationalized conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have claimed greater resources from governmental and international sources.

In Georgia, where the notion of a unified state has only tentative historical roots, the late-Gamsakhurdia's traditional following among Mingrelians (and Svans) still persists to a degree that is difficult to gauge. Although the fight with "East Georgians" was relegated to the back

burner so that all could join in the fighting in Abkhazia, memories of the bloody reprisal attacks, looting, and lawlessness that prevailed in Western Georgia for much of 1992 and 1993 remain relatively fresh.

Against the backdrop of its absorption of most IDPs from Abkhazia and its continued economic stagnation, the area remains fertile ground for insecurity and perhaps large-scale outbreaks of violence. Tbilisi's control over police and paramilitaries in the region was somewhat consolidated in 1996 and 1997, but bombings, kidnappings, and hostage taking by armed groups—often of unclear origins—remain a concern to the time of writing. Foreigners with the UNOMIG mission have been twice targeted for hostage taking in the Zugdidi area, suggesting an acute vulnerability of aid operations and personnel. In October 1997, two UN military observers (UNMOs) and a local translator were held for ransom, which the UN subsequently paid. In February 1998, gunmen claiming Zviadist sympathies stormed UNOMIG's Zugdidi sector headquarters and took four UNMOs hostage. The incident was resolved peacefully after protracted negotiations.

Samtskhe-Javakheti in Southern Georgia

There are some ethnic Georgian/Armenian tensions in this region, centered on the city of Akhalkalaki. These tensions have been worsened by the widespread perception among ethnic Armenians in the area that they receive a disproportionately small call on resources from the center in Tbilisi, relative to their Georgian neighbors. In recent years, there have been unsubstantiated—but still noteworthy—rumors of ethnic Armenians arming themselves for confrontation. Likewise, rumors have persisted of stepped-up activity and organizing drives by the Armenian Dashnak organization in Samtskhe-Javakheti, although official relations between Yerevan and Tbilisi have remained cordial.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTION

For all of the differences among settings across the Caucasus, important attitudinal, social, cultural, and political similarities inform the way that humanitarian action is conducted throughout the region. This section assesses recurring features of the environment for humanitarian action.

The social contexts in the region are the products of pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet influences, none of which are uniformly positive or negative. Yet the worst aspects of all three periods have been placed in sharp relief by the events of the past decade. Amid widespread nostalgia for the stability of life in Soviet times, the younger generation is rapidly adapting to new realities such as the rewards of entrepreneurship, unfettered critical thinking, and social action independent of government. However, Soviet-era attitudes and behavior still pervade the societies of the Caucasus, a consequence of 70 years of acculturation to a totalitarian system. In one important sense, the “collapse” of the USSR is a misnomer: many aspects of Soviet life persist.

Prominent among these qualities are attitudes toward relations between citizens and the state. As one commentator observed, “Political culture still suffers from the totalitarian legacy—people have an underdeveloped understanding of citizenship, their identification with the state and with democratic norms is weak, as, consequently, is the popular constraint

on the abuse of power and law.”⁵ Soviet control embraced all but the most private aspects of life: business, political relations, ownership of property, perceptions of foreigners (or outsiders of any stripe), expectations about the motives of foreign governments, and attitudes toward social action. Social relations and social networks outside the realm of formal structures tended to be closed and closely guarded havens of trust because they served the function of helping people adapt to—or get around—what was otherwise imposed upon them by the state. The assumption was widespread that political machinations lay behind other forms of social interaction.

Applying a methodology developed by the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA) Inc., Appendix II provides an illustration of Capacities and Vulnerabilities Analysis in a Caucasus context, in this case post-war Chechnya.⁶ The matrix organizes information about the attitudinal, social, and physical environments of aid in ways that help to anticipate potential obstacles to aid programming, identify ways that humanitarian action may be linked to longer-term development needs by supporting existing capacities, and discerning the potential development impacts of aid interventions. It is an especially useful device for analyzing local settings, although its application to conflict settings writ large is also instructive.

Attitudes Toward Outsiders

Throughout the northern Caucasus and in less-traveled parts of the southern Caucasus, the appearance of outsiders can evoke suspicion. In tense situations when populations feel threatened, suspicion can degenerate into outright hostility. In pre-Soviet times, especially in areas traversed or under attack by Czarist armies, visitors to mountain-bound Caucasus settlements often meant trouble. The Soviet period added a further element of paranoia, especially concerning the motivations of foreigners who were associated with spying. Recently, increased activity around conflict settings by security and intelligence services—or at least the tireless speculation over such activity in local media—contributes further to a pervasive cloak-and-dagger mindset.

In those parts of the Caucasus where aid agencies have worked for several years, people will generally understand what humanitarians do and why they are there. Where humanitarian actors are making first appearances, however, they cannot assume that their presence will be understood. One medical agency providing pharmaceuticals in Nagorno-Karabakh faced accusations of sterilizing the population. Another in Chechnya was accused of transporting chemical weapons in water tankers.

There is a general lack of awareness of international humanitarian activity, which is most acute in rural areas. Careful consideration of how international aid work is perceived by uninitiated local populations will help avoid problems, as will tireless efforts to be transparent about agency activities (see Box 4). Given the wide reach of electronic and other media throughout the region, it may be possible to use these as a way of getting the humanitarian

⁵ S. Neil MacFarlane, “A Role for the EU in Preventing Ethnic Conflict,” *Caucasus II Policy Paper* (Brussels: Conflict Prevention Network, December 1997): 6.

⁶ See Mary B. Anderson and Peter J. Woodrow, *Rising From the Ashes: Development Strategies in Times of Disaster* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1989). Reissued, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colo., 1998.

message out: explaining what an agency is, why it is there, and what it wants to do. Agencies can also consider enlisting the help of well-known local people to facilitate smooth introductions with local populations.

The Humanitarian Ethos

Traditions of altruism and social responsibility are evident in several cultures of the Caucasus. All but the poorest Azeris are encouraged to donate money to the needy in the spring once winter food stocks have been depleted. The Caucasus “table”, when properly hosted, imparts generosity on travelers or neighbors to solidify mutual respect among those who partake. Georgians who had settled on northern Caucasus lands vacated by deportees in the 1940s left livestock behind when the deportees returned to their homes in the 1950s to help returnees get reestablished.

Yet the Soviet experience did much to weaken the altruistic values and instincts that underlie humanitarianism. Islam was singled out for especially thorough suppression and emerged from the Soviet era weakened, but struggling to find its bearings, and vulnerable to radicalization and chauvinism. Georgian Orthodox and Armenian Christian churches periodically have given a religious imprimatur to chauvinistic ethnic nationalism. Some Western aid workers in the Caucasus have questioned whether the idea of humanitarianism is a particularly Western notion without resonance here. Without doubt, the prevailing cultures, although not without their own humanitarian traditions, have complicated the task of international humanitarian actors. In the Soviet period, nongovernmental social organizing and action, particularly at the local level, were associated with opposition to the government. Philanthropy or humanitarianism as stand-alone values were thus effectively suppressed, if not outlawed. The stigma attached to independent action is only slowly being overcome, while an understanding of humanitarianism is still in its infancy in extensive parts of the Caucasus.

An extreme tendency toward self-sufficiency is often described as a personality trait among people of the Caucasus, going beyond the individual into social networks of families and neighborhoods. At the same time, aid agencies in many settings in the Caucasus encounter a generalized expectation that pressing social problems will be solved from above and that solutions to local problems will be dictated from elsewhere. Less than a decade after the Soviet collapse, the limits to self-sufficiency very often still coincide with the points where the actions of government, the party, the collective, or the police once began. Convincing people of the scope of their individual efficacy or of the value of independent or joint action toward community goals can be hard work. Fear appears to be one factor: the risks or consequences of taking independent action without being told to do so are still fresh memories for many. A degree of fatalism is also evident in sentiments that whatever actions are taken independently of formal structures will be reduced to insignificance by the actions of government. Whereas the Caucasus boasts highly skilled and educated populations, initiative can be at a premium among the older generations.

Another factor is a persistent, deep-seated cynicism toward notions of community, collective good, social responsibility, and other values that expatriate aid workers often take for granted as universally recognized ingredients of a healthy civil society. The means to civil society as recommended by international aid, peacebuilding, and human rights organizations (e.g., social mobilization, public education, etc.) may be slower to show results in the Caucasus

Box 4 How Do “They” See “Us”?

Much of the work of an aid agency in the Caucasus, by its own account, involved making brief assessment and monitoring visits, often unannounced, to communities recently under attack or periodically occupied by fighters and armed gangs. Often these communities were very isolated. Agency staff drove expensive foreign vehicles festooned with unfamiliar markings and bristling with radio antennae. They dressed differently, held radio handsets, and spoke foreign languages. They sought out those in authority, took down their names and addresses, inspected infrastructure, asked innumerable questions, and took notes. Sometimes they took pictures or drew maps.

Their questions were necessarily wide-ranging, encompassing the location of key facilities, population details—including numbers, age and gender breakdown, health of inhabitants, security conditions, the political situation, and authority structures. Recognizing that answers from those in authority sometimes had to be taken with a grain of salt, agency staff often verified information with others out of earshot of authorities.

Due to prevailing insecurity, the need to get back to base before dark meant that they could not spend much time explaining who they were or why they were there. They were usually in a hurry, and seldom spent the night even if invited. Often they would decline invitations to sit at a table with locals to share food and drink. Their local drivers and interpreters were usually from a different part of the region and mostly from urban areas. Some local staff harbored an ill-concealed contempt for rural folk and adopted an air of superiority.

Lack of institutional memory, combined with a rapid turnover of expatriate staff, means that assessments often have to be conducted more than once, and relations with authorities rekindled on each visit. Sometimes there are gaps of several months between visits due to the workload and insecure travel conditions. Poor telephone communications and the risk of banditry in outlying areas often makes feedback difficult.

The agency was concerned. During these visits staff were often met with acute suspicion. People were sometimes unaccustomed to encountering outsiders, and the agency knew that, as a legacy of the Czarist wars and the Soviet system, outsiders were for many people associated with bad things, including spying. In addition, they felt that communities should have been able to look to humanitarian organizations for a measure of confidence, but the transience of aid agencies and aid workers—in short, the nature of the business—worked against this. Agency staff asked themselves the question: “How can we approach these visits differently to avoid arousing suspicion and get off on a better footing with locals?”

than in other settings. In post-Soviet space, the language of civil society and of nongovernmental humanitarian action can be tricky. Words and ideas that for a Westerner have positive connotations (e.g., peace, community, human rights, social solidarity, etc.) may have figured so prominently in Soviet propaganda campaigns or sloganeering that they were rendered offensive or meaningless. To avoid misunderstandings, precision in the use of language is necessary and helpful.

There are signs that the capacity for self-organization is stronger in areas that have been directly affected by war, although “brain drain” from these areas represents a further depletion of local capacity. Numerous aid workers from Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Chechnya have noted that the experience of war and isolation have sparked self-sufficiency in a social sense, which goes beyond the family.

Given the weak culture of nongovernmental organizing in the Caucasus, humanitarian or development assistance that models social responsibility and mobilizes community resources can help overcome psychological barriers to social action. Oxfam (UK) supported community organizing aimed at reducing vulnerabilities among groups of disabled people and abused women in parts of Georgia, needs not being met by government structures. Although it took time to convince participants of their own powers to bring about meaningful change, the activities demonstrated to participants and onlookers alike that concrete self-help actions were both possible and constructive.

CHAPTER 2

ADAPTING TO THE ENVIRONMENT FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTION

The features of the humanitarian landscape described in the preceding chapter present numerous challenges to humanitarian actors in the Caucasus. These challenges have underscored for aid agencies the necessity of being sensitive to the contexts where they work as a first step toward successful adaptation to a unique environment. This environment can be harsh—and at times costly—for aid agencies and personnel, but important lessons have been learned in the affiliated realms of security and personnel issues, which enable better adaptation and more effective humanitarian work.

SECURITY

This section is not meant to equip humanitarian actors with the technical knowledge required for operational security; that is beyond the scope of this guide and far too specific to local contexts and situations to be addressed here. Nor is the purpose to preclude careful on-the-ground analysis of security environments and responses to them. Rather, it is to convey key lessons learned—and not learned—from recent experiences in the Caucasus. At the end of the section, there are questions about humanitarian action in untenable security environments and the still largely untested potential of assistance by “remote control.”

As evidenced by the murder of six ICRC workers and the wounding of a seventh in a hospital south of Grozny in late 1996, some regions of the Caucasus have been notoriously hostile venues for humanitarian action. The threshold of insecurity at which aid operations were still considered viable was probably lower during and somewhat after the war in Chechnya than anywhere else in recent memory. Table 1 presents aggregate statistics on reported security incidents in the northern Caucasus through early 1998.

In the north, virtually all operational, programming, and policy aspects of humanitarian action were infused and defined by security considerations. Doing everything right was no guarantee of immunity from targeted attack, but a number of hard-won lessons helped some agencies to adapt well under the circumstances, and to keep programs operating for a time, despite a high level of insecurity. Meanwhile, several years of relatively unmolested aid operations in Armenia and Azerbaijan have led to a dangerous complacency among most agencies toward the security environment and the potentiality that the dangers could become much worse with unfolding events. The lessons that have been learned and spurned in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Daghestan, and Georgia serve as useful benchmarks throughout the region and perhaps beyond.

The continuation of assistance and protection in hostile environments can be difficult to justify amid constant threats to the personal safety of aid workers. By mid-1997, some aid agencies had encountered difficulties recruiting experienced, capable professionals willing to take the risks of working in the northern Caucasus. This became a factor in deliberations over the continuation of programs. In the field, staff motivation and the solidarity with victims, underlying risk-taking and the humanitarian impulse, sometimes were difficult to maintain

when conditions dictated that expatriate staff curtail or stop their movements and their contact with beneficiary populations. Highly insecure settings rendered normal assessment, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of aid operations difficult and expensive at best and impossible at worst. Protection of civilian populations was impossible to achieve under such conditions; problems encountered in meeting assistance needs, which were generally less acute, were more easily addressed.

The Threat

The *means* to inflict harm on humanitarian personnel and operations are widespread in settings like the Caucasus, where weapons and willing perpetrators of violence are readily available. The *motives* for inflicting harm on aid emerge out of political, economic, or personal factors, notwithstanding the best of humanitarian intentions of aid agencies. The *opportunity* for targeting aid workers is enhanced by a climate of impunity, compounded by an absence of deterring factors, such as the lack of preparedness and lax security discipline; indifferent local authorities and populations; and unwillingness among international political authorities to hold combatants and national governments accountable to international standards of conduct.

Without security, aid stops. This lesson appears to have been taken most closely to heart by those who target aid operations. Although difficult to prove, ample circumstantial evidence suggests the conscious manipulation of security throughout the northern Caucasus and parts of Georgia in ways aimed at constricting humanitarian space. Attacks on aid agencies have at times resulted in the interruption, limiting, or outright denial of assistance and protection for civilian populations. Intentioned or not, this has served the military objectives of combatants and the goals of vested interests who stand to benefit from discrediting authorities or from promoting instability, ethnic tension, or unrest. Attacks on humanitarian operations and personnel in Chechnya have at times seemed geared to discourage an international presence that could confirm abuses of civilian populations.

Apart from political motivations, and sometimes blended with them, many security incidents have been motivated by criminality. In the contexts of pervasive economic collapse, high unemployment, prolific small arms, poor policing, and large numbers of former fighters with few options, resource-rich aid agencies make attractive, easy targets for bandits and other criminals because they are unprotected by clan and kinship relations that often serve to inhibit crime among locals. Armed robbery, theft, hijacking, and kidnapping for ransom have become lucrative pursuits in the northern Caucasus and, to a lesser but still worrisome extent, in Western Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. There appear to be few inhibitions to preventing the same from happening throughout the Caucasus in the event of either renewed open hostilities or further growth in discontent among IDP populations.

The possibility of personal grievances against an aid agency turning dangerous can be avoided by vigilance of the agency's interaction with the local community, being good neighbors, and sound personnel practices, which respond to local sensitivities. Personal relationships between foreign men and local women have, in some instances in the northern Caucasus, resulted in threats of violence and intimidation of agency staff. Similarly, Chechen women whose families have disapproved of their employment around foreign men occasion-

Table 1 Reported Security Incidents Involving Humanitarian Agencies in the Northern Caucasus 1995-1998⁷

INCIDENTS / YEAR	1995 ⁸	1996	1997	1st Qtr 1998
Vehicle Accidents (with injuries)	2	2	1	0
Vehicle Accidents (with deaths)	0	1	1	0
Murders/Assassinations	5	6	0	0
Kidnapping/Hostage Taking	2	15	7	1
Attempted Kidnapping/Hostage Taking	3	7	4	1
Shooting Incidents (targeted & untargeted)	9	8	2	0
Assaults (including sexual assaults)	10	4	1	0
Vehicle/Cargo Hijacking	2	4	2	0
Armed Robberies	15	4	1	0
Thefts	4	5	3	0
Mine Incidents ⁹	1	0	0	0
Local Staff Deaths	8	4	2	0
Expatriate Staff Deaths	3	6	0	0
Total Deaths	11	11	2	0
Total Incidents	53	58	22	2

⁷ Compiled by Jim White and the author from data supplied by aid agencies. The sharp drop in the number of incidents since 1996 reflects the scaling back of humanitarian presence in response to insecurity. Incidents are counted once, except when they meet two criteria that do not contradict. An armed robbery that involved shooting is counted in both categories. Murders are counted by individual deaths.

⁸ There is very little data on incidents between August 1994, when ICRC began pre-stocking medical supplies in Grozny in case of an outbreak of war, and March 1995, when UN agencies established a joint office in Vladikavkaz. Several agencies reported coming under fire while attempting aid operations in Grozny December 1994-January 1995. Local NGOs also reported their staffs were assaulted and threatened by Russian troops while attempting to deliver aid to war casualties. Journalists, Russian and Chechen Red Cross staffers, and local NGO leaders reported four deaths and as many as 10 local humanitarian aid workers killed during the siege of Grozny December 1994-February 1995.

⁹ The single confirmed mine casualty in the North Caucasus involving an aid agency occurred when an IOM evacuation bus detonated an antitank mine outside of Samashki, Chechnya in March 1995, killing the IOM driver and nine IDPs. Many more were wounded. Another IOM local staff member was seriously wounded and placed on disability. Mine incidents in heavily traveled areas of Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan dramatically increased after mid-1996, although aid agencies have not experienced further such incidents.

ally have been beaten or threatened with death by brothers and cousins. The resentments of disgruntled former staff and of combatants once enlisted to provide protection for aid agencies have put a premium on careful hiring and firing practices and on sound judgment concerning relationships with local groups.

Against the recurring backdrop of suspicion of outsiders, unfamiliarity with humanitarian action, deeply politicized aid contexts, factional infighting, and volatile populations, aid itself has sparked some incidents. The way that aid is distributed among beneficiary groups, the impact of aid resources on local communities, the manner in which contracts are awarded, and the conduct and demeanor of aid agency employees at times have antagonized local populations or combatants to the point of jeopardizing security. Volatile aid environments call for acute sensitivity to local conditions to anticipate possible undesirable side effects of an aid agency's presence and activities. Chapter 4 examines some of the unintentional harmful effects of aid that have been encountered in the Caucasus and some of the creative ways that these have been avoided.

Nontargeted incidents, including random shootings and checkpoint violence, can be explained partially by indiscipline among combatants and poor recognition by those under arms of humanitarian organizations, and partly by frequent disregard for humanitarian mandates, missions, and actors. In cases where combatants do not understand who humanitarian actors are, why they are there, and how they work, suspicions of spying or perceptions of alliances with other factions are predictable and frequent.

LESSONS LEARNED AND SPURNED

Cost-Benefit Analysis

As incidents accumulated and threats grew, it was repeatedly necessary to ask the fundamental question: "Is the humanitarian impact of our work worth the risks we are taking?" Good answers to that question depended first on a realistic and sober grasp of current risks and likely scenarios. A knowledge of impacts was also necessary. Constraints on movement imposed by insecurity often made the evaluation of impacts very difficult and could sometimes only be guessed at, based on material inputs delivered and narrative accounts from local staff and other contacts. When reliable information was most needed, it was least available.

Outside political and donor considerations typically further complicated cost-benefit analysis. Given the administrative, bureaucratic, and logistics obstacles to becoming established in the northern Caucasus, closing down an aid operation would mean that considerable resources and time would have to be reinvested in the arduous process of reestablishing a presence later. For donors, the adaptations of operational agencies to worsening security conditions were often expensive undertakings, which became harder to justify as insecurity impinged on an agency's ability to assess needs, monitor programs, and evaluate impacts. Decreased program effectiveness combined with increased staff vulnerability to undermine donor support.

The Need for Contingency Planning—Proportionate Responses to Assessed Risks

A professional approach to security in the northern Caucasus entailed ongoing analysis

of all conceivable security contingencies and formulation of rational responses to each contingency. Security officers fashioned lengthy lists of “trigger points,” each representing a development in the security situation that affected their own agency, other agencies, or the general context. Trigger points were categorized and weighted according to the seriousness of impact or the threat posed, ranging from “no change” to closing the program.

Agencies were well served by such systems, which allowed for quick and orderly response with a degree of advance preparation when a security incident occurred. Inadequate responses under stressful conditions or overreaction in the heat of the moment were avoided. The integrity of these systems rested on careful forethought, a disciplined approach to security, and the cultivation of a culture of security-consciousness among all staff. At a calculated cost to transparency, such systems were kept strictly confidential so that they could not be used maliciously by combatants, factions, or authorities to manipulate the actions of an agency.

The Role of Information

Agencies active in the northern Caucasus during and after the war in Chechnya consistently identified information as the most important asset for dealing with difficult security conditions. Information helped clarify the threats facing an agency, suggested ways to manage the threat, and helped equip an agency to minimize its vulnerability. In a hostile environment, it is difficult to gather information; getting access to it requires tireless effort following up on all possible sources, including local and expatriate staff, local communities, news reports, other aid agencies, observer missions, and carefully chosen and nurtured contacts (see Box 6).

The Importance of Information Sharing

Information concerning the sexual assault of a female staff member of an NGO was suppressed for months, allowing other agencies unknowingly to expose female staff to risks previously unappreciated. Outright refusal by some agencies to acknowledge to counterparts that they had paid ransoms for the release of kidnapped staff made it impossible on several occasions to perform accurate risk assessments of the kidnapping threat. Attacks against one agency have repeatedly affected the security of all others.

Even the most professional of aid agency staff are not immune to the shock and confusion that follow a serious incident. In an apparent reversal of normal circumstances in which adversity stimulates interagency collaboration, experience suggests that agencies are usually good at sharing security-relevant information among one another until a security crisis emerges, at which point the sense of community unravels and cooperation typically breaks down. Immediately following serious incidents there has been a discernible tendency within agencies to “circle the wagons” in the immediate aftermath of being attacked, robbed, or having a staff member kidnapped.

All agencies need timely information on security incidents so that they can take steps to minimize threats to themselves. A degree of confidentiality may be called for governing the type of information released to other agencies following an incident, in order to avoid the misuse of information, revenge attacks on the agency, or exposure of hostages to further harm. However, in a setting where events move quickly and where distinctions between aid agencies

are lost on combatants and the general public, it is vital that the basic facts of an incident are disseminated among all other agencies with minimal delay. One agency in Chechnya enacted a policy of producing and distributing a “fact sheet,” detailing as much as it could about an incident. This helped others to assess and deal with risk.

Lessons can be drawn from the experiences in Georgia and the northern Caucasus about the role, structure, and effectiveness of information sharing on security issues. Significantly, formalized focal points among aid agencies on security matters have never been established in any of the centers of aid activity in the Caucasus. During the war in Chechnya the number of humanitarian agencies was uncommonly small, and the UN’s role was isolated to the periphery of the conflict in Ingushetia, North Ossetia, and Daghestan, as the UN was not present in Chechnya. A relatively informal approach to information sharing on security issues usually worked well. As the largest, most active, and most experienced agency in the region, the ICRC played an unofficial lead role in convening weekly meetings attended by agency representatives and the OSCE Mission. The OSCE provided appraisals of the military and security situation, and each agency contributed information from its own contacts and experiences, as well as on the locations and nature of its programming activities. These forums usually allowed for the exchange of good and bad experiences that sometimes yielded to consensus on specific grievances, leading to the voicing of common demands and requests to relevant authorities on behalf of the entire humanitarian community.

A similar ad hoc arrangement has prevailed in Georgia over the years, even though the humanitarian community has been more prolific, active, and mobile. By late 1997, when the number of serious security incidents rose sharply, still no formal security procedures had been put in place. In 1995, in response to a request from several international NGOs, the UNDHA humanitarian affairs officer attempted to formalize the collection and dissemination of information on security incidents, with DHA taking the lead. However, the effort fell victim to a disagreement between UNDHA and UNDP, which was enthusiastically taken up in the New York and Geneva headquarters of both agencies. As a direct result, there was no systematic tracking, analysis, or dissemination of information on the security environment until early 1998 when, in response to worsening security in Western Georgia and Abkhazia, NGOs turned to UNDHA as an ad hoc security focal point. This role involved UNDHA (now OCHA) as an information clearinghouse, informed by input from UNOMIG, on security conditions and incidents. Following a number of crises, security meetings open to international NGOs and the ICRC were convened by the UNDP resident representative and OCHA coordinator to facilitate the passage of information, a discussion of best practices, and the airing of grievances on security matters.

Ad hoc approaches to security have had several troubling shortcomings. First, their effectiveness has been notoriously vulnerable to personality conflicts, which are especially difficult to avoid in emergency situations and the constant comings and goings of new agencies and faces. Informal understandings reached between individuals and agencies break down, especially in times of stress. Second, although a degree of moral pressure can sometimes be applied, agencies are under no obligation to cooperate with ad hoc arrangements, share information, or abide by agreed-upon standards of security conduct. Informal community-wide security protocols and understandings are weakened by those who opt out, and the information available to all is incomplete. Third, the level of security professionalism among agencies varies enormously, from constant preoccupation and vigilance to careless indiffer-

Box 5 The “Submarine Syndrome:” Limitations on Information in a Conflict Environment

Conflicts in the Caucasus are typically multilayered, cloaked in subterfuge, and driven by a bewildering array of dynamics. Geopolitical intrigue can be interwoven with criminality, power struggles between local gangs, and personal vendettas. Tensions, sensitivities, power structures, economic stakes, and war experiences may vary dramatically between two villages situated mere kilometers apart, and can change from one day to the next.

An aid worker in Chechnya coined the term “Submarine Syndrome” to describe the limitations on information under which he and his agency labored. Programming, security, staffing, procurement, and contracting decisions were made more difficult and risky by the lack of a clear understanding of what was going on from day to day and place to place. Language barriers limited communication between locals and expatriates. Locals may have kept information from expatriates who were new or perceived as biased. Access difficulties and insecurity often rendered areas off-limits for travel and made it impossible to establish reliable networks of contacts for information gathering. It was like trying to stay out of trouble in the busy, collision-prone shipping lanes of an ocean in the days before radar by periodically looking at one part of it through a periscope.

He observed that his agency relied for information mostly on expatriate sources, such as other aid agencies, the OSCE, and the British Broadcasting Corporation. Interagency meetings were important and useful, but tended to be a closed circle. There were limitations in relying too heavily on local staff. An agency could recruit by selecting those who, by their background and status in the community, could provide a deeper understanding of the situation and an ability to cope with its nuances. Yet, just because they were “locals” did not necessarily give them an understanding of situations that tended to be extremely localized. A resident of Grozny would have little understanding of a southern mountain village so as to advise on how to deal with local authorities or award a work contract. Although the problem could not be completely resolved, his agency and others used the following outreach strategies:

- Designate “liaison persons” among trusted local staff whose primary purpose was to nurture and maintain contact with local communities;
- Employ expatriate staff who knew Russian. The absence of a language gap often meant that locals were more willing to share information;
- Cultivate personal contacts and local relationships. Forming implicit alignments with local officials broadened the base of support for the agency’s work, built a sense of local ownership of its activities, and provided access to local problem-solving processes and abilities.

ence. In settings where all humanitarian workers and operations can be placed in immediate jeopardy by the irresponsible behavior of one individual or one agency, no real possibility exists for bringing uncooperative agencies and individuals into line. Fourth, ad hoc approaches are insufficient in preserving institutional memory of security incidents and lessons learned. When assessment missions, new agencies, or new aid workers arrive in the area, there is no central resource that can provide in-depth information and guidance on security matters.

Security-Related Cooperation With Observer Missions

Observers with UN and OSCE missions are underutilized sources of information and analysis for aid agencies. They often travel off the beaten track, are familiar with areas which are underserved by aid, and have close contact with local authorities, communities, and combatants. They have a special appreciation for the military and political situations that prevail and, often, an acute appreciation of security threats.

Despite its potential value, poor security-related cooperation among the various observer missions and humanitarian actors in the Caucasus has been a recurring, life-threatening problem, for a number of reasons. Some aid agencies prefer to distance themselves from the political overtones of observer missions in order to safeguard the perceived independence and neutrality of humanitarian action. The vagaries of personality, clashes between humanitarian and military cultures, and high turnover rates in both groups also have contributed to difficulties. The lack of institutionalized responses from within the humanitarian community for confronting security problems has also meant that observer missions must deal separately with large numbers of individual aid agencies, rather than with a single focal point acting on behalf of the aid community.

The mandates of observer missions in the Caucasus are typically ambiguous regarding humanitarian roles and have been interpreted very differently under successive heads of mission. The consistency and hence the reliability of their support for humanitarian actors has been undermined by this ambiguity. On a number of occasions, UNOMIG and the OSCE Assistance Group in Grozny have asserted their support of humanitarian action—sometimes with near-disastrous results—when it was politically advantageous for them to do so. The problem is made worse, especially in UNOMIG's case, by the three month tenure of officers assigned to liaison duties with the aid community. In all cases, observer missions would benefit from secondments of qualified and experienced humanitarian professionals to one-year missions as civil affairs officers for liaison with humanitarian actors.

Managing Relations With Local Communities and Combatants

By necessity, staying safe in a hostile environment involves cautious management of relations with surrounding communities and local actors. A balance needs to be struck. Preoccupation with security can be perceived as aloofness if it leads to isolation from the local population. Although issues of impartiality and neutrality inevitably arise, experiences throughout the Caucasus attest to the value of nurturing friendly, consultative, and collaborative relationships with local communities, combatants, and beneficiary populations in both base areas and project locations.

Agencies that have treated humanitarian action primarily as an in-and-out logistics

operation, without regard for its place in the social context, have tended to be more vulnerable to targeted attack, harassment, obstruction, and interference from combatants, local authorities, and local populations. Acting as though combatants did not exist, carelessness about perceived alliances or ignorance of the dynamics of local communities has exposed agencies to avoidable risks and difficulties. Those that have taken a more socially aware approach to relief activity generally have fared much better—perhaps especially—in the midst of full-scale hostilities in Chechnya.

Winning the trust and implicit protection of locals has brought real security and other operational benefits. Agencies often have enjoyed the explicit protection of surrogate clan affiliations and “neighborhood watch” arrangements when they situated their staff housing, compounds, or offices in the neighborhoods of senior local staff, or in other places where a meaningful connection with the local community has been established and nurtured.

Relations with authorities and combatants likewise can be beneficial or problematic. At a pragmatic level, contact with combatants and authorities is usually necessary for operational aid effectiveness: security, freedom of movement, bureaucratic and administrative permissions, and perhaps even support. But merely making contact with factions can imply alliances with them and undermine the integrity of an agency in the eyes of other factions. Although results have been mixed, establishing contact and nurturing working relationships with all sides enables reinforcing with them an aid organization’s neutrality and impartiality, provided that these ideals are supported by the organization’s actual work on the ground.

The way humanitarian agencies and personnel present themselves and their work to post-Soviet authorities and combatants has been critical. As mentioned in Chapter 1, aid organizations and those in a position to provide them with political backstopping are advised to be aware of past patterns of brutality and violence from post-Soviet military, paramilitary, and police institutions. On an individual level, however, it is often possible to reach out to the human side of those in uniform. Humanitarians—especially the many among them who harbor stereotypes of military or bureaucratic personalities—often get off on the wrong foot in these relationships when they fail to show respect, are overly insistent, or take the attitude that they are dealing with “the enemy.”

Security and support for aid activities can stand or fall on the nature and tone of contacts between an aid agency and combatants or authorities. First impressions are important. Careful advance thought and preparation is called for in explaining the who, what, when, where, and why of the agency’s humanitarian work. The desirability of transparency should be tempered to avoid passing along information that could place the agency or its activities in jeopardy. An emphasis should be placed on finding incentives for cooperation and disincentives for control. Avoiding situations where aid agencies compromise their independence and impartiality, or confer undue legitimacy on authorities or combatants, can be difficult (see also Chapter 4). Several generic strategies—carrots and sticks—for promoting cooperation have been useful at various times in the Caucasus:

- Referring to internationally signed agreements that stipulate host authority obligations and support for aid activities and to specific agreements reached between authorities and the agency;
- Appealing to the implied responsibility of authorities and combatants to guarantee security and access for the agency, arguing that if this is not done, aid workers and

-
- local populations would not take seriously the influence of those who claim authority;
 - Appealing to the implied responsibility of authorities and factions for the welfare and protection of populations, arguing that if the work of the agency is protected and supported, this could only raise their standing in the eyes of the population;
 - Finding a “hook” that encourages the agency to be seen to be helping to solve problems of importance to authorities and factions;
 - Soliciting advice and assistance from authorities and factions, thereby reinforcing how they perceive their own authority;
 - Informally floating the idea of a project among the local population before seeking formal approval from authorities and factions. This has had the effect of building a sympathetic constituency of potential beneficiaries that authorities and factions have recognized.

Kidnapping and Hostage Taking

A discussion about the moral defensibility of paying ransoms for the release of kidnapped aid workers belongs in a philosophy classroom, not in the field. Hostage taking of foreign humanitarian workers received impetus by the payment of ransoms by a small minority of aid agencies whose staff had been kidnapped. At least three humanitarian NGOs in the northern Caucasus, some with support from their Moscow embassies and home governments, paid ransoms for the release of kidnapped expatriate staff. Ransoms also have been paid by UNOMIG in Georgia and, for the release of other foreigners, by media outlets, foreign companies, and embassies. Doing so placed all foreigners at risk in substantial parts of the Caucasus and ultimately led to the near-cessation of aid activity in the northern Caucasus.

Paying ransoms for the release of captive aid workers sets a dangerous precedent. It encourages criminals to take more hostages. Even if an agency withdraws its own staff after paying a ransom, the staff of all other agencies, and all humanitarian programs, are put at serious risk. Proactive humanitarian community-wide policies of not paying ransoms should be pursued aggressively. OCHA or the office of the UN representative in each aid focal point are usually the logical initiators of this policy and can bring UN resources to bear on publicizing it. Donors may have means of penalizing agencies that opt out of policies against ransom payments. Tough measures such as this are justified by the acute vulnerability of humanitarian efforts and aid workers when ransoms are paid.

In the fall of 1997, two foreign military observers and a local translator with UNOMIG were taken hostage for ransom near Zugdidi. Their captors immediately issued a ransom demand to UNOMIG’s Zugdidi Sector HQ via the observers’ own radio, threatening their captives with death. The duty officer who took the call informed UNOMIG’s head of mission of the incident and was instructed to use his discretion to negotiate a ransom, despite the fact that the UN has a clear policy forbidding payment. What should have been a black-and-white policy decision became an impossible judgment call for the duty officer, who was made indirectly responsible for the life or death of his comrades. A small ransom was paid and the hostages were released, setting precedent for the payment of ransoms in Western Georgia. UNOMIG’s chief of mission was immediately summoned to UN headquarters in New York and censured. Although UNOMIG officials subsequently appeared on Abkhaz and Georgian television insisting that a mistake had been made and that no ransoms would be paid in future,

Box 6 Motivations for Kidnapping and Hostage Taking

Although the extent, motivations, nature, and targets vary widely from place to place, kidnapping is a Caucasus-wide phenomenon that, without exception, has arisen in and around every conflict and post-conflict situation in the region. Foreign staff of international aid organizations have been targeted consistently in Chechnya, Daghestan, Ingushetia, and North Ossetia. Members of UNOMIG and the OSCE Mission to Georgia also have been afflicted with hostage takings or attempts in Western Georgia and South Ossetia. It is one of the most serious threats to the safety of aid operations and personnel and, consequently, to the ability of the aid community to maintain a presence. The motives for individual incidents of hostage taking or kidnapping, often unclear, may be multiple. Three general patterns have emerged:

Ransom—Especially prevalent throughout the northern Caucasus but recent cases in Georgia as well. Wealthy locals are the most common targets. However, the payment of ransoms, ranging from a few thousand to several million dollars by some aid agencies, UNOMIG, foreign embassies, foreign companies, and Russian media organizations, means that kidnapping foreigners and non-local staff members is a lucrative enterprise that is difficult to undermine.

Politics—A consistent feature of warfare and political infighting throughout the area extends to the Stavropol region in southern Russia and Trabzon and to Turkey in the east. During the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, military recruiters in Armenia reportedly took hostages from the families of draft-evaders. There is widespread suspicion that some of the kidnappings of expatriates in the northern Caucasus and Georgia have been motivated by a desire to discourage foreign presence or to garner media attention. This suspicion is due to the absence of ransom demands, or to known histories of hostage taking perpetrated by some faction leaders and others in authority.

Protection—Combatants have consistently used civilians, including women, children, hospital patients, policemen, and bureaucrats, as human shields. In a few cases foreign staff of aid agencies may have given combatants the impression that they were “willing” to act as human shields by volunteering to take the place of local hostages. Holding a foreigner may or may not elicit greater restraint from opposing forces or potential rescuers. Civilians and military forces on all sides of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as paramilitary groups in Abkhazia and Western Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and the northern Caucasus, have engaged in extensive hostage taking, often of women and children, to provide “insurance” for family members or fellow fighters believed to be held captive by the other side.

the damage had already been done.

Agencies should have in place clear, iron-clad policies and instructions on the nonpayment of ransoms and, as a deterrent, should repeatedly publicize these policies as widely as possible among local staff and throughout the areas where they work. All staff should be required as a condition of employment to agree to nonpayment of a ransom in the event of their kidnapping. It should not be left to operational actors in the field to decide on the spot whether to pay or not to pay a ransom for the release of a colleague.

Organizational Culture and Security

Security is jeopardized when the psychological and informational gaps within a given agency are not effectively bridged. These gaps have been apparent not only between far away headquarters and country offices but also, just as frequently, between country offices and field offices. Organizational cultures need to be engendered in headquarters and in the field which encourage and reward—rather than inhibit—honest exchanges of security concerns and information. Such measures also will engender a better appreciation throughout agencies that without security programming will stop. Recruitment and training measures can help ensure an appropriate outlook on security matters.

Approaches to security awareness and security training regimens in aid agencies have evolved out of experiences that have been serious, but often less extreme than those encountered in extensive parts of the Caucasus. Many agencies address security in ways seriously out of step with the requirements of much of the Caucasus environment. One agency actively discourages so-called “security paranoia” among its staff, sending the message that security should be something less than a 24-hour a day preoccupation. Another fielded a lone expatriate to the northern Caucasus with no special security protocols, equipment, training, or support. By contrast, the ICRC requires its field staff to undergo intensive three-week training, which includes familiarization with security threats and dealing with the challenges likely to be encountered in hostile environments.

Some larger agencies have labored against serious internal difficulties when confronted with security problems. Concerns among field staff about the career implications of asking to be withdrawn from the field or temporarily replaced, prevented staff members in at least one case from being frank with headquarters when they felt in imminent danger. Eventually a staffer was kidnapped, forcing the drastic curtailment of the agency’s entire program.

In the headquarters of some agencies, there can be implicit biases toward the continuation of programs, thus minimizing security risks. Smaller agencies, on the other hand, may be biased toward suspending programs due to the greater financial and logistics requirements of operating in a hostile environment. In the field, meanwhile, a recommendation to suspend programming due to insecurity can be viewed as an admission of failure.

Within UN agencies, reports and warnings on security matters have been suppressed both at the country level and in headquarters for fear that programming will be jeopardized by added staff time and cost, constricted movement, less flexibility, and other concerns. Desk officers and policymakers in headquarters settings undoubtedly need to conduct their own cost/benefit analyses, which take into account the political costs of suspending programming. However, the lesson that needs to be learned from experience in the northern Caucasus is that unresponsiveness to security threats can be costly if insecurity ultimately forces the closure of

a program. When dealing with extreme situations, security must come first.

Unresponsiveness of bureaucracies at headquarters to security conditions in the field has been a recurring problem. Funding for a VHF repeater network in Abkhazia and Western Georgia—vital for the security of all agencies in the area—has been held up for years by interagency disagreement and bureaucratic inertia inside the UN. In another case, an agency was warned repeatedly in writing by a highly qualified security consultant that a senior field representative was at risk of kidnap or other targeting, based on knowledge of three separate threats against him. Three months after the report was sent to the security section at his headquarters, the individual was kidnapped, forcing the drastic downsizing of the agency's program.

The headquarters of large agencies need to have clear lines of reporting and authority on security matters that are responsive to field conditions with minimal delay. Security sections need unhindered access to the authority of executive-level decisionmakers, and the ability to override program desks in extreme situations such as known and imminent threats.

High Profile or Low Profile Presence?

In settings where humanitarianism is often an unfamiliar notion, agencies need to be acutely aware of how they are perceived in the communities where they work. This means considering whether a high or a low profile presence is more beneficial and more safe. To counteract suspicion and or lack of awareness of humanitarian activity, it can be advantageous for agencies to be visible and transparent, using agency flags and logos, well-marked vehicles, and aggressive community outreach and education through personal contact and the media to help familiarize combatants and local populations with the motives and methods of aid activity. "Showing the flag" also sends the message that humanitarian action is a good in its own right and should be respected and protected.

This approach was discussed among agencies during the war in Chechnya before the escalation in targeted attacks on aid agencies, but was consciously pursued only by the ICRC in the course of its larger dissemination program. By their own account, a more concerted and systematic approach by the larger humanitarian community, had it been acted upon, could have increased humanitarian space by creating a greater sense of ownership over aid activities among the populace, decreasing the vulnerability of aid agencies as "soft targets" unprotected by anyone. Yet, in the midst of an unfolding war, operational agencies (again with the exception of the ICRC) had little time and few resources to commit to this. Had UNDHA established an activist presence in the northern Caucasus rather than passively monitoring developments from Moscow, it would have been ideally suited to this task, given its mandated role as humanitarian advocate.

There are obvious risks to a high profile approach when the helpers become the hunted. Following the cease-fire in Chechnya, as targeted incidents escalated, most agencies reconsidered their approach and adopted a decidedly low profile. An effort to preserve what little humanitarian space remained from mounting criminal and other threats, this often involved using unmarked vehicles, not displaying agency flags and emblems at bases and project sites, keeping movements and activities unpredictable and unannounced, and generally avoiding activities which drew attention to themselves.

A high profile presence works to familiarize local people with the motives and means of

humanitarian activity, thereby increasing humanitarian space and broadening the base of support for—and thus the security of—aid operations. High profile also reinforces the idea that victims have a right to assistance and protection and that aid agencies have a right to provide it. High profile can attract unwanted attention. Low profile presence attempts to preserve humanitarian space in settings where aid or aid workers are targeted.

Political Actors, Humanitarian Space, and Security

During open hostilities in the Caucasus, combatants have had virtually free reign to prosecute wars as they have seen fit, with little effective restraint imposed by the international community. In the more recent situations of frozen conflict and in post-cease-fire Chechnya, local authorities and governments have often been impotent or unwilling to control crime and the behavior of those under arms in the areas where humanitarian protection and assistance are most needed. The insecurity facing aid operations, abetted by this impunity, results in further constrictions of humanitarian space. The effectiveness of international pressure on governments and authorities to address insecurity is limited by the lack of accountability of combatants to their political masters and by the proliferation of loose-knit paramilitary groups and criminals outside of anyone's control.

Under these limitations, there is still an important role for international organizations and political actors to play in making inroads on the general culture of impunity. The Moscow embassies of the countries of origin of the six slain ICRC workers collectively made representations to Russian and Chechen authorities, reminding them that their investigations into the murders were being closely watched. Similarly, the OSCE mission in Grozny has been energetic at times in pressing for the safe release of kidnapped aid workers. In both cases, pressure was exerted and queries made at the behest of aid agencies. Examples of this sort of political backstopping for humanitarian action are rare in the region, however, and represent an underutilized resource.

For governments and international organizations, which have tended to defer to other pressing political interests in avoiding blanket condemnations of violations of humanitarian law, the stakes are lower, and presumably more acceptable, when they are asked to speak out on specific issues or cases of concern to humanitarian actors. In the Caucasus, they are not asked to do this as often as they should be. Aid organizations enjoy a degree of moral suasion when they appeal to international political actors to intervene on their behalf in this way. As a matter of international law, it is the responsibility of all state signatories to the Geneva Conventions to ensure that standards governing the protection of aid workers are upheld.

Assistance by Remote Control in Untenable Security Environments

Growing insecurity for expatriates in the northern Caucasus meant few options for aid agencies other than suspension of programming or complete withdrawal. A few experienced agencies began exploring ways to provide assistance by remote control as a marginally viable alternative to closure. This approach entailed managing assistance programs from a relatively safe distance, completely or almost entirely through less vulnerable local staff and organizations as intermediaries. Although still at risk, locals were not targeted for attack on nearly the same scale as expatriate staff since they usually fell under the implicit protection of family, clan,

and community affiliation.

Security degenerated to an untenable level before the full potential of remote-control assistance for different forms of humanitarian action could be known, but a number of observations can be made which may be useful in the event of continued insecurity, renewed hostilities, and ensuing humanitarian emergencies. Agencies which had taken an approach to relief which included support for local capacities had a distinct advantage over expatriate and logistics-centered interventions. Remote control assistance was only possible if an agency had already invested in relationships with local authorities and in the development of its local staff, or in capacity-support among the few capable local organizations in existence. Working relationships with local authorities were often the result of two or three years of carefully nurtured contact. Similarly, many senior local staff or members of their families had been in the employ of agencies for a long time, so they were trusted and knew intimately the lay of the land, how the agency worked, and what was expected of them. Remote control assistance was not a viable alternative for newly arrived agencies seeking impacts in the short term.

The abundance of capable and dedicated local staff was also an important factor. The professional backgrounds of highly qualified engineers, medics, logisticians, technical specialists, and managers could be augmented by whatever supplemental training was necessary to satisfy the requirements of the agency and its donors. Expatriates with backgrounds in development assistance were particularly well-suited to the remote control approach because it involved them in supportive and advisory roles, rather than in executive roles. Local staff were responsible for virtually all facets of day-to-day operations at agency subbases and project sites where expatriates could not normally go. Decisions on local procurement and contracting, hiring and firing, and substantive matters of programming would all rely on local staff, with expatriates providing guidance and whatever financial and political backstopping was necessary.

Although promising, the approach was far from ideal. The lack of reliable communications infrastructure and the need to minimize movement made liaison and coordination especially challenging. Gaps in the knowledge of local staff could not always be quickly or readily filled, causing problems across the board. To the displeasure of donors and agency headquarters, normal standards of needs assessment, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation were difficult or impossible to attain. Project monitoring often relied on narrative accounts from local staff or on photographic and video evidence of work completed. Controlling and tracking distributions of essential drugs and other relief items proved especially difficult.

The need to consider assistance by remote control may recur with the reemergence of conflict and untenable security environments. To prepare for this eventuality, aid agencies may consider options for building an installed local assistance and protection capacity in crisis-prone areas:

- What local organizations can be strengthened to the point of being able to mount major assistance activities as near-autonomous implementing partners of international agencies in the event of an emergency?
- Once strengthened, what kind of training and other support will be necessary to maintain the skills required to respond effectively in a crisis? What kind of relationship will be necessary between local and international organizations in the medium term?

-
- How much will local organizations or staff be put at risk by an affiliation with an international aid agency and its resources? How can their vulnerability be minimized?
 - What mechanisms can be put in place to ensure the accountability of local organizations and staff?
 - What kind of investment will be necessary? What are the staff, communications, and logistics requirements that are likely to need outside financial backing? What other forms of backing will be necessary?
 - Are territorial or national Emergency Situations Ministries viable implementing partners for assistance activities in crisis situations? If so, how can international humanitarian organizations help them before and during crisis situations?
 - What options are available for enlisting local organizations in protection roles? Can linkages be formed or strengthened between local and international human rights or witness organizations?

HUMANITARIAN PROFESSIONALISM

The qualities of humanitarian professionalism that are in demand in conflict settings around the world generally also apply in the Caucasus. Self-discipline, adaptability, sound judgment, political acumen, sensitivity to nuance, and a willingness to learn have proved to be especially important. These qualities are often particularly necessary due to unique features of the post-Soviet landscape, the high degree of politicization that infuses humanitarian activity throughout the region, and the special challenges sometimes posed by the extremity of the security environment. Especially in the northern Caucasus, an aid worker's unwillingness to follow security discipline will not only put him- or herself at risk, but others as well.

Some aid workers fail to recognize the competencies of educated local staff in the Caucasus cultures, which value highly intellectual prowess and accomplishment. Others have adopted management styles that are not a good fit with the pride, propriety, self-sufficiency, and honor, which are common among people in the region. Still others are initially caught off guard by the open hostility they may encounter among tense local populations. Box 8 contains illustrative cases of what might be termed "failed professionalism." Generally, however, the standard of humanitarian professionalism has tended to be high at operational levels in the Caucasus. In the northern Caucasus, most agencies eventually recognized the need to recruit highly competent and experienced staff in deference to political complexities and the security environment.

Rapid turnover of expatriate personnel has led to numerous difficulties. One agency in Chechnya rotated ill-prepared emergency staff in and out in three months. This was barely enough time for newcomers to become acclimatized to a complex environment, let alone to accomplish much of any value. Brief missions such as this have resulted in an agency being staffed entirely by inexperienced new hands and leaving behind little institutional memory regarding security or programming. Local staff can spend inordinate amounts of time helping foreigners to adjust and introducing successive new arrivals to authorities.

Aid agencies have learned several lessons regarding the hiring, firing, treatment, and development of local staff:

Box 7 Adapting to the Caucasus

Many humanitarians in the Caucasus emphasize the value of nurturing good working relationships with locals and of maintaining an acute awareness of their surroundings and of “outsider/insider” dynamics. Conditions of extreme insecurity for aid workers can lead to isolation from local people. Like anywhere else in the world, newcomers and veterans alike are well served by common sense, propriety, a healthy humility, a readiness to learn, and liberal application of the golden rule. Alternately, they can be jeopardized by the opposites of these behaviors. Sophisticated local cultures, of which there are many, are often obscured by a recent veneer of Westernization, but are more deeply interwoven with the behaviors, attitudes, and norms that helped people to adapt to the many exigencies of the Soviet system. Still other attitudes and values have emerged from violent conflict in more recent times and are sometimes layered upon deeply held feelings of injustice or victimization.

While there are important sensitivities and courtesies to become aware of in each locale, committing a contextual faux pas with the right attitude is usually a forgivable offense. Humor is often a useful and appreciated device, especially when directed at oneself. A sleep-deprived aid worker once made the grievous error of greeting an Abkhaz in language-sensitive Sukhumi with the Georgian *Gammarjoba*. By immediately swearing loudly at himself and repeating the greeting—all in fluent Russian—he not only managed to survive unscathed but elicited a laugh in the process.

As already noted, foreigners often remain novelties that arouse suspicion and distrust. Transparency is an underutilized defense. During the tense moments often encountered during assessment visits or among newly displaced populations, suspicion and frustration can and do make themselves known almost immediately. Being accompanied by a respected local person can deflect aggression. The judgment needed to discern the best courses of action can only come through time and exposure, but temporary withdrawal may well be the best option.

Alcohol can be a problem for aid workers in the Caucasus, even as they go about their work in calm times. Agreements struck, assessments made, refugees returned, and distributions completed are all cause for invitations to sit at spirit-and-food-laden “tables,” which instantly materialize out of nowhere in homes, offices, or at the side of a road. A “good” table is a well-ordered series of toasts and speeches that can help to cement relationships and build trust. Much emphasis is placed on formal speechmaking, and honored guests may be invited to hold forth.

Since a table typically lasts two or three hours, an impromptu celebration can seriously impinge on the day’s work. It is considered bad form to refuse a table, but apologies, explanations of pressing business, health concerns, or religious belief are acceptable when the mood is suitable. Females can refuse to drink alcohol at a table but may still be pressed to remain. A well-run table regulates the intake of alcohol to a somewhat manageable level, and drunkenness shows a lack of respect. A badly-run table can easily turn ugly. Although invitations to sit at tables are frequent and unavoidable in the Caucasus, as elsewhere it is important to avoid taking alcohol in unpredictable situations.

-
- Provided that it does not reinforce competition between groups or enhance the grip of local warlords, it can be advantageous to hire locals predominantly from prominent local families who carry weight in the communities where the agency is operational. They serve as a “foot in the door” to the community that may result in implicit protection, good advice, and cooperation;
 - Hiring recommendations from respected local staff should be taken very seriously. To recommend a person for employment who ultimately does not work out reflects badly on the person giving the recommendation. Recommendations are usually not given lightly for this reason, and those who give them often consider themselves responsible for the conduct and effectiveness of the new hires;
 - In-country staff should be hired with attention to the effects on local perceptions. Rural populations may regard urban sophisticates as corrupt or “tools of the system.” Local staff from urban areas may also harbor contempt for rural dwellers;
 - Staff cultivated under emergency conditions may need proactive training to equip them for dealing with the different requirements of transitional assistance as emergencies wind down;
 - A small number of agencies have sent local staff abroad to other aid settings to broaden their knowledge of what works elsewhere. Due to the lack of a culture of nongovernmental organizing in the former Soviet Union, these visits have proved especially valuable for local staff who are involved in social mobilization, community organizing, or support for local NGOs and grassroots organizations.

Other issues of humanitarian professionalism are more relevant at the management level. The first line of defense for an agency that is concerned about protecting humanitarian values is its staff. There can be a marked tendency toward paralysis among aid workers who acquiesce in the cloak-and-dagger mindset of the Caucasus.

This tendency has been most striking and problematic among those occupying senior management positions where humanitarian action and politics inevitably converge. In the shadow of Moscow and of Russia’s seat on the UN Security Council, some large agencies have deferred to the political complexities of conflict and aid in the Caucasus by appointing excellent politicians and diplomats whose humanitarian credentials and track records have been questionable at best. As a result, opportunities for pressing the humanitarian imperative, as well as for forceful advocacy on behalf of humanitarian principles, have fallen victim to a culture of humanitarian realpolitik.

In what is as much a recruiting issue as a policy one, UN senior management has not staked out humanitarian moral high ground in the Caucasus as it has done effectively in other settings in order to secure better adherence to international norms of conduct, or to expand humanitarian space. Against the backdrop of the moral confusion that has prevailed in the wake of the Soviet collapse, UN functionaries in Moscow and the Caucasus and their counterparts in Geneva and New York have been, with important exceptions, disappointingly reluctant to use their positions to establish moral points of reference for governments, local authorities, and combatants. Senior appointees to humanitarian agencies in the Caucasus need to keep politics and humanitarian action in finely balanced perspective. To elevate the status of humanitarian concerns in relation to political agendas, a more promising alternative to past practices has been to recruit tried and tested humanitarians with good political and diplomatic skills.

Box 8 Failed Professionalism

Most aid workers in the Caucasus are dedicated, compassionate, and capable professionals; some are not. Humanitarian professionalism takes on added importance due to the security environment and the lack of familiarity with humanitarian work and foreigners in many areas. The special challenges of the Caucasus lend added importance to personnel practices sensitive to local conditions.

- Following lengthy missions with NGOs in Africa and Georgia, an aid worker took up a position in the northern Caucasus. Within two days the newcomer had alienated the local staff who, over the preceding years and under extremely trying circumstances, had shown themselves to be capable and loyal beyond reproach. They were angered by the newcomer's attitude that he knew how to do everything better than they did. The agency's security was heavily dependent on a close and trusting relationship with its local staff.
- Two expatriates were welcomed to the Caucasus with a party. After a night of drinking, the newcomers got into a fistfight and were sent home the next day.
- The tempestuous behavior of the expatriate head of a large aid organization elicited threats against her from the spouses of local staff. Working conditions worsened but, because they felt unprotected by the agency's personnel policies or did not know what forms of redress were open to them, staff did not complain. When frustration peaked, staff decided that their rare and lucrative jobs with the agency were not worth the trouble. A revolt ensued and the expatriate had to be relocated to another part of the world.
- When approached on a Friday about a serious and unfolding attack on IDPs in a camp just outside Chechnya, an aid worker with protection responsibilities in the camp was strapping skis to the top of his agency's \$30,000 vehicle. When asked if he would go to the camp, he replied that it could wait until the following Monday.
- The head of a large UN agency was overheard by local staff warning expatriates not to leave locals unattended lest they begin "fornicating on the desks." All female local staff of another agency eventually quit after failing to convince an expatriate to clean up his foul language.
- In conservative Muslim Chechnya at a time of unpredictable military checkpoints and grieving families, a female expatriate was often seen traveling around war-torn areas in cutoff shorts and a halter top. A male expatriate with body odor, several ear piercings, and a long ponytail, T-shirt, and ragged jeans could not understand the cool reception from authorities and combatants.
- In Chechnya during the war, a marked aid agency vehicle driven by a local employee detoured around a busy, key checkpoint in plain view of those manning it. For the next week all agencies found the checkpoint very difficult. Important work was obstructed.

CHAPTER 3

HUMANITARIAN ACTION

This section focuses on the substance of humanitarian action and its convergence with politics, primarily at donor and policy levels. It begins with an overview of need and then sharpens the focus to the humanitarian implications of the “frozen” conflicts that predominate in the region. Next, the implications of various departures from needs-based humanitarian responses are addressed, including questions about donor constraints on independent, proportionate, and nonpartisan aid. Synergisms between humanitarian, diplomatic, and peacekeeping actors in the Caucasus are explored with a view to identifying why they are useful and necessary, why they work, and why they don’t. The section concludes with a discussion of options for increasing the space for humanitarian action.

Assistance emergencies tend to be short-lived and protection emergencies protracted in the Caucasus. Many humanitarian actors who have responded to the effects of conflict in the region point out that a singular difference between the Caucasus and other conflict settings is that acute needs for life-sustaining material assistance pale in comparison to protection needs. Extensive road and rail infrastructure, readily available local logistics staff, local food resources, and proximity to food stocks have contributed to the ability of international agencies to mount successful emergency assistance responses to mass population displacements and refugee flows. Consequently, these responses have helped avert large scale loss-of-life in the immediate aftermath of open hostilities. Large-scale and recurring food shortages or medical emergencies are unheard of in the Caucasus. Protection needs, however, have been more acute and the responses to them much more difficult.

ASSISTANCE NEEDS

Maintenance of displaced persons and refugees forms the bulk of conflict-related assistance activity in the Caucasus, although reconstruction and resettlement assistance will loom much larger once political and repatriation agreements have been reached. After the consolidation of cease-fires in the southern Caucasus, material assistance has focused on easing transition-related hardships among populations at large, primarily through bolstering and supplementing social services such as health, welfare, and education systems. The aim of these measures has been to minimize risks to vulnerable groups posed by eroding infrastructure and political and economic restructuring. Community development activity is also underway in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Some agencies have treated as emergencies specific severe deficiencies in health care of a more long-term sort, notably diphtheria and tuberculosis prevention and treatment.

Strong kinship support networks and traditions of self-sufficiency have diminished the need for outside material inputs in the wake of open hostilities. During the war in Chechnya, most IDPs who fled to Ingushetia were temporarily absorbed and assisted, with limited help from aid agencies, by Ingush households. Some Ingush families sheltered up to 30 IDPs from Chechnya. Throughout the Caucasus, many IDPs and refugees often find temporary shelter with host populations rather than in camps or collective shelters. It is often a point of pride

to be able to rely on family rather than on international assistance. However, this naturally occurring absorptive capacity is limited by the generalized, transition-related hardships facing host populations.

Special Implications for Assistance Activity

The nature of warfare in the Caucasus and the unresolved status of the conflicts have special implications for assistance. The central role played by the burning of homes, unrestrained use of heavy weapons, and indiscriminate bombing have caused widespread damage to residential areas in all conflicts, predictably resulting in mass population displacements. Those displaced from rural areas tend to have had more and diverse resources to draw upon in coping with hardship. These resources include stronger family support networks and often, as in rural Chechnya and the Gali region of Abkhazia, the possibility of returning to their plot of land, rebuilding their own home, planting new crops, and starting anew.

People who have been accustomed to living in modern apartment blocks and have become reliant on sophisticated urban infrastructure such as centrally provided gas, heat, electricity, and water supplies, often face special hardships. They may lack the extended family support networks enjoyed by the rural population. With fewer of their own material capacities to draw upon in adapting to new hardships, urban dwellers are more vulnerable to failed or destroyed infrastructure.

Pockets of acute conflict-related material need have persisted for years after cease-fires among select vulnerable groups such as the elderly, ethnic minorities, and those who have been forced to flee conflict more than once. These needs very often are exacerbated by and intertwined with the collapse of centrally-planned economies, social safety nets, and the slow transition to market economies. The fact that the needs of the displaced often blur with the substantial hardship of the general public makes for difficult choices by aid agencies and donors.

In addition to the need for continued maintenance of specific vulnerable groups, there are other notable exceptions to the relatively low priority of assistance needs. These stem from the dearth of reconstruction assistance provided to insurgent areas over the past several years. Pressing humanitarian needs in Abkhazia (north of Gali region), South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh have largely been met by the ICRC and a small number of NGOs, augmented in the latter case by significant assistance from Armenian and Armenian diaspora organizations.

However, the fragility of water and sanitation infrastructure in urban areas may warrant emergency attention. Insecurity has prevented permanent repair of Grozny's water supply and sanitation infrastructure, which, as of early 1998, was known by international agencies to be inadequate and on the verge of collapse, posing a danger of epidemic from waterborne diseases such as typhus and cholera. The threat to aid agencies and personnel has precluded comprehensive assessment of need in Chechnya since the outbreak of war in 1994.

Donors have been unresponsive at times to what one aid worker termed "the bit in the middle" between humanitarian and transition or development assistance. Against the background of near-complete systemic collapse in the region's economies and social safety nets, reform measures often have resulted in certain vulnerable groups being squeezed by the lifting of subsidies, the nonpayment of pensions, inflation, and other side-effects of structural reform. Agencies have found that they need to spend more time and resources on donor relations in

the Caucasus than in other settings.

Needs Assessment and Targeting

It has been difficult in the Caucasus, as in other settings, to arrive at accurate figures for displaced and refugee populations. Numbers typically have become the object of rancorous political debate among conflicting parties and are wrapped up in the ethnic demographics that fuel conflict between Abkhazia and Georgia, South Ossetia and Georgia, Ingushetia and North Ossetia, and Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijan. Further, displaced and refugee populations in the region—though to a lesser extent in Armenia and Azerbaijan—have tended to be mobile and thus difficult to track. Estimates of the numbers of spontaneous returnees to the Gali region of Abkhazia have fluctuated wildly in recent years with the ebb and flow of insecurity, commercial activity surrounding the fall harvest, and the availability of reconstruction assistance in areas of return. Likewise, IDPs from Chechnya to Ingushetia and Dagestan often fled for short periods from transient warfare in their home areas, appearing at aid distributions in the frontier regions and then returning to Chechnya when conditions were safer.

Aid agencies throughout the region have initially found it difficult to arrive at reliable indicators of vulnerability. Conventional “status” indicators included IDPs, refugees, returnees, pregnant and lactating women, single-parent households, families hosting IDPs, elderly live-alones, institutionalized persons, and disabled veterans. Status indicators generally have proved unreliable in part due to the narrowness of definitions of vulnerability that have excluded some people in need but included others who were not. The preponderance of kinship support networks and of strong indigenous capacities for meeting post-conflict material needs, often under conditions of displacement, have suggested to many aid agencies that needs should be assessed by household rather than on an individual basis. More useful criteria now include factors such as access to land, livestock, income from self-employment in extensive unofficial economies or, of increasing importance, migrant remittances from abroad. Difficulties with “selling” new vulnerability criteria to local authorities have been overcome, usually with admirable success, by actively collaborating with local actors in the search for better indicators.

In the insurgencies and secessionist wars of the Caucasus, questions of ethnic demographics and political recognition are central among protagonists and aid beneficiaries alike. Definitions of vulnerability, the inevitable dilemmas of targeting, and proportionate responses according to need all have proved contentious for aid agencies and donors. Many problems emerge from situations in which vulnerability effectively mirrors ethnic background. Pockets of Russians or Armenians in Abkhazia north of Gali region have been considered especially vulnerable due to their lack of extended family support networks and the ambivalence toward them, on ethnic grounds, of the Abkhaz administration.

Further, serious questions have been raised about how assistance activity interacts with the dynamics of displacement and the consequences of these interactions for conflict resolution and eventual returns (see Box 9). Other problems have arisen from the use of humanitarian assistance as political leverage as, for example, when donors opt to withhold assistance to exert pressure on insurgent authorities. This chapter assesses the lessons learned in the Caucasus regarding the intersection of politics and humanitarian agendas and how the aid enterprise

has and has not coped. Chapter 4 defines and addresses the dilemmas of providing assistance across ethnic and political divides, and illustrates how some agencies in the Caucasus have come up with creative ways of avoiding reinforcing tensions among the different groups.

PROTECTION NEEDS

Effective humanitarian action in conflict situations not only relieves life-threatening suffering by providing material assistance but also protects fundamental human rights of vulnerable populations. Wars fought and cease-fires managed without humanitarian pretensions, as in the Caucasus, place a premium on the protection of civilians before, during, and after hostilities. However, supposed sovereign prerogatives, intentional targeting of civilians, insecurity of aid operations and personnel, and the high degree of politicization endemic to all of the conflicts have collectively stacked the odds against effective protective responses. There is little consensus among humanitarian actors and others as to what protection involves and who is responsible for it. In the Caucasus, protection has involved the art of the possible. The actions by host governments and de facto authorities, the behavior of combatants, agency mandates, operational realities, and the unwillingness of international political authorities and organizations to defend humanitarian principles unequivocally have complicated the protection task.

The lack of protection for civilian populations in war-torn parts of the Caucasus has made conflict exponentially more intractable. In Chechnya and Abkhazia, inadequate protection and the ensuing vulnerability of civilians often has led to increased militancy among segments of the population (e.g., Samashki 1996, Gali region 1995-1998). Exposed civilians repeatedly have taken up arms, mined the perimeters of their villages, and formed loose-knit, self-defense cadres to protect themselves or to secure and safeguard the resources they need for the survival of their families.

Practical Protection Strategies

A generic approach to protection entails safeguarding the well-being of war-affected people by ensuring that civilians have access to sufficient humanitarian assistance when and where they need it. Protection prevents or minimizes the damaging effects of warfare and instability on life and property, and advocates adherence to international norms of conduct by combatants and authorities. Modalities of protection necessarily differ according to the stage of a conflict and the types of risk and abuse to which civilians are exposed. During the war in Chechnya, civilians under bombardment from Russian forces needed residential areas respected, evacuation corridors opened and maintained, and access to emergency relief. All were repeatedly denied despite the best efforts at all levels of the ICRC and other agencies in the conflict theater, in Moscow, Geneva, and New York. Consequently, casualty rates among civilians were high and damage to civilian areas and infrastructure extensive. In situations of frozen conflict, which have prevailed in and around Abkhazia, Prigorodnyi Raion, and Nagorno-Karabakh, IDPs and refugees have required the intercession of humanitarian actors to protect them from abuse or arbitrary treatment from host authorities—or from their own community leadership—in areas of refuge, as well as from resident populations, authorities, and combatants in areas of return.

For the ICRC, protection functions are defined by the Geneva Conventions, specifically Article 3 in internal conflict situations, and by the basic principles of international humanitarian law in the event of internal disturbances. The ICRC's approach is two-pronged. First, by working confidentially, maintaining contact with combatants and authorities at all levels, and bringing to bear its considerable resources for humanitarian diplomacy, the ICRC calls the attention of military and civilian authorities to abuses in an effort to undermine impunity and trigger corrective action. Second, when abuses occur, the ICRC intervenes to evacuate vulnerable people from dangerous areas, reunite families, pass family messages, and provide life-sustaining assistance. Implicit in the ICRC's approach to protection is the notion that a humanitarian presence will serve as a deterrent to abuses of civilians and a tempering influence on the behavior of those under arms. At times, when confidential entreaties to combatants and authorities have failed to prevent abuses, the ICRC can and does go public with its concerns. This happened on several occasions during the war in Chechnya, although appeals on behalf of civilians to combatants and authorities at all levels went largely unheeded.

At operational levels, the literal or figurative insertion between combatants and civilians of humanitarian agencies, observer missions, and human rights missions can deter abuse. However, among combatants who have no tradition of limiting the use of force, who are uncontrolled, or who do not understand or respect the roles and mandates of humanitarian organizations, the presence of aid agencies has been a weak deterrent in the Caucasus.

Aid agencies engaged in assistance activities face a dilemma when confronted with serious abuses of human rights. To speak out may mean putting assistance efforts and their own lives in jeopardy. Agencies in Chechnya during the war took a variety of approaches to this. Some opted to stay silent, reasoning that their relief work was most essential and that other agencies were better equipped to bear witness. One organization carefully documented human rights abuses and when these reached a level considered intolerable, held a press conference in Moscow to denounce the behavior of combatants. The decision to speak out was taken in full appreciation of the likelihood that its continued presence would become untenable. With hindsight, the agency believed that the price paid by its beneficiaries was not worth the limited benefits that accrued from attracting the media spotlight to abuses.

Other agencies took a lower profile approach, passing information on abuses to local, Moscow-based, or international human rights organizations. They rendered informal, low-profile assistance to local groups in getting film and documentary evidence of atrocities out of the theater and into the hands of human rights NGOs and, eventually, the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

Ideally, actions taken by international organizations such as the UN or the OSCE and their member states to increase and secure humanitarian space, to counteract impunity, and to elevate the status of humanitarian concerns relative to other issues would be integral parts of a functional humanitarian system. However, in settings where protection functions are readily equated with partiality and bias, or run the risk of putting political interests in jeopardy, the provision of material assistance is more expedient and less risky than protection. With few exceptions, protective measures in the form of political steps by governments or international organizations have been conspicuous by their absence in the Caucasus.

As a consequence, experience throughout the region testifies to the limitations under which humanitarian agencies labor when their efforts to provide protection are unsupported by meaningful measures to address conflict and humanitarian emergencies politically. When

operational capacities for providing protection are depleted by insecurity or other constrictions in humanitarian space or simply by the overwhelming scale of protection needs, assertive political measures by the wider international political community become indispensable.

SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS CAPACITIES

In small parts of the Caucasus, notably Tbilisi and Yerevan, infusions of financial and technical support from Western donors have helped a growing core of local NGOs to evolve into organizations capable of playing significant roles in responding to human need and strengthening civil society. As of early 1998, American-funded local NGO umbrella organizations were playing important capacity-supporting roles, imparting management and other skills to the growing NGO sector. However, nongovernmental organizing remains very much an urban pursuit of elites that does not yet extend far into society at large; there are few genuine grassroots organizations and rural NGOs. In Azerbaijan, some local NGOs have thrived as implementing partners in UN, ECHO, and USAID assistance initiatives, but NGO-friendly legislation and an easing of government suspicion have been slow in coming.

In the northern Caucasus, local NGOs largely have been overlooked by international donors and face an uphill battle in their efforts to be accepted, let alone embraced, within their own communities. This has left a serious deficit of potential implementing partners for international aid organizations in the event of renewed humanitarian crisis. Due to the dangers involved in mounting expatriate-centered responses to emerging crises, less vulnerable local organizations would be more advantageously placed to assist. However, few local NGOs in the north have received outside help to progress beyond the idea or discussion stage, and most struggle as ad hoc volunteer efforts mounted by a few dedicated individuals.

As noted in Chapter 2, many in the Caucasus harbor deep-seated cynicism and distrust toward those in authority, posing another challenge to the evolution of grassroots organizations and NGOs. Until very recently the leadership of local groups has tended to be in the hands of holdovers from Soviet power structures, members of the intelligentsia, former dissidents, or other national "elites." Young people have begun to grasp the idea of NGOs, however, and a number of excellent environmental, human rights, legal, and other organizations have emerged in the southern Caucasus.

It is not yet clear whether the Western NGO model is the best fit against the backdrop of rapidly changing political cultures. In many respects, newly-evolved local NGOs combine recently introduced Western notions of what an NGO ought to be with what is more familiar from the past. Mandates, organizational structures, priorities, inclusiveness, decisionmaking, and methods of work are often heavily conditioned by Soviet influences. In 1995, the nascent Georgian NGO "United Nations of Youth Net" (UNOY) subjected prospective volunteer members to a battery of psychological tests to determine their "fitness" for membership. Komsomol, Communist Party, and Pioneer influences still abound, but often these provide useful points of departure where other organizational forms are simply not known. Three years after its inception, UNOY has internalized democratic and inclusive ideals that are increasingly reflected in its structure, membership, and activities.

Some Western aid workers who have helped local NGOs through their formative stages have noted that the Western ideal of grassroots organizations and NGO independence may remain elusive in the region for many years. Some have seen benefits accrue from loose

linkages between formal governmental and informal NGO structures. Such contacts can serve as conduits for a two-way flow of information, ideas, and innovations.

HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND POLITICS

In the Caucasus, as elsewhere, the ideal of humanitarian action, which responds to human suffering because people are in need, has come under pressure from the infusion of extraneous political agendas. The degree to which humanitarian action is politicized may be greater in the Caucasus than elsewhere, for a number of reasons. First, intercession in the region's conflicts by the peace and security arms of the UN and the OSCE has been tempered or ruled out by Russian stewardship over the Caucasus and Russia's prominence in both organizations. UN and OSCE member states have tended to defer to Russian sovereignty and broader interests in the region to secure Russian cooperation on other foreign policy interests. As a result, armed conflicts have proceeded with relative impunity, and official peace processes in the Caucasus have tended to be lackluster: most of the region's conflicts have remained frozen and unresolved in states of prolonged volatility. The most important outcome is that protection needs of civilians affected by war have remained acute for many years. As mentioned earlier, there is mounting evidence that the lack of effective protection for civilians has fed into each of the conflicts, making them more intractable over time and the resumption of full-scale hostilities more likely.

Real or perceived Russian influence has also sometimes tempered the responses of UN humanitarian agencies. During the war in Chechnya, operational UN agencies disregarded the advice of their own staff and did not press for permission to work inside Chechnya, or even to fund the activity of NGOs where needs were greatest. UN activities were confined to dealing with the effects of the war on its periphery, with no UN personnel stationed on the ground in territorial Chechnya.

Politics also have influenced the selection of senior UN appointees in the region in ways that undermine the perceived independence of UN humanitarian activity. Personal integrity and international citizenship notwithstanding, the appointment of a Russian national to a top-level UN humanitarian post in Moscow sent unfortunate messages to Chechens and others about the claims to neutrality, nonpartisanship, and independence of UN humanitarian efforts in the northern Caucasus. The appointment of a Turkish national as UN representative in Baku inevitably sent similar messages to Yerevan and Stepanakert.

The politics of ethnicities in conflict sometimes have encroached upon the staff of aid agencies. It can be difficult to motivate local staff of one ethnic group to work on behalf of another when the two are sharply divided by conflict. Expatriate staff of the same agencies working in isolation on different sides of conflict, notably in Armenia and Azerbaijan, also have developed sympathies for the positions of their host authorities. At the programming level, ethnically fractured societies have been difficult venues for safeguarding the principle of proportionality. Patterns of need reflect violence that was inflicted on the basis of ethnicity such that one ethnic group receives more aid than another. This has resulted in perceived biases or unfairness in the way that international aid is apportioned. Meanwhile, populations in insurgent areas in the past have been deemed effectively off-limits for assistance by some regional and international political actors and donors, constricting, rather than expanding, humanitarian space.

FROZEN CONFLICTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR ACTION

The conflicts in Prigorodnyi Raion, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and, to a lesser extent South Ossetia, have been characterized by lengthy periods of stasis in which definitive peace settlements have been elusive, and many displaced persons, refugees, and other war-affected people have been maintained in limbo. The observation that these conflicts are “frozen” does not imply that they are in any way resolved for the people whose welfare is at stake because of them. The conflicts share a number of common features:

- Tense cease-fires and continuing, low-level, back-and-forth violence;
- Large displaced, refugee, and other war-affected populations, often living under conditions of severe deprivation and political manipulation;
- Relatively fresh and often deeply personal memories of full-scale war and ethnic cleansing;
- Hostile populations separated along ethnic lines with little or no vicarious or face-to-face contact with the ethnic other, and little knowledge about the conditions facing people on the other “side”;
- The infusion over time of various political agendas into the humanitarian response on different levels and from different quarters, including foreign and domestic governments, donors, aid agencies themselves, local staff, local authorities, and beneficiaries;
- Neglect of reconstruction, rehabilitation, and development needs;
- Replication of conditions under which criminality flourishes, posing threats to peace processes and undermining prospects for reconciliation;
- Lack of tangible progress in official peace processes and repatriation efforts.

In the case of Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh, combatants on all sides have been given an opportunity to rearm, reorganize, train, and prepare themselves for a resumption of hostilities. Meanwhile, lackluster official peace processes have resulted in little tangible progress to provide war-affected people in and around these two settings with a sense of hopefulness that their problems will be solved peacefully.

Contrary to expectations, the cessation of open warfare and the prevailing frozen state of these conflicts have not resulted in increased space, either for the protection of civilians or for peace building. The situation has been characterized by one aid worker as akin to providing aid under Cold War conditions. Aid responses frequently have mirrored ethnic divisions: that is, aid has been ghettoized such that separate programs prevail on opposite sides of conflict lines, leaving fewer possibilities for aid to serve as a constructive link between people across ethnic divides. Cease-fires and the intervention of peacekeeping or domestic police and paramilitary forces generally have not resulted in enhanced security for civilians who still reside in—or have returned to—contested or tense areas. Protection needs in Abkhazia’s Gali region and Prigorodnyi Raion are acute, but meaningful protective mechanisms, notably impartial and effective police forces, have been elusive.

Even more ominously, the experience of prolonged displacement has affected eventual returns, making them and the maintenance of IDPs as they wait for their return much more problematic for aid agencies. UNHCR in Georgia commissioned a field study in 1997 to explore the dynamics of displacement among those who had fled from Abkhazia. Although

Box 9 “Bounded Populations”—The Georgia/Abkhazia Case

Research conducted in 1997 among war-affected Abkhaz and Georgian populations examined displacement and war experience as seen through the eyes of people who continue to live through it. One-on-one interviews with Georgian IDPs and Abkhaz within Abkhazia, revealed several patterns, with clear implications for humanitarian action and peace building. The findings compel a serious reappraisal of aid programming, which maintains the status quo among war-affected populations. They also lend added urgency to contingency planning that anticipates the local-level consequences of official peace processes, especially the outcome of talks on repatriation of Georgian IDPs.

Conspicuous among the findings was the adamant refusal of most people to imagine living together in peace again with their former neighbors. Instead of allowing wounds to heal, the passage of time has resulted in “bounded” or isolated populations within which resentments against the ethnic “other” have become increasingly distilled and sharpened.¹⁰ Daily reminders of the war’s violence, destruction, and ensuing deprivation contribute to their self-identification as distinct, separate, and victimized groups. Within the confines of these groups, the constant telling and retelling of personal stories of war and of “ethnic cleansing” help to keep the wounds fresh: IDPs are becoming over time more—rather than less—vulnerable to manipulation and militancy.

Rather than being integrated into the host population, Georgian IDPs tend to be visibly separate. Many, especially those in collective centers, have limited contacts outside their own improvised post-war communities. Children whose families fled Abkhazia often attend special IDP schools. IDP economies have taken root within host communities that are struggling with economic hardship. Aid distributions from governmental and international sources often target beneficiaries solely on IDP status. Economic, social, and organizational structures thus serve to maintain the boundaries between IDPs and host populations. An activist and politically hard-line Abkhaz “Parliament in Exile” acts as the sociopolitical focal point for IDPs, keeping them mobilized, raising expectations about the imminence of their return home, and nurturing memories of the war.

There is another potentially dangerous identity gap between many IDPs and the host population. IDPs from Abkhazia are predominantly Mingrelian (an ethnic subgroup indigenous to Western Georgia). Issues which arise within and around the IDP community therefore, sometimes take on the political overtones of the Gamsakhurdia/Shevardnadze divide.

¹⁰ See Catherine Dale, *The Dynamics and Challenges of Ethnic Cleansing: The Georgia-Abkhazia Case*, in *Refugee Studies Quarterly* 16, No. 3, 1997.

the study dealt only with the Abkhaz/Georgia conflict, its findings also provoke thought on Prigorodnyi Raion and Nagorno-Karabakh (see Box 9). The near-complete separation of ethnic groups and the hostilities harbored among them have created conditions under which animosity has festered and, apparently, gotten worse since the cease-fire. The lingering experience of displacement, isolation, and hardship has yielded a sense of estrangement from the host population within Georgia. Competition between IDPs and hosts emerges from perceptions among hosts that IDP businesses have enjoyed undue advantages and have near monopolies over some aspects of trade and commerce, such as minibus services and some markets. Frustration and militancy among elements of the IDP population, meanwhile, have been increasingly dangerous factors that, in the view of many observers in the region, have contributed to a growth in "partisan" activity. Violence perpetrated by these groups has been getting progressively more bold and more bloody since 1995, to the point that it has threatened the continued presence of the CISPKF and undermined the political peace process.

The challenge facing aid agencies that provide assistance to IDPs in Georgia has been to find ways to assist which also help to break the isolation of IDPs from host communities and stem the growing resentments in these communities toward IDPs. In addition, since an increasingly militant IDP population ultimately means diminished prospects for safe and orderly return, options for counteracting misinformation and attempted manipulation of the IDP community are politically risky but essential. A restive IDP population, typified by frequent boisterous demonstrations in Tbilisi and on the Inguri Bridge to Abkhazia, has served as a resource for the self-proclaimed Abkhaz parliament-in-exile and the Georgian government, which helps to maintain political pressure on Abkhaz authorities. The IDP leadership and the Georgian government have manipulated IDP expectations about the imminence of their return home, helping to fuel openly hostile attitudes toward assistance that appears to be aimed at integrating IDPs into the population at large.

Some displaced persons for whom integration is simply not an option have been angered by the installation of new doors and windows in their temporary housing since this implies that they will not be going home for at least another winter. The picture has not been all bleak, however. Some agencies have identified IDP groups that have become fed up with being manipulated and are determined to improve their lot in place. Income generation activities with these groups show promising results.

The situation among IDPs in Azerbaijan, whose level of self-organization is much lower than that in Georgia, has been less volatile even though the conditions they face are often much worse than among Georgian IDPs. Numerous agencies in Azerbaijan have programs that seek to build a diverse skills base among the IDP population and help equip them for the conditions and rebuilding tasks they will face in the event of a return. Other programs promote social activities in order to help maintain community cohesion and alleviate psychosocial effects among IDPs. Still other efforts assist IDPs to become self-sufficient through small business startup loans and other support for local capacity.

Like their counterparts in Georgia, IDPs in Azerbaijan are used as pawns, but in different ways. As in Georgia, some IDPs appear to be housed in places and ways that are designed to be visible reminders of unfinished business. Azeri IDPs have not been kept on edge about returning as they have been in Georgia, and few would put much stock in the possibility of a return home in the short term. However, there is widespread but largely unspoken sentiment among humanitarian agencies that the conditions for IDPs are intentionally being kept

marginal by the government of Azerbaijan in order to ensure that international attention stays focused on the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and the occupied areas. Although the government misses few opportunities to publicize the very real plight of IDPs to the international community, its own record on substantive measures to improve conditions for the displaced is dubious at best.

In Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the northern Caucasus, situations call for more proactive and effective protection of IDP interests on humanitarian grounds. As politically difficult as it may be, this entails intervention with governments and other authorities whose policies and pronouncements incite IDP attitudes for the worse. Specifically, the delicate task of insulating IDP communities from cynical manipulation falls to agencies with protection functions, primarily UNHCR, in whose interest it is to help IDPs strengthen their capacities for safe and peaceful return. IDPs need better information than what they get from their own government and community leaderships about the prospects of return and the conditions they will find when they get there.

DONOR POLICIES

Many of the roots of conflict in the Caucasus stem from long-standing denials of security and justice, unfair and inadequate access to resources, impingement on human rights, historical perceptions of threat and victimization, fear of genocide and other demographic oblivion, and so on. It is difficult to imagine how denial of the right to receive humanitarian assistance and protection could lead proud people toward more moderate and tolerant attitudes, or away from chauvinistic nationalism. Yet, this has been the strategy followed by many donors in all of the conflicts of the Caucasus. Until early 1996, it was widely held among UN agencies in Georgia, with the exception of UNICEF, that there was a UN policy against the provision of assistance in Abkhazia.

Such was not the case. No such policy existed, but it was strongly implied, reinforced by the reality that the first systematic UN effort even to assess needs in Abkhazia did not occur until early 1998. The denial of proportionate assistance, or the provision of assistance motivated by something other than human need, has undoubtedly exacerbated preexisting notions of historical grievance and encouraged an “us-against-the-world” mentality among populations in insurgent areas. It seems a safe assumption that such strategies have diminished prospects for conflict resolution and eventual reconciliation.

Section 907 of the United States Freedom Support Act is an example of how extraneous political agendas have infused humanitarian responses. Designed to exert pressure on the government of Azerbaijan to ease its economic blockade on Armenia, Section 907 came about due to successful lobbying pressure on the Congress by Armenian diaspora organizations. Section 907 prohibits the provision or routing of official U.S. aid money to, or through, the government of Azerbaijan.¹¹ Although American assistance funds are provided through international NGOs, implementing partners are proscribed by the terms of Section 907 from dealing with the government of Azerbaijan. Government officials are not able to attend training or seminars and are barred from receiving equipment and technical support meant to

¹¹ The U.S. has consistently provided indirect support for humanitarian action inside Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and Azerbaijan through contributions to the ICRC.

strengthen indigenous capacity. In sharp contrast not lost on Azeris, Armenia receives U.S. official assistance at per capita levels second only to U.S. assistance to Israel. Such aid has helped to fuel a rapidly growing local NGO sector, promote democratization and adherence to human rights, and strengthen government capacities to coordinate aid, although appraisals of its effectiveness vary. However, some observers conclude that an embarrassment of riches has contributed to the disappointing performance of such assistance.

ECHO funding has played an important role throughout the region by filling major gaps left by decisions taken by the U.S. government and the UN to withhold or condition assistance in some areas, or simply not to be present at all. When the humanitarian agencies of the UN refused funding for potential operational partners working inside Chechnya during the war, ECHO provided financial backstopping for the front line agencies meeting urgent assistance needs at the height of the war. The work of a small number of agencies inside Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia has likewise benefited from ECHO's less politicized approach to humanitarian assistance in the region.

Donor approaches began to change in parts of the Caucasus in early 1996, with the realization that aid could be used as a carrot as well as a stick, and that coercive approaches were not bringing insurgent authorities into line with international wishes. Box 10 contains an illustration from South Ossetia and Georgian environs of how the reconstruction and development assistance offer was tied—successfully, by early accounts—to the promotion of constructive working relationships across the lines of conflict. Although ethical considerations rule out conditionality on life-saving humanitarian assistance, aid meant to meet needs that are not life-threatening has become an attractive incentive for cooperation. Investigations into the feasibility of using similar strategies commenced in Abkhazia in early 1998. The Russian government has been experimenting with the provision of economic incentives for peace in troubled areas of the northern Caucasus.

For their part, operational humanitarian agencies, which have depended heavily on U.S. government or UN funding, collectively have done little to challenge a flawed status quo and insulate their own commitments to independence and impartiality from donor pressures. In the competitive interagency politics of maintaining donor favor, there have been few rewards for such challenges. When one American NGO initiated modest activities on both sides of the Abkhaz/Georgian conflict in 1995, USAID as its primary donor made its displeasure known. However, as aid agency competencies grow in providing aid in ways that do not unduly legitimize de facto authorities or strengthen the positions of combatants, donor policies which make political distinctions between those in need will become less sustainable. Options for achieving this are discussed in the following chapter.

HUMANITARIAN, DIPLOMATIC, AND PEACEKEEPING SYNERGIES

In the highly politicized contexts for humanitarian action in the Caucasus, the challenge facing humanitarian actors and their political supporters is to elevate the status of humanitarian action relative to extraneous political agendas and, where possible, to assert the ideal of independent humanitarian action. The actual record of synergisms and complementarity between humanitarian, diplomatic, and peacekeeping actors in the Caucasus, however, is decidedly mixed.

On the positive side of the ledger, political arms of the OSCE and UN have interceded

Box 10 UNDP Rehabilitation of Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia

Earthquake and war damage compounded by years of neglect had undermined South Ossetia's water, health, educational, and transport infrastructure to the extent that living conditions were dismal and economic normalization impossible. Although a few humanitarian agencies ensured that most urgent needs were met, donors and UN agencies largely ruled out reconstruction and rehabilitation programs. Agencies feared that such assistance could lend impetus and legitimacy to the region's secessionist claims and jeopardize their own relations with the Georgian government. Many Ossetians felt that aid was being withheld as punishment.

By early 1997, UNDP and others recognized that these unmet needs were fueling tensions and hindering progress in the political peace process. UNDP, with consent from the Georgian government, responded with an infrastructure rehabilitation program that avoided acquiescing in the prevailing realpolitik while promoting intercommunal cooperation on concrete issues of mutual interest.

Based on consensus, all activities—from identification and planning through implementation—must be jointly agreed to by representatives of both parties to the conflict. Emphasizing transparency, flexibility, and its own political neutrality, UNDP provides a pool of \$2 million from which disbursements are made only with the agreement of all parties. On both sides of the conflict lines and across them, works include school, hospital, road, and bridge rehabilitation, repair of telecommunications links, technical assistance to agriculture, and housing reconstruction.

Project activities are supervised and overseen by a joint steering committee consisting of Georgians and Ossetians, and chaired by UNDP. The OSCE has observer/facilitator status on the committee, bringing to bear its long experience as mediator in the conflict. For each of the sectoral priorities identified, working groups of experts are designated by both sides, laying careful groundwork for the awarding of procurement contracts and work tenders so that potential disputes over perceptions of bias are avoided. A project secretariat within UNDP is staffed by ethnic Georgian and Ossetian technical experts who monitor implementation under the supervision of the UNDP Resident Representative.

After a full year in operation, results are promising. Authorities on both sides of the conflict are eager to see the program expanded or replicated. Vital repairs have been made on both sides with tangible and visible benefits for the population. The European Union has confirmed its intent to bolster the approach with an infusion of funding.

periodically with specific preventive and reactive measures to protect civilians. In late 1995, the OSCE Ambassador to Georgia took the proactive step of issuing a sternly worded demarche to Abkhaz authorities, warning against arbitrary collection of “duties” on the multimillion dollar hazelnut harvest in the Gali region. The situation threatened to result in extortion and armed clashes, possibly prompting new displacement of spontaneous returnees from Gali. The OSCE’s firm and principled stand had the desired effect and the harvest passed relatively quietly.

For its part, the UN’s initiative to form a Georgian/Abkhaz Coordinating Council with working groups designated to address security, repatriation, and economic and social issues was favorably received by both sides in late 1997. The Council’s establishment and the influence it wielded at high levels created a space for the UN’s humanitarian and resident coordinator for Georgia to facilitate a UN-sponsored assessment of priority rehabilitation needs in long-neglected Abkhazia.

The mission, informed by input from the Friends of the Secretary General,¹² the EU, and the OSCE, stood on several pillars. The political arm of the UN’s Georgia presence secured the high level consent of both sides necessary for the mission to proceed; UNOMIG played an advisory role and assisted with secure transport in unsafe areas; consultants and senior representatives of UN humanitarian, development, and specialist agencies conducted appraisals in various sectors, including agriculture, food security, transportation, mine action, education, health, housing, and others. The mission identified its role as part of larger international efforts to assist parties to the conflict to chart a course eventually leading to reconciliation through their cooperation on issues of mutual benefit.

Three years earlier, the OSCE mission in Georgia pursued good relations with aid agencies and urged them to take more interest in areas of South Ossetia where it patrolled. Acting on the trust it enjoyed in Tskhinvali, the mission served initially as “matchmaker” and intermediary between aid agencies and the relevant Tskhinvali authorities and later helped to smooth over difficulties as agencies commenced work. As mentioned previously, the OSCE Assistance Group in Grozny periodically intervened to good effect with Russian and Chechen authorities on issues of concern to the humanitarian community after the cease-fire.

These initiatives are examples of the benefits that can accrue when the potential for complementarity between aid, peacekeeping, and political actors is operationalized. In practice, however, these examples were exceptions to a more prevalent insularity between political, humanitarian, and peacekeeping constituencies in the Caucasus.

During the war in Chechnya, many humanitarians were incensed at the lack of intercession in the conflict by international organizations and member states that had pressed for restraint and adherence to humanitarian law in other conflict settings. The small and hamstrung OSCE mission, the international community’s one substantive gesture toward intercession, was widely resented among aid agencies for not doing more to hold combatants accountable and exercise restraint.

For their part, Western diplomats in Moscow deferred to Russian sovereignty and other foreign policy interests, limiting their involvement to sending military attaches to Chechnya for an occasional look. At the same time, the head of the OSCE mission was frustrated that aid agencies were not doing more to exercise what he saw as their political influence. He felt

¹² France, Germany, Russia, United Kingdom, and the United States.

that humanitarian actors were hiding behind claims of neutrality when they should have been reporting ongoing developments in the war to “their” embassies. While more concerted agency pressure might have been helpful, his suggestion also might have confirmed the widespread assumption among protagonists that aid agencies were spying on them.

Although there are encouraging exceptions, the record shows that the humanitarian imperative frequently has lost out to narrowly defined peacekeeping and observer mission mandates, as well as to the regional political interests of those states that can influence events in the area. At times, the lack of communication or understanding between the different constituencies has meant that humanitarian and peace-building efforts have been perceived as competing rather than complementary efforts by diplomatic actors pursuing official peace processes. In Abkhazia and Chechnya, humanitarian actors have often decried diplomatic initiatives in peace processes that have made humanitarian activity more difficult or dangerous. Risks have become especially acute when diplomatic arms of the UN in Abkhazia or the OSCE in Chechnya have become properly exercised on humanitarian issues but without first consulting with the humanitarian community.

The costs of a lack of collaboration remain most evident in the absence of contingency planning for a return of displaced Azeris. Humanitarian agencies of the UN in particular have not taken up the issue seriously with the High Level Planning Group (HLPG) of the OSCE’s Minsk process, nor has the HLPG sought out sufficient input from humanitarian actors.

In sum, real potential exists for more effective assistance and protection from enhanced collaboration with official peace processes and observer missions. Likewise, diplomatic actors involved in official peace processes and those processes themselves stand to gain from a better awareness of, and appreciation for, the benefits that can accrue to the process from independent and effective humanitarian action.

MAXIMIZING THE SPACE FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Lessons learned about operational strategies for maximizing humanitarian space were provided in Chapter 2 in the context of improving security for aid agencies and staff. In a broader sense, the dearth of political backstopping and aggressive advocacy on behalf of humanitarian action in the Caucasus puts a premium on activities by aid agencies for cultivating better understanding of their work, improving awareness of basic humanitarian values and principles among beneficiaries and combatants, and nurturing a sense of local ownership of aid efforts. Box 11 contains examples of the use of the mass media to convey such messages.

The current frenzy among regional and international powers over Caspian oil and pipeline routes has resulted in recent shifts in political and donor interests which have affected the humanitarian space available for meeting the needs of war-affected populations in the Caucasus, not always for the better. In Chechnya, as international agencies were forced farther away from where needs were greatest, Russian emergency teams and funding for reconstruction began to play a token but highly symbolic role in alleviating civilian distress in late 1997 and early 1998. This role reflected a convergence of interests among power brokers in Moscow and Grozny, who shared the common desire to stabilize Chechnya and secure conditions for a “northerly route” for Caspian oil through Daghestan and Chechnya to points west.

Russian federal assistance in Chechnya since the cease-fire has included emergency

reconstruction of villages destroyed by mudslides in the south of Chechnya, several emergency cleanup operations for minor ecological disasters, and a polio vaccination campaign for Chechen children. Substantial funds have been earmarked by Moscow as war reparations as part of the cease-fire agreement, but actual cash transfers have been subject to numerous delays and several have gone missing. Russians have been at extreme risk of kidnap and revenge attack in and around Chechnya. Despite the Russian government's newfound sense of responsibility for the welfare of Chechens, the viability of systematic post-war humanitarian and reconstruction assistance on the scale needed remained remote to the time of writing. The proliferation of armed criminals and uncontrolled factions continued to render Chechnya a virtual closed area for international involvement.

Also, as noted in Chapter 2, insecurity has also threatened humanitarian space in Western Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, coinciding with renewed donor interest in stepped-up humanitarian, reconstruction, and development assistance in these areas. Western donor governments with a stake in a Georgian oil pipeline route have begun to experiment effectively with the use of aid as a "carrot" to encourage stability and win concessions from insurgent authorities. Greater proactive humanitarian advocacy by the UN, specifically UNDHA/OCHA, led in 1997 to improved access and a better understanding within the aid community of needs in insurgent regions.

Humanitarian concerns have been voiced by UNHCR and UNDHA/OCHA in official peace talks between Abkhazia and Georgia, helping to heighten awareness among protagonists and other stakeholders of the human consequences of continued stasis and renewed conflict. However, these efforts have not yet produced improved security for people on the ground, specifically those residing in Gali region. International oil companies themselves have become more major (though relatively speaking, still modest) direct funders of assistance work, particularly in Azerbaijan.

Humanitarian space has been nonexistent in the occupied areas surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, precluding comprehensive needs assessment to evaluate reconstruction and resettlement requirements for an eventual return of Azerbaijan's 600,000 IDPs. The continued absence of serious contingency planning for what promises to be an extremely complex and expensive movement of population is rendered even more troubling by a continued lack of attention by the OSCE to humanitarian and security needs in areas of potential return. Although the OSCE's High Level Planning Group for Nagorno-Karabakh has maintained sporadic contact with UNHCR, serious planning has been impossible because levels of destruction and reconstruction requirements are not known. An attempt at needs assessment by a UN mission mounted out of Geneva failed at the last moment to gain the approval of the Azerbaijan government. Unless humanitarian diplomacy is aggressively pursued at the highest levels to secure permission for assessment missions, there is a danger that the aid community will be caught unprepared by sudden shifts in the peace process, which could lead to mass returns.

Box 11 The Creative Use of Media

Almost every home in the Caucasus has radio and television. Literacy rates approach 100 percent. Local newspapers and magazines proliferate and demand is huge. Quality, censorship, and private ownership vary widely, however. Insurgent areas typically maintain their own media outlets, as do Chechen factions and Georgian IDP groups. Mass media often serves to mobilize popular support for militancy and chauvinistic nationalism. However, numerous initiatives have used the media to promote the humanitarian ethos or vicarious contact between otherwise-isolated groups, thereby expanding the space for humanitarian action and peacebuilding.¹³

- Helsinki Citizens' Assembly launched the Caucasus Media Support Project (CMSP) in 1997 to counteract information blockades and advance understanding of media ethics, the role of media, and balanced reporting of conflicts. An organization for journalists, the CMSP promoted information exchanges between journalists across conflict lines through workshops and electronic networks. A conference on conflict coverage enabled Azeri journalists to visit Armenia for the first time since 1992 to compare notes with Armenian counterparts and interview the Armenian prime minister. Similar initiatives have brought together Georgian and South Ossetian journalists.
- United Nations Volunteers and UNICEF publish an interactive magazine for war affected children throughout Georgia, including the insurgent areas. The content fills gaps in education in an entertaining way, promoting healthy and peaceful values. A gratis circulation of 10,000 copies elicits a regular stream of return mail from youngsters in all areas of the country. Two editions—one Russian and one Georgian—are produced due to the prevailing language sensitivities, but content is identical in each.
- With direction from an American freelancer, Ossetian and Ingush journalists collaborated on the 1997 TV documentary, *Checkpoints of the Mind*. Simultaneous broadcast in Ingushetia and North Ossetia was a condition from the outset, to help break down mutual distrust by putting a human face on the Prigorodnyi conflict. Interviews depict an Ingush returnee expressing fears over prevailing insecurity; an Ingush elder grieving the ethnic bisection of his family; a happily intermarried couple—he Ossetian, she Ingush; a businessman hoping that commerce could prevail over ethnic division; and Ossetian Muslims hoping that religion could unite, rather than divide. A similar program is being made by Georgian and Ossetian journalists.
- Throughout the Caucasus, the ICRC promotes international humanitarian law (IHL) among both civilians and combatants in imaginative ways. On the desks of senior politicians and military officers are often attractive calendars featuring local artwork. Accompanying texts recount vignettes from familiar folk tales or history, and then draw parallels between the local story and a principle of IHL.

¹³ The International Center for Humanitarian Reporting in Geneva is a good source of information and ideas for creative use of the media on conflict and humanitarian issues. Contact by e-mail at: info.ichr@itu.ch or view the ICHR website at: <http://www.ichr.org>.

CHAPTER 4

CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE: INTERACTIONS IN PRACTICE

The previous chapter identified humanitarian implications for donors and policymakers of “frozen” conflicts in the Caucasus and examined the lessons learned from the region about interactions between humanitarian, political, diplomatic, and peacekeeping actors. This chapter sharpens the focus on such interactions at the programming and operational level. Experience in the region has shown that there is potential within the scope of aid agency activity for supporting or undermining official and unofficial peace processes.

At the same time, recent memories of war and ethnic cleansing and persistent hostile attitudes among divided populations highlight the importance of an approach to humanitarian action which anticipates and plans for the local level effects of negotiated agreements.¹⁴ While small-scale returns of IDPs and refugees are already underway, with mixed results in Prigorodnyi Raion and South Ossetia, contingency planning for organized returns to Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and areas around Karabakh is in its infancy.

Returns will mean that populations with a recent history of hostility again come into close contact and begin to share the same resources, infrastructure, and neighborhoods. Reliable protective mechanisms for ensuring security of both residents and returnees alike are likely to be elusive, especially if international forces are not given meaningful roles in helping to allay deep-seated fears and to police return areas. The potential for renewed outbreaks of localized, intercommunal violence is high. Returns may also spark resumption of suspended blood feuds and revenge attacks that, based on past experience, are difficult to contain. Should security conditions improve in Chechnya, the resources introduced by post-war reconstruction efforts can be anticipated to evoke competition between groups harboring animosities toward one another.

Aid agencies throughout the Caucasus need to nurture an acute sensitivity to local conditions to avoid making tensions worse and unwittingly providing flashpoints for the resumption of hostilities. As this guide goes to press, the continued displacement of large numbers of Azeri IDPs and the lack of progress in facilitating their return home threatens to become an aid-incited flashpoint. Azeris undoubtedly will take exception to seeing US-funded American and Armenian NGOs gear up for what portends to be significant reconstruction and rehabilitation activity—implemented by Armenian local staff—inside Nagorno-Karabakh.

LIMITS TO LOCAL TRADITIONS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Indigenous capacity for conflict resolution at the local level in the Caucasus has been overlaid by 70 years of the Soviet experience, which has undermined the memory and legitimacy of old ways that used to work. Although cultural traditions for settling disputes exist throughout the region, these evolved to address disagreements primarily among the relatively closed and controlled circles of families rather than complex all-out wars and ethnic

¹⁴ See Dale, *The Dynamics and Challenges*.

cleansing among groups numbering in the hundreds of thousands.

Second-track conflict resolution and peacebuilding activity mounted by international actors is a growth industry that receives mixed reviews in the region. Numerous creative initiatives exist, and some of them are supported by aid agencies. Generally, these projects have not been held up to the same standards of accountability as humanitarian programming. No rigorous evaluations of their efficacy have been conducted and little is known about the helpful or harmful results these initiatives have achieved. There is a growing sense in the southern Caucasus that conflicts are being used as laboratories where the latest theories can be tested by conflict resolution academics and practitioners from the West. Yet authorities are reluctant to refuse to participate in such initiatives, for refusal would leave them open to accusations of not being interested in peace.

AVOIDING NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS

During the war in Chechnya access to particular towns or villages sometimes implied to the combatants that aid agencies were aligned with one faction or another. As a result, these locations and the aid agencies that served them became targets. When clinics and hospitals were being repaired and staffed by medical relief agencies, aid workers were sometimes accused by Russian authorities and military officers of “aiding the enemy” by providing medical treatment or supplies to wounded Chechen fighters, sometimes under duress and sometimes not. Some accusations led to obstruction, harassment, and even targeting humanitarian efforts.

Weighed against the optics of the situation, the humanitarian imperative could not have been a strong or convincing argument in an environment where notions of independent, neutral, and nonpartisan humanitarian action were little understood by the combatants. The Russian authorities were right: if a humanitarian agency gave a fighter medical attention he was likely to resume fighting and sustain the war effort. But the aid agencies were also right: if they refused to treat the fighter, he might die. Not assisting would be inhumane. Moreover, if the agency evoked an attack on itself from vengeful comrades of the deceased fighter (a likely scenario), they would have been unable to assist the bulk of their caseload—civilians. Who was most right? How could this dilemma have been approached?

Discussions on the dilemmas encountered in mounting humanitarian responses to conflict often end up sounding moralistic. They need not, provided that actual experience provides the basis for discussion. Based on its learning from aid agencies and aid workers over the past several years, the Local Capacities for Peace Project has taken an inductive approach. Reviewing the experiences of aid agencies in conflicts around the world, including the Caucasus, the LCPP has identified ways that aid can inadvertently increase tensions and exacerbate or feed conflict, even when the aid itself is entirely successful on its own terms. But the LCPP has also found that there are decisionmaking options within an aid agency’s power to avoid some of the major negative impacts, even in very complex conflicts. The decision is seldom one of assisting or not assisting, but of finding creative options for proceeding wisely.

The LCPP’s “Framework for Considering the Impact of Aid on Conflict” (Appendix III) helps to organize systematically an aid agency’s knowledge of the context in ways that anticipate harmful and helpful interactions between aid and conflict and that suggest programming options for avoiding or maximizing these interactions. In the Caucasus, many

agencies have observed that aid that feeds into intercommunal tensions sometimes also antagonizes local groups or populations. As such, avoiding the harmful effects of aid can also help to reduce risk and even enhance the security of aid operations and personnel.

Based upon the experiences gathered by the LCPP, two general patterns of negative impacts have emerged: those resulting from resource transfers and those resulting from the messages sent by the way that resources are delivered. The categories are organic and interrelated, rather than mutually exclusive. Negative impacts are summarized below, accompanied by brief illustrations from the Caucasus.¹⁵

RESOURCE TRANSFERS

Direct support of conflict occurs when the assets of an aid agency or the aid itself is stolen or looted and used by warring parties (and criminals) for their own purposes.

Aid assets were “harvested” in different ways in Chechnya. Ransoms paid by humanitarian agencies for the release of kidnapped staff put money directly into the pockets of people whose criminality was sustaining instability in Chechnya. Robbery and thefts of large sums of cash and other assets from the relatively resource-rich “soft targets” of aid agencies not only helped to finance fighters and criminals but also put agency staff at risk. The security situation in Chechnya was such that being targeted for crime was virtually impossible to avoid. However, common-sense solutions helped to minimize both the damage and the likelihood of robbery, such as engaging fewer cash transactions, keeping cash-on-hand to a minimum, ensuring that cash transfers were irregular and known to the fewest possible people, having sound security safeguards and procedures in place, and ensuring that staff abided by them.

Indirect support of conflict through resource transfers can take forms such as the following:

1. *When external aid takes care of civilian needs, it frees up internal resources for use by warring factions*

Human Rights Watch concluded in 1995 that at a macro level the monthly costs to Russia of prosecuting the war in Chechnya exceeded payments being deposited into Russian coffers by the International Monetary Fund. Similar connections could be drawn between official U.S. assistance to Armenia and that country’s support of military action in Nagorno-Karabakh during the war. The international community—prodded, when necessary, by humanitarian agencies—needs to understand and address such connections.

¹⁵ The negative impacts cited are excerpted from Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: Supporting Local Capacities for Peace Through Aid* (Cambridge, Mass.: CDA Inc., 1996). For a more extended discussion, see Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peaces, Not War* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, forthcoming 1998).

-
2. *By controlling the passage of aid goods, warring factions are able to manipulate civilian populations.*

Events in the first few months of the war in Chechnya suggested that Russia manipulated humanitarian assistance to solidify support among pro-Moscow Chechens and to entice displaced civilians from southern Chechnya into frontier regions more firmly under Russian control. Over the objections of some humanitarian agencies active inside Chechnya at the time, Russia encouraged aid deliveries from the north and west, although the most practical route for aid shipments to the stricken south of Chechnya was through Daghestan, which had a significant pro-separatist minority on its Western border. Shortly after the war began, aid shipments moving in this direction were seriously obstructed both in Moscow and at the Daghestan/Chechnya border. In addition to cultivating deprivation among those who had fled to the south, the strategy put more aid into the hands of those who were less likely to support Chechen separatism. Pro-Moscow Chechens on the relatively unscathed northern plains also benefited.

3. *External aid can distort economies, making return to a peace-time economy more difficult and less likely.*

Even before implementing programs, an aid agency begins to affect its economic surroundings by hiring local staff, procuring goods and services, renting offices and housing, luring away skilled workers from civilian activities, paying wages, and so on. When programming begins, the introduction of aid goods can decrease both the demand for and the value of local goods. To some extent, these impacts are inevitable and may not have any specific connection with a wartime economy.

One issue that arises frequently in the Caucasus, however, is the dependency that aid agencies may inadvertently create, undermining sustainable self-help alternatives. Numerous income-generation projects among IDP populations equip beneficiaries with the tools, equipment, and raw material necessary to produce various items such as food staples or woolen socks. Some goods have markets only among expatriates, predominantly from the aid community itself. Other projects, however, have the added value of encouraging the production of goods for purchase by aid agencies for eventual distribution to vulnerable groups and decreasing the supply that must be brought in from abroad.

Aid workers see a net positive effect on local economies resulting from the inflow of aid dollars, arguing that the resulting employment and business activity is a stabilizing factor in economies that otherwise offer dismal prospects. Others are concerned that the “aid economy” is inherently artificial, short-term, and disruptive. The effects of the aid presence on local economies with the Caucasus deserve more detailed analysis.

Box 12 Assisting Across Ethnic Divides—The Case of Language in Abkhazia

Language sensitivities, a focal point in Abkhaz-Georgian tensions since long before the war, have become a political football and recurring flashpoint in the post-cease-fire period. Road signs and advertisements in Abkhazia have had Georgian writing defaced or blotted out. Abkhaz authorities banned the use of Georgian in Abkhazia's schools in 1994.

Language dilemmas epitomize the intersection of politics and humanitarian action. They serve as examples of how aid can inadvertently exacerbate tensions in highly-charged settings, and they provoke reflection on how these harmful effects can be avoided. Among Abkhaz and Georgians, language is a tangible symbol of distinct ethnic identity. Both sides tend to frame the issue in zero-sum terms of cultural imperialism. Russian is an oft-cited compromise, but is accepted only grudgingly by Georgians as the nominal *lingua franca* of the region. Knowledge of Russian has diminished among Georgians since independence, especially among the young. To Abkhaz, Georgian has long symbolized an encroachment on their cultural identity and is closely associated with fears of assimilation. Abkhaz insistence on the use of Abkhaz or Russian is seen by Georgians as a dismissal of Georgian and often evokes resentful memories of the titular status and periodic promotion of Abkhaz culture under the Soviet system.

In the fall of 1995, emotions among Georgians, especially among IDPs, were peaking with the anniversary of their expulsion from Abkhazia. UNICEF and United Nations volunteers had distributed blackboards and schoolkits to selected schools in quiet areas of the Gali region, so that they could reopen for the first time since the war. The idea was that the children of some spontaneous returnees would no longer have to cross minefields on the long walk to school in Zugdidi region.

Authorities on both sides manipulated the school openings for their own purposes. For Georgians, open schools were symbolic of a permanent return, a view which IDP leaders ensured was highly publicized. Such unilateral actions were perceived as a threat by the Abkhaz. UNOMIG also played a role by encouraging schools to open in areas of Gali that were less secure—with the rationale that the permanent return of families would enhance stability.

To demonstrate that Sukhumi's will held sway in Gali, it decreed that schools could open but would not be allowed to teach in Georgian. IDP leaders became confrontational. Defiant threats and ominous warnings were issued by both sides. As tensions increased, some schools received bomb threats. Cadres of armed Georgians assembled around some schools. A face-saving outcome was reached only when Sukhumi decreed that Mingrelian, the dialect of Georgian spoken by most of the returnees, would be acceptable.

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

Two years later, language continued to pose dilemmas for humanitarian actors in the Gali district. The ICRC planned an Abkhazia-wide distribution of booklets for children explaining the basics of humanitarian law, but unknown reactions to the language issue forced a postponement in Gali. UNHCR wanted to supply penmanship books in Abkhazia but held off because some pages appeared in a format useful only for practice of the Georgian alphabet. UNV faced a similar dilemma in the distribution of a children's magazine. Until late 1997, a Russian-language edition of the magazine was distributed in the Gali region without difficulty, but returnees had come to resent not receiving the Georgian issue.

In a brainstorming session, the three agencies analyzed the situation and considered possible courses of action:

- Clarify the facts. Determine the sources of language tensions at a local level. If the issue is being manipulated, does this emerge locally or from elsewhere?
- Encourage a common approach among agencies experiencing similar difficulties, emphasizing a focus on local needs in each school setting. Local needs should be defined in consultation with local village administrators, school directors, and communities.
- Highlight the humanitarian nature of the assistance rendered—with the community and with authorities.
- Adopt a strategy of flexibility within clearly defined limits. Clarify and publicize the financial, logistics, and human costs and other consequences of pandering to language sensitivities. Given agency resources, added expense will mean that fewer people benefit.
- Emphasize transparency in decisionmaking at every step, ensuring that authorities and communities understand why decisions are being made.
- Investigate whether there are local NGOs or community groups who could support or advise on decisions.
- Broaden the base of community support for programming where language issues are contentious. If possible, inculcate a sense of local ownership over the programming and involve authorities and communities in the decisionmaking process.
- Give extra care to the timing of distributions or activities where language or other sensitivities can be anticipated to emerge as a flashpoint.
- Where possible, emphasize shared cultural traditions in the content of publications, even if they are published and distributed in different languages.

-
4. *In an environment of scarce resources, the introduction of external resources can feed into and reinforce suspicion, enmity, and competition for wealth and power. Aid can serve as another source of power over which groups compete for control.*

There is significant potential for aid to become a flashpoint in intercommunal tensions in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Javakheti, Prigorodnyi Raion, and Chechnya. It is unclear whether Azeri returnees will ever again live close to Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh area. However, given recent increased donor interest in reconstruction and rehabilitation work in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the danger is imminent in these two locales. A promising rehabilitation project in South Ossetia appears to have turned the danger around so that it avoids making tensions worse, while at the same time promoting constructive interactions across conflict lines on concrete, mutual interest issues (see Box 10). This experience may be instructive for future activities in the region.

In Prigorodnyi Raion, a medical relief agency had to consider how it could provide medical support for a returning Ingush population. Its fear that providing assistance only for returnees would provoke the resident Ossetians was confirmed by complaints from Ossetian authorities, who objected to aid they perceived to be biased in favor of ethnic Ingush. Examining its options, the agency considered how to provide medical support that would be “nonethnic”—that is, would benefit neither Ingush nor Ossetians but patients. It decided to look into locations for medical facilities, which could serve both ethnic groups, and planned ways to make clinics as conducive as possible to worry-free interactions across ethnic lines. It also considered staffing options, given the reality that some Ingush were known to be uncomfortable receiving treatment from Ossetian doctors and nurses. It decided that a mixed staff comprised of both Ingush and Ossetians was possible and that constructive attitudes between staff could be encouraged by providing appropriate training and encouragement.

In the event of an organized return of IDPs to Abkhazia, aid-centered tensions can be expected as reconstruction of homes and infrastructure begins. Due to the way that war and displacement in Abkhazia were played out, assessments of need for reconstruction assistance—based solely on objective criteria—will often identify beneficiary groups which effectively mirror ethnic and other divisions. In the rush to get people resettled, returnee homes, predominantly Georgian, will receive first claim on assistance from aid agencies.

From district to district and village to village, war damage often reflected the ethnic origins of the homeowner or the ethnic composition of the neighborhood. Care will need to be given to avoid perceptions among Abkhaz and smaller minorities that aid is biased in favor of the Georgian ethnicity, thus reinforcing preexisting resentments. Housing presently or formerly occupied by Abkhaz and others, an unknown quantity of which has been occupied by squatters, is unlikely to be a priority for aid agencies since most of it is already habitable. Throughout the Caucasus, similar potential pitfalls may be faced when assisting settlements of ethnic minorities such as Russians and others who may be objectively assessed as particularly vulnerable, due to the lack of family support networks enjoyed by many among the majority populations.

Considering alternative strategies of targeting aid can help to anticipate problems. Targeting on the basis of community or collective needs (e.g., schools, clinics, bakeries, and other infrastructure) can avoid feeding into tensions emerging from competition over resources or perceptions of bias, and is more likely to serve constructive bridge-building functions. Targeting on the basis of status (e.g., IDP, refugee, or returnee) can provoke tensions if groups of a different status are excluded from needed assistance. Strategies for increasing transparency, encouraging self-selection of beneficiaries by communities, inculcating a sense of community ownership over the allocation of aid resources, and bringing communities into the decisionmaking process have all, in specific cases, proved to be options for counteracting competitiveness or perceptions of unfairness.

Aid distribution among IDPs and refugees in the Caucasus is a frequent source of resentment among host populations toward IDP communities and even within IDP communities themselves. Agency experience provides examples of both pitfalls and solutions:

- In 1995, an aid agency was doing extensive shelter rehabilitation on IDP housing near Zugdidi, in Western Georgia. The agency had a reputation among IDPs for doing good work, and its services were much in demand. Local procurement and manufacture of doors, window frames, and other items had resulted in several thriving small businesses that kept dozens of IDPs gainfully employed. At times, however, problems arose to which the agency was not well-attuned. Engineers would make unannounced site visits to prospective project sites. Work was approved and scheduled for dwellings only if people happened to be home on the day of the site visit, which were on-off affairs that continued only until the budget for a building or a village had been expended. The outcome was predictable: in one four-dwelling rowhouse, dwellings one and three were rehabilitated, but two and four were not. On the day of the work, the male head of household in dwelling four—who happened also to be an armed partisan making regular sojourns into Abkhazia—objected to his home being left untouched. He became violent not only with his neighbors but also with the aid agency's work crew.
- In Azerbaijan, a food distribution in an IDP camp led to aid workers being attacked by locals from a nearby village. They resented being left out of distributions, feeling as in-need as the IDPs.
- An NGO had repaired a water pipe that led through a village to a former youth camp used as IDP housing. Relations between the IDPs and the village were poor because of partisan activity launched from the camp, resulting in violent reprisals in the area. The villagers had jury-rigged an outlet on the pipe to feed a fish pond. When repairs were complete the system was flushed with disinfectant. All the fish were killed, depriving the village of an important part of its food supply. The villagers blamed the IDPs and relations between them became even more rancorous.
- In Armenia, an aid agency had received funding to rehabilitate housing for refugees from Azerbaijan and work commenced. Trouble arose at one work site when a group of neighbors from across the road, whose homes were destroyed several years before in an earthquake, protested against being excluded from assistance. The agency sought permission from its donor to provide assistance on

the basis of need—in this case, homelessness—rather than on refugee status. Not all agencies have been as fortunate since inflexible donor constraints can preselect beneficiaries, creating tensions where there were none before.

IMPLICIT ETHICAL MESSAGES

Although the explicit message of aid is one of compassion and solidarity, the way that assistance is rendered can convey messages which feed into conflict. The LCPP has observed a number of ways that this can happen. Some of them include:

1. *Acceptance of the terms of war. Aid can be provided in ways that appear to accept the terms on which war is fought.*

A frequent example cited from conflict settings the world over is in the employment of armed guards. Protecting aid operations with armed guards can send the message that it is proper that arms determine who has control over resources. In Chechnya, aid agencies were aware of this argument but felt that the message sent by using guards was almost irrelevant, dwarfed as it was by the extreme violence surrounding them. Not employing armed guards would either fail to make them more secure or would actually put them at greater risk. However, it is not simply an “either/or” question.

If an agency opts to use armed guards, it has at least some control over how it is guarded. The UN office in Tbilisi was under armed guard for several years before lawlessness in the capital was brought under control. The office was frequently visited by the public, political figures, and diplomats. Until late 1995, the guards, supplied by the Georgian interior ministry, wore scruffy leather jackets and otherwise had no tell-tale signs that they were any different from thugs. Perched menacingly at entrances and in dark corridors, the guards were usually unshaven, often unkempt, always sullen, and handled their rusty Kalashnikovs with frightening carelessness. In the view of civilians seeking UN assistance, protection, or advice, a few hundred dollars spent on razors and minimally presentable uniforms greatly improved the UN’s approachability—and perhaps also its image as a legitimate, respectable presence.

Partisan humanitarian assistance that serves extraneous agendas, or the “ghettoization” of aid along ethnic lines, reinforces the notion that ethnic and other divisions between people are legitimate ones under which everything else, including human needs, can be subsumed. A Russian aid operation in Grozny in the first few months of the war was launched for the benefit of the Russian population. Chechens were not actively turned away but neither were they actively helped, and word quickly spread that the agency was there to help Russians only. Other local organizations took a different approach, making no ethnic distinctions among those in need. Similar examples exist from Armenian diaspora aid to victims of conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, where little if any assistance from that quarter reached Azeris. The rapid evolution in local NGOs in some parts of the Caucasus may mean that they will eventually play active roles

in reconstruction and resettlement activity in the event of stepped-up IDP returns in Georgia, and perhaps in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. Donors may be able to influence the activities of local NGOs to encourage or insist upon a commitment to nonpartisanship.

One concern elicited by these examples is the constrictions of humanitarian space that can result from aid being politicized in this fashion. Suggestions of how this has occurred at a more macro level were explored in the previous chapter. However, at operational levels assistance that is partisan is also apt to provoke perceptions of unfairness and feed into preexisting suspicions and resentments. Aid that is nonpartisan reinforces humanitarian action as a good in its own right and undermines the notion that ethnic and other divisions are legitimate, even when people are in need.

2. *By the way aid is delivered, agencies may confer legitimacy on the leaders of warring parties, thus reinforcing their power and standing.*

This may be the other side of the moral coin from donors seeking to impress the leaders of warring parties with their “wrongs” by withholding or conditioning aid. A common aid dilemma in the Caucasus has been the risk of seeming to endorse the aims of combatants, especially de facto authorities in the insurgent regions, (e.g., Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh) by dealing with them in the normal course of aid operations. Conversely, as demonstrated by the example of Chechnya at the beginning of this chapter, one set of authorities can interpret aid agency dealings with the “other” side as an imprimatur on the aims and actions of the “enemy.” The problem has become less of an issue as authorities have gained a better understanding of the intentions of aid agencies, a result of persistent effort by the agencies themselves. In the recent past, however, de facto authorities and combatants often failed to distinguish humanitarian actors from political ones and assumed complicity between them. As such, in the absence of visits by diplomats or other overtly political actors, de facto authorities customarily used meetings with humanitarian actors to air political grievances and to condemn the positions of international political organizations. Token humanitarian activity by UNOMIG in Abkhazia and the OSCE missions in South Ossetia and Chechnya may have muddied understandings of the division of labor between political and humanitarian actors.

As a matter of practicality and of security, de facto authorities should be familiar with the mandates, aims, and methods of humanitarian agencies to increase or maintain humanitarian space. Constructive relations on humanitarian matters help to avoid bureaucratic obstructionism, reduce suspicion, enhance security, and enlist cooperation. In addition, they may provide opportunities for aid agencies to inculcate an awareness of the human consequences of conflict and the notion that humanitarian action strives toward nonpolitical aims—providing assistance to those in need—independent of extraneous agendas. By involving de facto authorities on humanitarian issues, opportunities may arise to promote a sense of responsibility among them for the welfare of civilian populations in their

constituencies. To this end, some agencies may have better success than others in making this argument. As noted in the previous chapter, donor policy can and often has undercut claims to independence by some agencies in the Caucasus by imposing constraints that have proscribed or heavily conditioned assistance to people in insurgent regions. As such, the baggage that a newly active agency carries with it upon arrival may make it more difficult to project an image of independence and evoke the humanitarian imperative.

Past experience offers strategies for dealing constructively with de facto authorities and combatants without conferring undue legitimacy upon them:

- Nurturing a collaborative relationship with authorities on humanitarian matters that encourages them to cooperate rather than control. The way that an agency presents itself is of prime importance to this approach. A disadvantage is its dependence on personal relationships;
- Consistent transparency to undercut suspicion of ulterior motives or complicity with political actors;
- Making a practice of dealing with the lowest possible level of authority necessary for getting the job done;
- Strenuous efforts to unlink the humanitarian from the political by pressing the humanitarian imperative and stressing the independence and nonpolitical goals of humanitarian action.

3. Aid may undermine values important for peacetime.

How aid agencies and their staffs interact with local cultures sends messages about their values. Local populations, beneficiaries, and local staff may look to these values as benchmarks in the often confused and sometimes chaotic environments of the Caucasus. In the post-Soviet context, locals can find exposure to the organizational cultures of international agencies to be a new experience. Among those who are accustomed to rigidly hierarchical and often authoritarian structures, positive interactions with aid agencies, which place a high value on their relations with their local staff or with the public, can leave lasting impressions in their wakes about the utility of professionalism, cooperation, equality, the value of human life, and the humanitarian ethos. Or, they can leave other impressions:

- A local employee of an aid agency in Chechnya was killed when the vehicle he was in struck an antitank mine. The agency was under no obligation to do anything because contracts for local hires customarily had no stipulations for death or disability benefits. However, the agency valued the loyalty of its local staff and sincerely felt for the family of the victim. Expatriates and locals together ensured that the family was provided for.
- An expatriate aid worker with a prominent agency had assistance responsibilities among an IDP population in the Caucasus. He believed

that the locals where he worked tended to be lazy and irresponsible. He regularly used his physical size to intimidate people and on one occasion beat a village administrator who questioned the way that a distribution was being conducted.

- After scaling back its programs, a large aid agency in the Caucasus was left with many expensive vehicles and drivers in its headquarters location. For several months the vehicles were used for ferrying local and expatriate staff between their homes and office at a time when public transportation was readily available and no special security threats existed. Staff paid for this service, but the population did not know this. It was not uncommon to see a half-dozen expensive aid agency vehicles parked outside the more popular bars and eateries at the end of the day. The message, accurate or not, was one of impunity: that it was acceptable for scarce aid resources to be used frivolously and wastefully.

4. *The behaviors of aid agencies can reinforce animosity and demonization of the “other.”*

The separation of hostile populations resulting from frozen conflicts has often been mirrored by the isolated responses of agencies on either side of the conflict lines. A “branch-plant” syndrome sometimes has taken root: agencies tend to develop sympathies for the prevailing understanding of conflict where they work. Promotional material or other documentation describing the work of an agency can reflect biases when it condemns the actions of one side over another. More generally, the attitudes and conversations of expatriate staff may reinforce one-sided perceptions of conflict or stereotyped views of the “other” among local staff.

Although the trend has also been in evidence in Tbilisi and Sukhumi, it is most evident among aid agencies in Armenia and Azerbaijan, which often have surprisingly little contact with their offices in the neighboring country. One agency has successfully sought to undermine this tendency by bringing together staff from throughout the southern Caucasus at regional meetings. Interactions and exchanges of attitudes between local staff across ethnic divides is passively encouraged by providing space for them to focus on pragmatic, “neutral” issues relating to programming and operations in each of the three countries. The point is simply to promote normalcy; a conflict resolution agenda is not pursued at these meetings.

Another example of how the tendency toward a branch-plant mentality can be undermined comes from a small agency with offices in Tbilisi and Sukhumi. Local staff were sometimes heard grumbling among themselves about unfair amounts of assistance being provided to the Abkhaz or the Georgians. Expatriate staff took pains to be transparent with local staff—many of whom had been directly affected by the war and ethnic cleansing—by explaining the activities of the agency on each side of the conflict. However, they had no real way of knowing how the staff really felt toward the “others.” Twice each month the two drivers for the agency, one an Abkhaz from Sukhumi and the other a Georgian from Tbilisi, would meet on the demarcation line at the bridge over the Inguri River

to trade agency documents and supplies. Several months after the ritual began, expatriate staff learned that the two had quietly made a practice of exchanging small gifts at each meeting—typically, a pail of Abkhaz mandarins for a bottle of Georgian wine. Realizing that it would be a mistake to trumpet or read too much into these gestures, the expatriates nevertheless quietly thanked the drivers for setting an example.

SUPPORTING LOCAL CAPACITIES FOR PEACE THROUGH AID

Most humanitarian agencies are rightfully concerned about safeguarding the integrity of their humanitarian mandates and identities by avoiding activities which could be construed as overtly political. In the highly politicized aid environments of the Caucasus, linking humanitarian assistance to reconciliation or peacebuilding may risk compromising that integrity and thereby constricting humanitarian space. However, experience there and elsewhere has shown that by the way assistance is provided people can be given space, voice, and incentive to disengage from conflict without an aid agency moving beyond its mandate or being seen to be engaging in political activity.¹⁶ Such initiatives may be particularly valuable in the entrenched situations of frozen conflict which have prevailed in the Caucasus. Where few other possibilities exist for face-to-face or vicarious interactions of people from across ethnically-defined conflict lines, aid may provide the only opportunities for such interaction. Likewise, aid may have roles to play in supporting interactions between IDPs or refugees and host populations, helping to break the isolation of each from the other.

The LCPP's "Framework for Considering the Impact of Aid on Conflict" (Appendix III) suggests ways that programming can be adapted to local contexts so that it supports, rather than undermines, the connections between people in conflict settings. These connections may not be readily apparent: as a function of the settings where they work, aid workers tend to be more adept at identifying what is wrong and destructive than what is right and constructive. Connections can take many forms. Dependence on common infrastructure, markets, or sources of information may serve to unite people, or the common experience of war may serve to move them beyond what divides them.

An aid agency wanted to provide surgical and psychological rehabilitation for women who had been raped and mutilated during the war in Abkhazia. Initially, it intended to assist only women on one side of the conflict, even though both sides had been terribly abused. After thinking through the possibilities and making careful queries among social workers on both sides, the agency concluded that a joint program was both possible and desirable. Interaction with the "other" was seen by local social workers as an element in overcoming the trauma of the war. Having given their informed consent, women from both sides of the conflict were brought to a safe, neutral location for treatment. The agency was careful not to force anyone together, but ensured that the environment encouraged constructive interaction if the women themselves chose to reach out. Some of the women were uncomfortable at first with the proximity of the "others." By the end of the treatment, however, even the most hostile women

¹⁶ This discussion is based on the findings of the Local Capacities for Peace Project (see Chapter 6 of Anderson, *Do No Harm*). It also reflects input received during feedback workshops conducted with aid agencies in the Caucasus in February 1997.

realized that the “others” were people who had shared similar experiences that transcended ethnicity. The connection in this case was a shared experience of war.

The above example and the UNDP initiative described in the previous chapter illustrate initiatives that engaged people from both sides of a conflict in a common purpose and under a single project structure. This approach entails a certain acceptance of—and adequate political and security conditions for—face-to-face interactions. If such an interaction is not viable, a vicarious one may be. A nuanced approach may be safer and more useful where face-to-face interactions are not possible. “Parallel” projects engage people on both sides of a conflict in identical or similar activities, but under more distinct and autonomous project structures. In this approach, the focus is on information exchange, definition of common interests, and setting a precedent for cooperation by encouraging vicarious rather than explicit interaction. Aid activities that promote interdependence among communities have shown promise in other conflict settings. In the Caucasus, few opportunities for this sort of initiative have yet emerged, but are likely to present themselves once ethnically separated populations once again begin to share the same living spaces, resources, and infrastructure.

CHAPTER 5

TOWARD NORMALIZATION: POST-EMERGENCY HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Assuming that new conflicts do not emerge in the Caucasus and that frozen conflicts do not again heat up, the greatest challenge facing humanitarian agencies in coming years will be that of contributing to the safe and orderly return of large numbers of IDPs and refugees. Due to the way that wars were fought and ethnic cleansing conducted and also to the conditions that have emerged in the years that conflicts have been frozen, these activities will necessarily extend far beyond the returning population. This chapter revisits likely challenges facing return efforts and identifies key issues to consider.

ASSISTANCE IN WAYS WHICH PREPARE RETURNEES FOR THE MOVE HOME

When people go home, the attitudes they take with them will be as important, if not more important, than the skills they possess. Disturbing trends toward militancy and a more generalized political mobilization among IDPs in Georgia point to the need for tempering unrealistic expectations, addressing frustrations, easing isolation, and promoting a better sense of community among potential returnees, host communities, and residents in returns areas. Efforts in Azerbaijan to furnish and maintain social and vocational skills among potential returnees may serve as a model.

PREPARATION FOR WORSENING SECURITY

Manipulation of the security environment for aid operations and personnel is one option available to those who oppose peace agreements, population returns, and aid allotments to certain groups. Further, the infusion of resource-rich aid agencies into resource-scarce areas at the time of large-scale population returns will present attractive targets for criminality. The security environment before a return should not be taken as an indication of what will prevail during or afterward: much will have changed in the interim. Aid agencies have a responsibility to beneficiaries and staff to take potential security threats seriously. Aid community responses to security incidents or to a general downturn in the security environment will be helped tremendously by preparation. Serious consideration should be given to formalizing security protocols throughout the humanitarian community. In environments of extreme insecurity, these protocols should be backed by sanctions imposed by donors on agencies that opt out.

PROACTIVE CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR PENDING RETURNS

The need for contingency planning, which keeps abreast of realities in return areas—and one step ahead of political peace processes—is highlighted by the failed repatriation to the Gali region in late 1994. The threat that aid community preparations for large-scale returns will be overtaken by political developments is especially acute in the occupied areas around

Nagorno-Karabakh. Local effects of political agreements will require careful attention due to the extremely localized character of ethnic demographics, war damage, available resources, authority structures, war experiences, and conditions in displacement.

Apart from assessments of material needs, contingency planning entails analysis of protection requirements, with the full participation of political and security actors in return areas. It also involves anticipation of how the aid programming associated with pending returns will interact with or create intercommunal and other tensions. Contingency planning for returns has been given inadequate priority by both humanitarian and political and security actors in the Caucasus. Aggressive humanitarian diplomacy at the highest levels should ensure that contingency planning is allowed to proceed without obstruction.

SUPPORTING SAFETY THROUGH AID

The potential for intercommunal violence will be acute in some return areas. Renewed blood feuds, revenge attacks, competition over resources, and criminality all have strong potential to serve as flashpoints for armed clashes between residents and returnees. Consequently, the need to protect returnees and residents also will be acute. Experience in the Caucasus suggests that meaningful protection cannot be assumed: entrusting these responsibilities to ill-disciplined and poorly trained local police, soldiers, and militia is a poor option. Political agreements will determine whether returnees enjoy the protection of international police or peacekeeping forces.

Meanwhile, aid efforts, which support local capacities to deal with the conflicts and support creative programming that provides people with improved opportunities for living together peacefully, will be important adjuncts to political answers to protection challenges. Programming that encourages interdependence among groups and that results in tangible, visible cooperation benefits between them are worthy of special consideration to strengthen the ability of communities to resist being drawn into intercommunal violence. The LCPP framework in Appendix III will help to identify such programming options.

ACCURATE AND TIMELY INFORMATION ON RETURNEES, RESIDENTS, AND AREAS OF RETURN

The willingness of residents to receive or live alongside returnees is not determined by signatures on political agreements but by a melange of local factors. These include the absorptive capacity of infrastructure, the availability of proportionate assistance on the basis of need unlinked to subgroup identity, and confidence among returnees and residents that land and other disputes will be resolved without violence. In order to make informed judgments on the timing of returns, up-to-date information on conditions and attitudes among IDPs and in return areas are essential. Due to the level of political mobilization among IDPs, especially in Georgia, attitudes, expectations, and the readiness to reconcile may change quickly due to vulnerabilities among both IDPs and residents to fear and manipulation.

MAXIMIZING SUPPORT FOR LOCAL CAPACITY

Most aid workers are problem-solvers by nature. This means that they tend to be much more adept at identifying what is wrong in an aid context than what is right. Among local communities, material, social, and attitudinal capacities for coping with hardship can be easily overlooked in the rush to respond with outside assistance, thereby undermining possibilities for their support. The sample Capacities/Vulnerabilities Analysis in Appendix II illustrates a means of systematically organizing information about an aid context in a way that suggests what local capacities can be identified, harnessed, and strengthened through aid responses. An analysis of vulnerabilities across three “realms” of life in communities also suggests how aid can help to minimize the extent of needs resulting from attitudinal, social, or material problem areas.

GUARDING AGAINST THE QUICK FIX

Deep-seated animosities, complex political issues, severe destruction, and the vulnerability of residents and returnees to fear and manipulation collectively point to the need for long-term investment by both aid agencies and governments. As one aid worker in the region put it, “repatriation is a big word” that encompasses many incremental steps. Cutting corners in deference to speed and frugality can be dangerously counterproductive to the welfare of returnees and the sustainability of returns.

APPENDIX I

REGIONAL CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR EVENTS

- 1801** Georgia annexed by Russia; northern Caucasus remains outside Russian control.
- 1813** Russia seizes most of present-day Azerbaijan from Iran.
- 1828** Russian capture over present-day Armenia.
- 1834** Increased Russian efforts to subdue northern Caucasus, lasting decades.
- 1857** Northern Caucasus resistance leader Imam Shamil captured by Russian forces.
- 1864** Nominal Russian military victory in northern Caucasus, but ongoing resistance.
- 1895** Violence against Armenians in Turkey.
- 1905** Violence against Armenians in Baku.
- 1915** Genocide kills 1-1.5 million Armenians in Ottoman Turkey; hundreds of thousands of ethnic Armenians flee to present-day Armenia; pro-Turkish, Muslim, anti-Russian resistance in southwest Georgia (Adjara) results in Russian reprisals, killing some 45,000.
- 1918** Georgia, Dashnak Armenia, Azerbaijan declare independence from Russia, but garner little international recognition; anti-Azeri pogroms led by pro-Bolshevik Dashnaks kill 30,000 in Baku, followed by Azeri and Turk reprisals; Dashnak irregulars attack Akhalkalaki area of southern Georgia, now heavily populated by ethnic Armenian refugees from genocide; anti-Armenian reprisals in Tbilisi. Azeri-Armenian intercommunal violence in Nagorno-Karabakh.
- 1922** Bolsheviks consolidate control over Caucasus.
- 1943-1944** Stalinist en masse deportations from Caucasus begin, including Karachai, (1943) Chechens, Ingush, (Feb. 1944), and Meskhetian Turks (southern Georgia, Nov. 1944) with great loss of life; Chechen-Ingush ASSR dissolved, lands allocated to southern Russia, North Ossetia and Daghestan and repopulated with nonnative settlers.

-
- 1956** Khrushchev issues decree partially rehabilitating dissolved territories and authorizing return of deported peoples. Prigorodnyi Raion not restored to Ingush. Badly managed return in Chechnya and Ingushetia takes place over 1957-1960, prompting antireturnee/intercommunal tensions; violent clashes continue sporadically for next decades.
- 1958** Russian settlers inflict three-day pogrom on returned Chechens and Ingush.
- 1965** Mass commemoration in Yerevan of Armenian genocide.
- 1970** Ingush demonstrate in Prigorodnyi for return of lands formerly part of Ingushetia.
- 1982** Violent demonstrations in Prigorodnyi; Ingush banned from living in North Ossetia.
- 1985** Mikhail Gorbachev comes to power in USSR.
- 1987** Perestroika introduced.
- 1988** Rising interethnic tensions and secessionist rumblings in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh. Anti-Armenian violence in Sumgait, Azerbaijan. Mass expulsions of Armenians from Azerbaijan and Azeris from Armenia. In December, severe earthquake in northwest Armenia kills 25,000.
- 1989** *April*: 21 demonstrators killed in clash with Soviet troops in Tbilisi; *July*: ethnic riots in Abkhazia kill 17, martial law declared; rail blockade of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh begins; *November*: violent clashes between Georgian nationalists and Ossetians in Tskhinvali, continuing until January 1990.
- 1990** Growing lawlessness throughout region; *January*: mass demonstrations and anti-Armenian violence in Baku, Soviet troops deploy in city, 160 Azeris killed; Soviet troops deploy in South Ossetia; *March*: Georgia declares sovereignty; *August*: Armenia declares intention to secede from USSR; Abkhaz Supreme Soviet adopts declaration on state sovereignty of Abkhaz SSR.
- 1991** Lawlessness continues throughout region. *March*: CSCE establishes committee on Nagorno-Karabakh; *April*: Georgia declares independence; Soviet troops and Azeri irregulars sweep villages around Nagorno-Karabakh, forcing ethnic Armenians to flee; *August*: Azerbaijan declares independence; *September*: Armenia declares independence; Azeri forces shell Stepanakert; *November*: Chechnya declares independence, Ingushetia opts to remain in Russia; *December 8*: USSR ceases to exist; formation of CIS; Gorbachev quits; warfare with indiscriminate shelling continues in Nagorno-Karabakh.

-
- 1992** *January:* Gamsakhurdia toppled after battle in downtown Tbilisi; open warfare escalates in Western Georgia between Zviadists and loose-knit paramilitaries comprising “Georgian National Guard,” continuing into March; *March:* open warfare continues in Nagorno-Karabakh; *May:* coup and counter coup in Azerbaijan; *June:* Joint Control Commission PKF established in South Ossetia; *August:* loose-knit with Georgian fighters invade Abkhazia and open warfare ensues, with Georgian fighters taking Sukhumi; *October:* open warfare in Prigorodnyi Raion between Ingush and Osset fighters, continuing into November, some. 500 killed and another 60,000 flee, primarily Ingush; *December:* OSCE mission opens in Georgia.
- 1993** Fighting continues in Nagorno-Karabakh; *May:* Azerbaijan declares unilateral cease-fire; *June:* Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Karabakh Armenians sign peace accord under auspices of OSCE Minsk Group; plans envisioned for deployment of OSCE PKF, open warfare continues until September, Karabakh Armenian fighters seize substantial Azeri territory; *July:* rebel fighters clash with government troops in Azerbaijan, advance on Baku; pro- and anti-Dudayev clashes kill 100 in Grozny; *September:* Georgian fighters expelled from Abkhazia; renewed fighting ensues in Western Georgia, continues to November.
- 1994** *May:* Abkhazia and Georgia sign Separation of Forces Agreement, Quadripartite Accord instituted, CISP KF deployed; *July:* UNOMIG mandate and mission expanded by UNSC. September: large-scale attempted spontaneous return of IDPs to Abkhazia; heavy fighting in Grozny continues into October *December:* 40,000 Russian troops invade Chechnya, open warfare ensues, continuing until August 1996.
- 1995** *January-February:* Indiscriminate bombing and shelling in Chechnya, mass displacement inside Chechnya and to neighboring regions; *April:* Soros Foundation team disappears in Chechnya; June: OSCE Assistance Group opens mission in Grozny; *November:* Shevardnadze survives assassination attempt in Tbilisi; *December:* IOM expatriate murdered south of Grozny.
- 1996** Open warfare continues in Chechnya; Conflicts remain “frozen” amid low-intensity violence in Prigorodnyi Raion, Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh; *August:* Chechen fighters seize downtown Grozny, followed by cease-fire agreement stipulating withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya; security incidents targeting aid agencies steadily escalate after cease-fire; *December 17:* seven ICRC expatriates murdered, one injured while sleeping in ICRC hospital compound; all aid agencies withdraw from Chechnya to neighboring regions.
- 1997** Lawlessness prevails in Chechnya. Increasing militancy among elements of Georgian IDP population from Abkhazia; conflicts remain frozen amid low-

intensity violence in Prigorodnyi Raion, Abkhazia, and front lines around Nagorno-Karabakh; increased intercommunal contact between Georgians and Ossets in and around South Ossetia; increasing insecurity in Western Georgia and security zone in southern Abkhazia; *June* targeted incidents against aid agencies continue to escalate in and around Chechnya, severely curtailing aid operations; rash of expatriate hostage takings continues through the year, some agencies pay ransoms; *August*: Russian foreign minister accompanies Abkhaz leader Ardzinba to Tbilisi for direct talks with Shevardnadze, all pledge a nonviolent solution; *October*: UNOMIG observers taken hostage near Zugdidi, UN pays ransom.

1998

Lawlessness prevails in Chechnya. Continued militancy among elements of Georgian IDP population from Abkhazia; conflicts remain “frozen” amid low-intensity violence in Prigorodnyi Raion, Abkhazia, Western Georgia, and front lines around Nagorno-Karabakh; Russian Interior Minister Kulikov sacked; *February*: UNHCR head of office (northern Caucasus) in Vladikavkaz kidnapped, UNHCR scales back to skeleton presence; virtual cessation of humanitarian assistance in northern Caucasus, although ICRC continues to assist by remote control. Assassination attempt against Shevardnadze in Tbilisi; UNOMIG observers taken hostage by Zviadists near Zugdidi, released after protracted negotiation without payment of ransom; hard-liners oust moderate Armenian prime minister; *May*: outbreak of violence in Gali region, Abkhazia, sparks ethnic sweep operation resulting in displacement of 35,000 to Zugdidi; *June*: armed attack on Daghestani legislature; escalating government and faction tensions in Chechnya; escalating insecurity in Prigorodnyi.

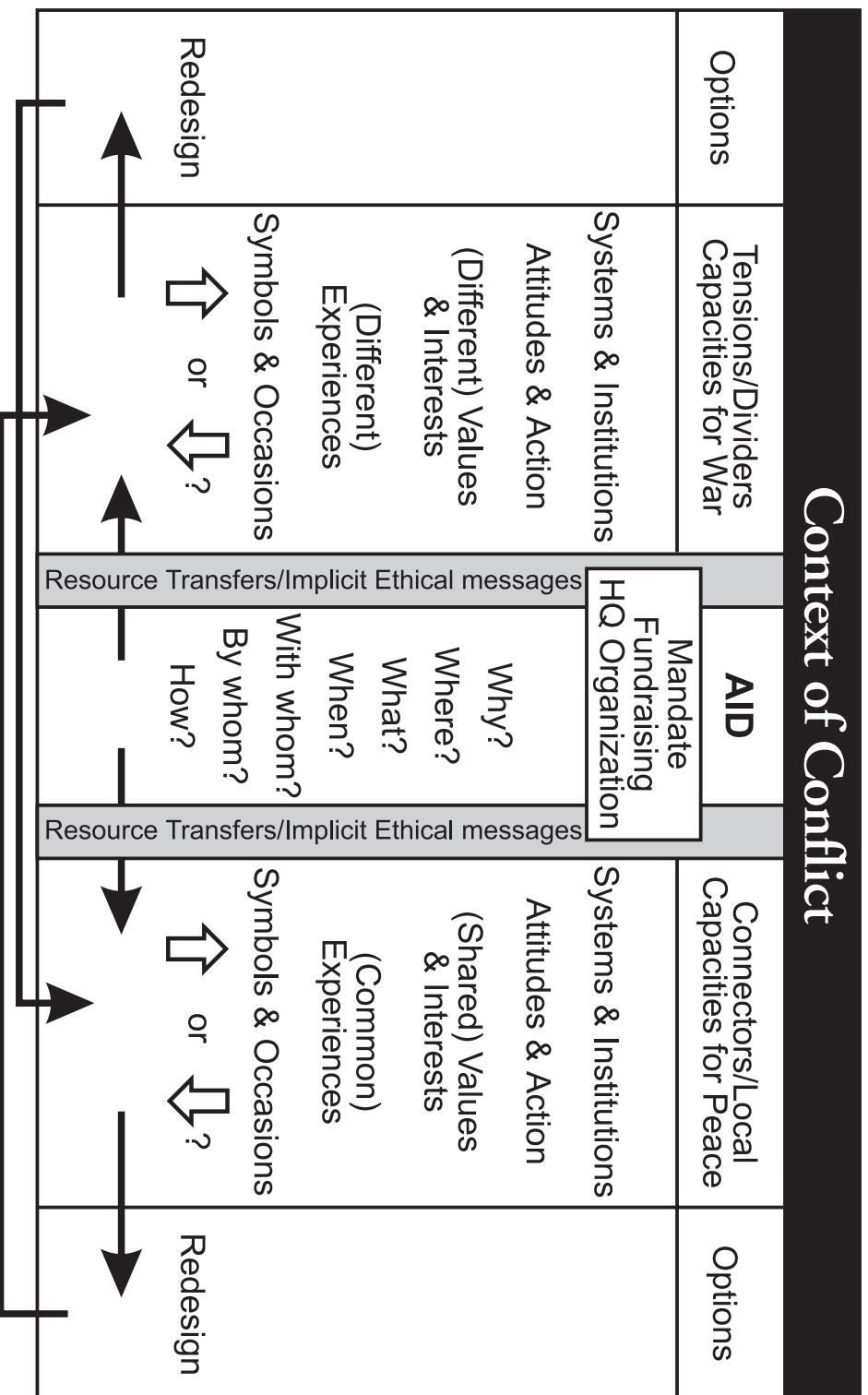
APPENDIX II

SAMPLE CAPACITIES AND VULNERABILITIES ANALYSIS: POST-WAR CHECHNYA

Realm	Capacities	Vulnerabilities
Community's Views on Abilities to Create Change	Traditionally adaptive and self-sufficient, often to an extreme, in times of hardship. Accustomed to getting around the system through the informal economy and back channels to officialdom. Distrust and cynicism toward formal authority provides impetus to take action independent of formal structures.	Conservatism and traditionalism. Coercive power in the hands of armed factions reduce options for community action. Lack of confidence in formal structures. Authorities often meet with extreme cynicism and distrust; widespread expectation that solutions will be imposed from above. Accustomed to centrally planned rather than local solutions to local problems.
Organizational and Societal Relations	Lateral, formerly clan-based. Strong traditions of family honor, especially among males. Remnants of clan organization (<i>taips</i>). Very strong ties of kinship, with extended families often reaching into neighboring regions of Ingushetia and Daghestan. Strong national identity when faced with outside threats.	Few indications of readiness to take collective responsibility for social problems. Marginalization of traditional clan structures and diminishing influence of elders, coinciding with entrenchment of armed factions and criminality. No tradition of hierarchical state structures. Authorities increasingly pressed to accommodate radicals and militants, providing some with formal government posts. Imposition and arbitrary interpretation of Islamic <i>Sharia</i> law. Radicalization of Islam, leaving less room for more moderate interpretations. Tradition of blood feuds a propagator of violence where countervailing traditions of conflict resolution and restraint have been weakened. Most formal Soviet-era social organizations discredited (e.g., political, social, youth groups), contributing to suspicion of social mobilization, public education, and propaganda. Suspicion of nongovernmental activity and lack of tradition and awareness of nonstate humanitarian ethos. Interclan and interfactional hostility persisting from war and pre-war periods. Xenophobia, growing sense of alienation, suspicion of outsiders. Uncommonly strong warrior tradition, beatification of violent role models.
Physical-Material Skills, Resources, Hazards	Good potential for agricultural self-sufficiency. Good knowledge of food preservation techniques in rural areas. Strong trading tradition. Relatively high level of education among young women.	Soviet infrastructure highly centralized, frequently of poor quality, and generally not conducive to local adaptation. Unknown quantity of landmines and unexploded ordinance. Sporadic de facto economic embargo imposed by Russia. Lawlessness, impotence of legitimate law enforcement structures. Proliferation of small-arms. Widespread destruction of housing and health, education, social infrastructure. No coherent health system; primary health care especially weak. Water and sanitation infrastructure in Grozny severely damaged, prone to failure. Loss of knowledge of traditional farming methods due to collectivized agriculture. Land tenure confusion and disputes. Mass unemployment, particularly problematic among former fighters who then gravitate to crime. Relatively low level of education among men. High rates of family violence.

APPENDIX III

A FRAMEWORK FOR CONSIDERING THE IMPACT OF AID ON CONFLICT



APPENDIX IV

THE PROVIDENCE PRINCIPLES

Aid work that proceeds from an appreciation of past experience and clearly articulated principle stands a better chance of success and poses less of a possibility for doing inadvertent harm than more reflexive approaches. The “Providence Principles” are framed not as moral absolutes but as norms toward which to strive. They have evolved out of research and consultations conducted over a period of several years by the Humanitarianism and War Project, including thousands of interviews with aid workers from UN agencies, international and local NGOs and donor agencies in many different conflict settings.¹⁷ Similar efforts such as the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief provide equally valuable guideposts for humanitarian action in conflict.

Relieving Life-Threatening Suffering. Humanitarian action should be directed toward the relief of immediate, life-threatening suffering.

Proportionality to Need. Humanitarian action should correspond to the degree of suffering, wherever it occurs. It should affirm the view that life is as precious in one part of the globe as another.

Nonpartisanship. Humanitarian action responds to human suffering because people are in need, not to advance political, sectarian, or other extraneous agendas. It should not take sides in conflicts.

Independence. In order to fulfill their mission, humanitarian organizations should be free of interference from home or host political authorities. Humanitarian space is essential for effective action.

Accountability. Humanitarian organizations should report fully on their activities to sponsors and beneficiaries. Humanitarianism should be transparent.

Appropriateness. Humanitarian action should be tailored to local circumstances and aim to enhance, not supplant, locally available resources.

Contextualization. Effective humanitarian action should encompass a comprehensive view of overall needs and of the impact of interventions. Encouraging respect for human rights and addressing the underlying causes of conflicts are essential elements.

Subsidiarity of Sovereignty. Where humanitarianism and sovereignty clash, sovereignty should defer to the relief of life-threatening suffering.

¹⁷ Excerpted from Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Action in Times of War: A Handbook for Practitioners* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993).

APPENDIX V

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING

- Anderson, Mary B., *Do No Harm: Supporting Local Capacities for Peace Through Aid*, Local Capacities for Peace Project (Cambridge, Mass.: CDA Inc., 1996).
- Conquest, Robert, *The Nation Killers: The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1960).
- Forced Migration Projects, Open Society Institute, *Coping With Conflict: A Guide to the Work of Local NGOs in the North Caucasus* (New York: Open Society Institute, 1998).
- Gall, Carlotta, and Thomas De Waal, *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998).
- Goldenberg, Suzanne, *Pride of Small Nations: The Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder*, (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1994).
- Hansen, Greg and Robert Seely, *War and Humanitarian Action in Chechnya*, Occasional Paper #26 (Providence, R.I.: Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, 1996).
- Human Rights Watch, *The Ingush-Ossetian Conflict in the Prigorodnyi Region* (Helsinki: Human Rights Watch, May 1996).
- McGrath, Rae, *Landmines, Legacy of Conflict: A Manual for Development Workers*, (Oxford: Oxfam, 1994).
- MacFarlane, S. Neil, Larry Minear, and Stephen D. Shenfield, *Armed Conflict in Georgia: A Case Study in Humanitarian Action and Peacekeeping*, Occasional Paper #21 (Providence, R.I.: Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, 1996).
- MacFarlane, S. Neil and Larry Minear, *Humanitarian Action and Politics: The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh*, Occasional Paper #25 (Providence, R.I.: Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, 1997).
- Minear, Larry, and Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Action in Times of War: A Handbook for Practitioners* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1993).
- O'Ballance, Edgar, *Wars in the Caucasus, 1990-1995* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).
- UNHCR, *Prospects for the Return of Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees to Abkhazia*, UNHCR, May, 1997.
- Wixman, Ronald, *The Peoples of the USSR: An Ethnographic Handbook* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1988).

APPENDIX VI

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND THE SPONSORING PROJECTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg Hansen has worked as a UN volunteer in the Republic of Georgia and as a civilian observer in the former Yugoslavia. He has conducted peace research in Lebanon and Mozambique and, in 1982, served with a Canadian contingent of UN peacekeeping forces in Cyprus. Hansen coauthored the Humanitarianism and War Project's monograph on Chechnya with Robert Seely and is an associate of the Local Capacities for Peace Project.

ABOUT THE HUMANITARIANISM AND WAR PROJECT

The Humanitarianism and War Project is an independent policy research initiative underwritten by some 50 UN organizations, governments, NGOs, and foundations. Since its inception in 1991, it has conducted thousands of interviews in complex emergencies around world, producing an array of case studies, handbooks and training materials, books, articles, and op-eds for a diverse audience of humanitarian practitioners, policy analysts, academics, and the general public.

The project is currently examining the process of institutional learning and change among humanitarian organizations in the post-Cold War period. Recognizing that humanitarian agencies nowadays are not only in greater demand but are also experiencing greater difficulty in carrying out their tasks, the project is highlighting the innovative practices devised by individual agencies to address specific challenges.

The research builds on case studies conducted to date, both geographical (the Persian Gulf, Central America and the Caribbean, Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia, the Great Lakes Region, and the Caucasus) and thematic (the interface between humanitarian action and peacekeeping and the roles of the media and the military in the humanitarian sphere). The current round of research focuses on three clusters, each containing two issues and selected challenges:

Cluster A: Humanitarian Interactions

Issue 1: Orchestrating Emergency Action

- challenges of coordination
- challenges of security
- challenges of professionalism

Issue 2: Safeguarding Human Rights in Complex Emergencies

- challenges of belligerence and criminality within assisted populations
- challenges of imperiled populations
- challenges of gender abuse and bias

Cluster B: Humanitarian Politics

- Issue 3. Defining Involvement and Protecting Space
- challenges of engagement and disengagement
 - challenges of proportionality
 - challenges of advocacy
- Issue 4: Managing Conflict Connections
- challenges of not fueling war
 - challenges of easing tensions

Cluster C: Humanitarian Impacts

- Issue 5: Capitalizing on Development Potential
- challenges of understanding
 - challenges of timing
 - challenges of funding
- Issue 6: Strengthening Local Capacity
- challenges of institution building
 - challenges of identity
 - challenges of accountability

Research is tailored to the expressed needs of humanitarian organizations, which constitute the primary constituency of the project, producing materials designed for reflection and training purposes. Findings and recommendations are also being followed with interest to the project's other main constituencies, policymakers and academics.

The project is part of Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies, which was established in 1986 to facilitate analysis of global problems and to develop initiatives to address them. Additional information about the institute and the project may be found on the Internet at www.brown.edu/Departments/Watson_Institute.

Project donors include the governments of Australia, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The intergovernmental organizations that have contributed to the project are the European Community Humanitarian Office, International Organization for Migration, OECD Development Center, UNDHA/UNDRO, UN-DMTP-DHA, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNITAR, UN Special Emergency Program for the Horn of Africa, UN Staff College, UN University, UN Volunteers, WFP, and WHO. The nongovernmental organization contributors are the American Red Cross, CARE-US, Catholic Relief Services, Danish Refugee Council, Fourth Freedom Forum, International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development (Canada), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Orthodox Christian Charities, International Rescue Committee, Lutheran World Federation, Lutheran World Relief, Mennonite Central Committee (U.S.), Mennonite Central Committee (Can.), Mercy Corps International, Nordic Red Cross Societies (D,F,I,N,S), Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam-UK, Save the Children-UK, Save the Children-US, Trócaire, and World Vision. Generous support also came from the Aria

Foundation, Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, McKnight Foundation, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts, Rockefeller Foundation, and the U.S. Institute of Peace.

**ABOUT LOCAL CAPACITIES FOR PEACE PROJECT
(COLLABORATIVE FOR DEVELOPMENT ACTION, INC.)**

The Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCPP) is a collaborative effort involving a number of international agencies including bilateral donors, nongovernmental organizations, and agencies of the United Nations. The project seeks to identify how international humanitarian and/or development assistance may be provided in conflict situations so that it helps local people cease fighting and begin to develop alternative systems for dealing with the underlying problems, rather than exacerbating and prolonging the conflict.

Between 1994 and 1996, the LCPP conducted 15 field-based case studies in 14 conflict areas around the world. These cases revealed some clear patterns about how “outsider” aid interacts with local conflicts in ways both negative (exacerbating) and positive (encouraging disengagement). These lessons were published in May 1996 in a booklet entitled *Do No Harm: Supporting Local Capacities for Peace through Aid*. In late 1996 through the first half of 1997, the project conducted 26 feedback workshops in conflict zones and in aid agency headquarters. Participants were invited to test the lessons learned through LCPP cases against their own experience and to suggest additions and amendments to improve them and their usefulness.

Beginning in the fall of 1997, the project entered a third phase involving three sub-projects: an implementation project; a policy project; and workshops focused on conflict-prone areas. These three subprojects are focused on furthering the learning about how aid may be better provided in conflict zones.

The Implementation Sub-Project consists of a number of joint efforts between NGOs and LCPP liaisons in which the lessons learned through the LCPP are applied in the design and implementation of actual operational programs in conflict zones. These projects test the applicability and usefulness of LCPP lessons and demonstrate how they can be incorporated into humanitarian and development assistance programs on an ongoing basis. Twice-yearly meetings amongst all those involved in the various projects provide for information exchange and synthesis.

The Policy Project addresses ways in which NGO headquarters’ and donor agencies’ policies can support field staff efforts to “do no harm” and to support local capacities for peace. It seeks to discover, through consultation with field workers, which policy constraints make a real difference at the field level, and then to work with donors and NGO headquarters to encourage the specific policy changes which can do the most good.

Feedback Workshops provide practical tools which participants can use to implement the lessons of the LCPP in their fieldwork and offer ongoing opportunities to add to LCPP learning. LCPP continues to hold up to 10 workshops a year.

A longer version of *Do No Harm* that incorporates the Project’s learning plus selected case studies will be published in 1998. The LCPP can be contacted by e-mail at: cdalcp@aol.com