
ICRC Assistance Policy

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Public version

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the ICRC's assistance activities¹ have diversified and its assistance programmes have expanded. This development is due to a variety of factors that have caused the concept of humanitarian assistance to evolve well beyond mere emergency responses.

Emergency response itself has become increasingly complex, seeking to be more "intelligent" in order to achieve maximum effectiveness and to minimize the adverse consequences that humanitarian aid can have. In many situations, conflicts have become entrenched, forcing assistance work to cover the longer term, to meet needs that are at once urgent and recurrent, or even chronic. As a result, humanitarian work must be adapted and, very often, a link established between emergency and rehabilitation programmes in order to promote support or mobilization activities, stimulate adaptation mechanisms and persuade the authorities concerned to shoulder their responsibilities.

The ICRC is also faced with a proliferation of actors carrying out humanitarian work and the diversity of their areas of specialization, their abilities and their working methods, a situation that has fostered a spirit both of complementarity and of competition. Under the Seville Agreement, the ICRC acts as the International Movement of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent's "lead agency" in the event of armed conflict and guides the other components in carrying out activities that, more often than not, are linked to assistance programmes. At the same time, the growing insecurity in some situations, which can go as far as the rejection of humanitarian aid, has forced the ICRC to modify its approaches and strategies.

In this complex environment, the ICRC seeks to be and remain a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian organization with a recognized status,

an organization that is credible, reliable and able to carry out a wide range of activities in a highly professional manner. Its integrated approach,² designed to provide victims of armed conflict and other violent situations with both protection and assistance, gives it a strong and unique identity. The organization also wishes to be, and stay, in close proximity to these people, whether individuals or groups, so that it can respond quickly and appropriately to their essential needs.

The ICRC has the capacity to act rapidly and effectively in the event of an acute crisis. It strives to play a role in preventing events that are disastrous in humanitarian terms. At the same time, it must continue to meet certain essential needs in chronic crises and sometimes even in post-crisis situations.

The ICRC's programmes in the areas of health, water and habitat, and economic security are a key aspect of this approach. In order to optimize its response to present day situations, the organization has opted to maintain a spectrum of core activities for which it possesses the internal capacity needed.

Implementing the present Assistance Policy will help the ICRC position itself as a major player in the humanitarian sphere. It is also a prerequisite for laying sound foundations from which to launch a more wide-ranging internal discussion on how humanitarian organizations in general, and the ICRC in particular, can meet the challenges of the coming decades.

Developments in today's world are influenced by deep-seated trends: increasing poverty, marginalization, urbanization, the widening of the North-South divide and the deterioration in the terms of trade, problems formulating and implementing adequate economic, agricultural, social and demographic policies, the deteriorating environment, the appearance or reappearance of pandemics, the use of non-conventional weapons, and so on.

The ICRC must monitor the impact of these trends on the conduct of its assistance work so that it can, insofar as possible, adapt its working methods accordingly.

The aim of this policy paper — a practical, action-oriented tool — is threefold:

- to guide decision making on matters having to do with assistance, so as to ensure a professional, coherent, integrated approach that meets the

¹ Assistance activities are primarily those carried out in the fields of health, water and habitat, and economic security.

² An integrated approach is the inclusion of all ICRC programmes and activities in an overall strategy — optimal combination of a wide range of activities and modes of action appropriate to a given situation (not to be confused with the concept of integration developed by the United Nations).

essential needs of individuals and communities affected by armed conflict and other violent situations;

- to clarify and affirm the position of assistance work and of the Assistance Division within the ICRC, thereby helping to provide the organization with a strong identity;
- to serve as a reference framework for the formulation of thematic guidelines applicable to different areas of assistance.

The present document constitutes an updating of the policy paper *Engagement de secours par le CICR* (of 12 December 1988). It also takes account of the policy paper *ICRC action in periods of transition: Guidelines* (of 28 November 2002).

2. ICRC action

In accordance with Article 5.2 of the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement,³ the ICRC takes action in connection with international armed conflicts, non-international armed conflicts and internal disturbances. Under Article 5.3 of the Statutes, it may also furnish assistance in situations other than the abovementioned. In these circumstances, the ICRC's task is to provide protection and assistance for civilian and military victims.

In terms of priority, the ICRC takes action in situations where its work has added value for the affected population, and more specifically where:

- its role as a neutral and independent organization and intermediary facilitates access to those in need and to the authorities concerned;
- its integrated approach to assistance and protection can promote respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of the law (be it international humanitarian law, human rights law or refugee law);
- its presence in and knowledge of a given situation lend it particular legitimacy;
- it can mobilize the capacity and skills needed to provide essential aid.

The ICRC's strategy is based on a combination of five modes of action: persuasion, mobilization, denunciation, support and substitution/direct provision of services. Persuasion and mobilization are the preferred modes of

³ Hereafter the Movement.

action when it seeks to stop or prevent violations of international humanitarian law and to make the authorities aware of their responsibilities while urging them to meet the essential needs of the affected group.⁴ This also applies to preserving their dignity. Denunciation is reserved for exceptional cases.⁵ Support and substitution/direct provision are the preferred modes of action when what is needed is to help supply essential services or to take responsibility for them when the authorities are unable to do so.

While circumstances may lead the ICRC to provide services for affected groups, it is not the organization's role to relieve the authorities of their responsibilities. The ICRC will continue to urge them to ensure delivery of those services and fully meet their obligations.

Assistance must always be regarded as forming part of an overall ICRC strategy. This necessarily entails close cooperation among all programmes and all levels of decision making.

3. Guiding Principles

3.1. Taking the affected group and its needs into account

The ICRC seeks to work in close proximity to the affected group. The organization must take account of the local value systems and the group's specific vulnerabilities and perception of its needs.

3.2. Effective humanitarian assistance of high quality

ICRC programmes must be planned, implemented and monitored in accordance with the highest professional standards. If the ICRC is to preserve its capacity to provide high quality and effective assistance, it must analyse and develop professional standards in conjunction with academic institutions and other relevant bodies.

⁴ Those suffering the consequences of armed conflicts and other violent situations.

⁵ The ICRC reserves the right to make public statements concerning violations of international humanitarian law if certain strict conditions are fulfilled: (i) these violations are major and repeated; (ii) the ICRC delegates have witnessed the violations with their own eyes, or the existence and extent of those breaches were established by reliable and verifiable sources; (iii) the steps taken confidentially have not succeeded in putting an end to the violations; and (iv) such publicity is in the interest of the persons or populations affected or threatened.

See also the articles elsewhere in this *Review* by the President of the ICRC, Jakob Kellenberger (on confidentiality) and by its Director of Operations, Pierre Krähenbühl (on the future of neutral, impartial and independent action).

3.3. Ethical norms

When providing assistance, the ICRC must respect certain ethical standards, namely the applicable principles of the Movement, the principle of do no harm, and the principles set out in the relevant codes of conduct.⁶ The best interests of those suffering the consequences of armed conflict and other violent situations must always guide the ICRC's activities.

3.4. Responsibilities within the Movement

As a component of the Movement, the ICRC must discharge its responsibilities in compliance with the Seville Agreement and the Statutes of the Movement currently in force. During armed conflict or internal disturbances and in their direct aftermath, the ICRC has a dual responsibility: its responsibility as a humanitarian organization for carrying out the specific activities arising from its mandate and its responsibility for coordinating the international action taken by any components of the Movement involved in an operation or wishing to contribute to it. The ICRC must provide effective coordination and information in relation to both types of responsibility.

3.5. Partnerships with other humanitarian actors

The ICRC must take particular care to associate with humanitarian actors whose working methods and policies are compatible with its own principles and work.

4. Strategies

4.1. Overall analysis of the situation and needs

The ICRC conducts an overall analysis of each situation in which it is involved (security and economic, political, social, environmental and cultural aspects) in order to identify the problems and needs of the affected groups in terms of resources and services and their relationship with the various actors involved. It especially endeavours to determine whether there have been violations of international humanitarian law and, if so, whether or not they are deliberate. This analysis, regularly updated at the local, regional and international levels, enables the ICRC to draw up, adapt or

⁶ Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief (adopted by the Council of Delegates of the ICRC in Birmingham in 1993), ICRC Regulations for Personnel on Mission, Rules of Conduct for ICRC Staff on Assignment.

alter its operational strategies. Finally, the ICRC analyses each situation and assesses risks in relation to expected impact. This is the basis on which the organization determines its own course and guides the work of other components of the Movement who wish to take part in an operation.

4.2. Integrated approach

The ICRC's assistance work is flexible and wide-ranging. Its aim is to meet the essential needs of the affected group. The assistance integrated approach is based on a concept of overall health⁷ and includes the supply of and/or access to safe drinking water, food, a habitat and basic health care and health services.

The inclusion of assistance in ICRC action as a whole depends largely on the choice and combination of modes of action. The same approach is applied to assistance provided by other components of the Movement in cases of conflict.

4.3. Combining different modes of action

The ICRC uses persuasion, mobilization and, where necessary, denunciation to induce the authorities to meet their obligation to provide essential services for the affected groups. Where the ICRC considers that its efforts are not going to bring about a satisfactory, timely response from the authorities, and that the problem is a serious one, it may simultaneously engage in appropriate support and/or substitution/direct provision activities.

- ICRC delegations must decide how best to combine and introduce different modes of action in order to optimize the impact of their activities. How various modes of action are combined, and the weight given to each, are determined by the importance and urgency of the problems identified, the types of needs and the current and potential responses from the authorities and other actors involved.

4.3.1 Persuasion

It is the fundamental responsibility of ICRC staff, within their respective spheres of competence, to determine the extent to which the authorities fail to meet their obligation to provide essential services (because they are unwilling and/or unable to do so) and the scale of the emergency that this

⁷ World Health Organisation, *Definition of health*.

has created. In addition, they contribute to the representations the ICRC makes to the authorities in an effort to persuade them to respect their obligation to preserve the lives, health and dignity of individuals, groups and populations under their control.

4.3.2 Support for local structures/partners

The ICRC provides support for local structures and partners wherever it considers that they constitute a viable means of ensuring access by the group affected to basic goods and services. Such support may be considered if:

- the structures/partners are willing to provide assistance in accordance with the principles of humanity, impartiality and shared ethics;
- the structures/partners are in a position to absorb the ICRC's support and to implement the necessary assistance programmes.

Within their respective spheres of competence, ICRC staff are responsible for helping to identify the most appropriate structures/partners and for planning and implementing the activities connected with this mode of action, which constitutes the best way of preserving existing structures over the long term. Furthermore, cooperation with local structures/partners enhances the ICRC's work and may provide a basis for a responsible withdrawal by the organization.

4.3.3 Substitution/direct provision of services

The decision to substitute for the authorities and to provide a direct service for those affected depends on the urgency and gravity⁸ of the needs to be met. This mode of action may be considered when:

- the needs are great and the responsible authorities are not able to meet them, or where no such authorities exist;
- the needs are great and the responsible authorities are not willing to meet them;
- security conditions and/or the risk that indirect assistance might be misused or ill received so require;
- assistance will help protect the persons affected.

Within their respective spheres of competence, ICRC staff are responsible for planning and implementing the assistance activities associated with this mode of action.

⁸ The gravity of a problem takes into account its severity, its scale and the risk of any aggravation of the problem.

4.3.4 Mobilization⁹

The ICRC may mobilize third parties¹⁰ who will endeavour to persuade the authorities to shoulder their responsibilities or, failing that, will strive either directly (themselves) or indirectly (by supporting others) to assist those affected. Within their respective spheres of competence, ICRC staff are responsible for identifying those who are in the best position to influence the authorities or to provide the necessary aid.

4.3.5 Denunciation

In case of important and repeated violations of international humanitarian law the ICRC may, in accordance with its policy guidelines and thus in exceptional cases,¹¹ take steps to denounce those responsible.

4.4. Coordination

Insofar as this does not jeopardize its independence, neutrality or security, the ICRC promotes coordination of its activities with those of other actors to ensure the greatest possible complementarity of diverse efforts to provide those in need with humanitarian aid. Coordination mechanisms may have to be adapted, depending on the situation (for example, a need to ensure confidentiality). Within the Movement, the assistance activities of all the components present and active in the field are closely coordinated so as to maximize their impact on the persons affected and to project a coherent image of the Movement's work in the country concerned.

4.5. Sharing tasks and responsibilities

The ICRC considers sharing tasks and responsibilities with other humanitarian organizations, formally or informally, insofar as this does not undermine its independence, its neutrality, its security, its access to areas affected by conflict or its ability to carry out protection activities. Responsibilities may be shared in relation to the following aspects:

- sector or field of activity (health, water and sanitation, housing, food and essential household items);

⁹ *ICRC public communication: policy, guiding principles and priority audiences* (2004).

¹⁰ Such as States, international or regional organizations and private firms or individuals.

¹¹ *Action by the ICRC in the event of breaches of international humanitarian law* (1981).

- geography (responsibility for the affected groups is divided up among different organizations, depending on where the people live or are located);
- category of affected person (for example, displaced persons,¹² war wounded).

4.6. Partnerships

The ICRC develops and maintains a network of local and international partners. Its activities are carried out in cooperation with these partners only where their working methods and policies are compatible with the ICRC's objectives, strategies and principles and where this cooperation does not weaken the ICRC's ability to provide effective and timely assistance. Other components of the Movement are the ICRC's preferred, but not exclusive, partners.

4.7. Adaptation and innovation

If the strategies described above do not offer a suitable solution to a particular problem, the ICRC will consider drawing up other strategies, taking into account the many variables in the regional, national and international environment (in particular, security).

5. Action in the field of assistance

Unmet essential needs are what drive ICRC assistance work. The decision making process leading to any action is based on two levels of analysis.

5.1. First level: the ICRC identifies the groups for whom assistance is a priority

To this end, it relies on the following criteria:

5.1.1 Category of persons affected:

- persons specifically protected by international humanitarian law (for example, prisoners of war, persons deprived of their freedom, the wounded and sick, civilians and the shipwrecked);
- persons currently or potentially at risk owing to their nationality, religion, ethnic origin, sex, gender (cultural roles and responsibilities based on sex), membership of a social group, political opinions or any other characteristic that may be the basis of arbitrary discrimination.

¹² Includes people displaced within their own countries, refugees and returnees.

5.1.2 Degree of crisis

This is determined on the basis of access to existing resources and the capacity of existing services to meet essential needs:

- emerging crisis and pre-crisis situation — essential needs are still being met, but there is a risk that they will not continue to be met;
- acute crisis — certain essential needs are not being met;
- chronic crisis — essential needs are not being entirely met and an acute crisis could recur;
- post-crisis situation — essential needs are being met by existing services but these remain fragile.

5.1.3 Gravity of problems

In identifying the problems to be tackled as a priority, account is taken of:

- their severity (e.g. mortality rate, incidence, degree of suffering, disability);
- their scale (number of people affected);
- the risk of aggravation (trend).

5.1.4 Anticipated impact of action

The ICRC's decision to step in will depend on the expected results of its assistance on the target group.

5.2. Second level: for each group identified, the ICRC defines the form that the operation will take

5.2.1 Integration within overall ICRC action

Assistance activities are integrated in the ICRC's overall work in accordance with the above-mentioned guiding principles (point 3) and strategies (point 4).

5.2.2 Coherence of assistance activities

Assistance activities are oriented by the public health pyramid, which requires an integrated approach in the areas of water and habitat, economic security and health services. The result is a welldefined range of integrated activities.

This comprehensive approach calls for management tools such as:

- systems analysis (health, trade, etc.);
- planning;
- coordination;

- monitoring of programmes/projects;
- evaluation.

5.2.3 Capacity to carry out core activities

Among the wide range of activities carried out by humanitarian agencies in response to the needs of affected groups, the ICRC, drawing on its experience, has defined a set of activities it regards as core. These activities, whose level of priority and implementation depend on the context, are as follows:

- supply, storage and distribution of drinking water;
- environmental sanitation and waste management;
- energy supply for key installations such as hospitals, water treatment plants and water distribution networks, and appropriate technologies for cooking and heating;
- transitional human settlements (spatial planning, design and setting up of camps, construction of appropriate shelter);
- distribution of food rations;
- distribution of essential household items;
- distribution of seed, farming tools, fertilizer and fishing tackle;
- rehabilitation of agriculture and irrigation;
- livestock management;
- revival of small trade and handicrafts;
- minimum package of activities derived from primary health care (PHC);
- support for victims of sexual violence;
- pre-hospital care and medical evacuation of the wounded;
- emergency hospital care (surgery, obstetrics, paediatrics, internal medicine) and hospital management;
- repair/upgrading of medical facilities and other buildings;
- therapeutic feeding;
- physical rehabilitation programmes;
- health in detention.

The ICRC has equipped itself with the professional skills and logistical capacity required to implement these core activities. It also has the ability to upgrade its operational skills and methods and to develop new standards, which enables it to adapt its policies, guidelines and operations to the changing environment for humanitarian endeavour in the various fields of assistance.

5.2.4 Partnerships

Where this sets no constraints on its independence or neutrality, the ICRC may undertake activities in partnership with one or more other actors, in particular other components of the Movement. This will be done where the ICRC does not have sufficient capacity, where other actors are in a better position to respond to the problems or where this is the preferred course of action. Particular attention will be paid to maintaining and developing the capacity of National Societies working in their own country.

5.2.5 Diversification of activities

Diversification may be considered where the above-mentioned core activities do not meet the needs identified in the most appropriate manner or where there is no possibility of a partnership. Any diversification must be regarded as a new activity and may be considered where:

- the gravity of the problem demands action;
- other actors are unable or unwilling to meet the needs identified;
- the ICRC has access to the necessary specialized knowledge;
- this diversification does not jeopardize the ICRC's core activities;
- these new activities promise to be carried out in an effective and efficient manner.

5.2.6 Other parameters to be considered

Action may also be considered where:

- assistance activities can serve as a launching pad for protection;
- assistance activities facilitate the positioning and promote the acceptability of the ICRC.

Should the ICRC decide to act on the basis of any of these parameters, it must take into account the possible longterm implications of the programme and consider only core activities.

5.2.7 Feasibility of action

The following factors are taken into consideration in order to gauge an operation's chances of success:

- how the operation will be received;
- the national legal framework;
- security conditions;
- human, financial and logistical resources;
- compatibility with the ICRC's management framework.

5.3. Implementation

The ICRC adapts its response to the situation.

In acute crises, the ICRC seeks to maintain a rapid response operational capacity. This will help strengthen its identity as an organization that works in close proximity to the affected groups and is effective in dealing with emergencies, while at the same time taking security constraints into account.

In pre-crisis situations, the ICRC takes action insofar as possible to prevent what could be a disaster in humanitarian terms, either by supporting existing systems or by mobilizing other entities to do so.

In chronic crises, the ICRC focuses on finding sustainable solutions to the problems it encounters. In particular, it explores the possibility of handing over its programmes to the authorities concerned — by strengthening the capacity of their services — or to other organizations. In cases where it has a residual responsibility,¹³ the ICRC continues its activities.

In post-crisis situations, the ICRC shoulders its residual responsibilities.

5.3.1 Water and habitat

Water and habitat programmes are designed to ensure access to safe water (for both drinking and household use) and to a safe living environment. The ultimate aim is to help reduce the rates of mortality and morbidity and the suffering caused by the disruption of the water supply system or damage to the habitat. Access to water and housing is problematic both during and after a conflict.

In situations of acute crisis, sources of water are sometimes deliberately targeted. People may be forced to leave their homes to go and look for water in a hostile environment, or water supply systems may have been damaged by fighting, or be inaccessible for other reasons. The ICRC ensures access to water and safe environmental sanitation conditions and helps basic health care facilities by means of emergency action and support for existing facilities.

In emerging crises, chronic crises and post-crisis situations, the ICRC's priority is to support and strengthen existing structures through specific programmes that meet the needs of the population in a viable, sustainable manner.

¹³ The ICRC has a residual responsibility towards the persons it has assisted during a conflict, particularly those who may be endangered by a cessation of its work or those the ICRC knew would need a long-term commitment when it began its work. See the ICRC policy paper on *ICRC Action in periods of transition* (2003).

5.3.2 Economic security

The main purpose of economic security programmes is to preserve or restore the ability of households affected by armed conflict to meet their essential needs.

In acute crises, when the means of production can no longer ensure subsistence, the ICRC provides the relief (food and essential household items) needed to sustain life and facilitate resumed production, chiefly through the distribution of agricultural equipment and supplies.

In emerging crises, chronic crises and post-crisis situations, the ICRC's priority is to support and bolster the means of production through programmes tailored to the local economy. These programmes mainly concern: reviving agriculture, livestock health and management, and microeconomic initiatives. The ICRC provides other components of the Movement with opportunities to become involved in economic security activities in these situations. It must give special attention to cooperation with National Societies working in their own country.

5.3.3 Health

ICRC activities to promote health are designed to ensure that the affected groups have access to basic preventive and curative care meeting universally recognized standards. To this end, the organization assists local or regional health services, which it sometimes has to replace temporarily.

In emerging or acute crises, when access to medical facilities and the provision of health care are at risk, the ICRC provides support for basic health services, pre-hospital care (first aid and medical evacuation) and emergency hospital care. The basic services are selected from among the components of primary health care:¹⁴ outpatient curative care using essential drugs, mother and child care, vaccination campaigns, and dealing with the consequences of sexual violence. Hospital care focuses on the management of emergencies in the fields of surgery, paediatrics, obstetrics and internal medicine.

In chronic crises and post-crisis situations, the ICRC may consider providing support for a broader range of primary health care activities than those cited above. These may include expanded immunization programmes, the

¹⁴ Primary health care is a process in which the community takes part. Carried out in consultation with civil society, it aims to assess health related needs and to implement health activities in the following fields: (1) ambulatory health care using essential drugs; (2) mother and child care, including family planning; (3) expanded immunization programmes; (4) programmes to fight communicable diseases; (5) health and hygiene promotion; (6) health education; (7) mental health; (8) water; and (9) nutrition.

promotion of health and hygiene and expanded hospital care. It may also take steps to strengthen hospital management. More diversified services are thus provided in the fields of surgery, paediatrics, obstetrics and internal medicine.

Whatever the degree of crisis:

- war wounds may lead to amputation or other serious disabilities, which are dealt within the framework of physical rehabilitation programmes;
- the ICRC guarantees access to basic health care, prevents ill-treatment in places of detention and helps fight epidemics. In the longer term, it endeavours to consolidate health care systems in places of detention by strengthening the management ability of the authorities concerned.

6. Operational directives

6.1. Involving the affected group in programme planning and management

Insofar as possible, the affected group must be involved in identifying its own needs and in designing and implementing programmes to meet those needs. The ICRC acts to build the capacity of competent local bodies capable of taking responsibility for assistance activities or playing an active part in the ICRC's work.

6.2. Assessing the situation — integrated needs and background analysis

The assessment of assistance needs must be based on an information network that is as broad as possible and must include a wide range of issues and areas of endeavour. These must encompass not only assistance related areas of activity, but also those relating to protection of the group concerned and security. Various possible scenarios should be taken into account (for example, "what is likely to happen if no assistance is provided"). Staff in charge of assistance should contribute to the delegation's overall analysis of the situation, and they in turn will benefit from it.

6.2.1 Initial assessment of needs: According to the integrated approach, these must be carried out jointly by representatives of the health, water and habitat, and economic security programmes, and representatives of other programmes involved. The priorities of the ICRC and the delegation concerned must always be taken into consideration.

6.2.2 Assessment methods: These must, insofar as possible, be compatible with those of other actors. This compatibility provides a basis for a comparison of data over time and in different places, and considerably facilitates adaptation to changing circumstances and situations.

6.2.3 Assessment partners: Assessments may be carried out jointly with other humanitarian organizations pursuing similar objectives, where this in no way limits the ICRC's independence or affects the nature of the data collected, security conditions or access to the people in need.

6.2.4 Assessment reports: These must contain timely, concise information that facilitates the planning and implementation of appropriate responses to needs. In addition, they must provide information on the delegation's overall action strategy. Information on health, water, sanitation and economic security may be shared with the other humanitarian organizations involved and with the authorities concerned, except for data relating to security and politically sensitive or protected data.

6.3. Planning assistance programmes and projects

In designing assistance programmes and projects, ICRC staff must respect the methods laid down in the ICRC's "Planning for Results" (PFR) process. In the case of programmes or projects that are to last more than 12 months, the duration should be taken into account in the initial planning document while steps are taken to ensure the flexibility needed to respond to any changes in the situation. In such cases, the resources required (human, financial, logistical, etc.) must be planned and explicitly stated for the entire duration of the proposed programmes.

It is vital, in the case of longer-term programmes or projects, for the ICRC to work as closely as possible with local partners and in so doing to emphasize capacity building and sustainability. Long-term programmes or projects should fit in with the policies of the authorities concerned. The ICRC's planning must also take into account the activities of components of the Movement working in coordination with it and those of other international organizations, especially those involved over the long term.

6.4. Implementation

The ICRC must have the skills and logistical capacity needed to carry out its core activities rapidly and effectively. Activities undertaken with government or private entities (for example ministries or community associations) must, wherever possible, be the subject of a formal agreement in writing. The same goes for components of the Movement.

6.5. Entry and exit strategies

Entry and exit strategies must be provided for in the initial plans and, for exit strategies in particular, must be drawn up together with the other actors concerned. This will promote community participation and support for the programme, right from the start, and will make it possible to identify in good time potential partners for the exit process later on. Exit strategies must be transparent and flexible. If it is impossible to adopt a strategy providing for the handover of activities, the ICRC may retain some degree of residual responsibility for the group it is assisting, or may find solutions with one or more components of the Movement who wish to be involved in the medium term, thereby maximizing the potential for complementarity within the Movement.

6.6. Monitoring

From the beginning, a system is put in place for situation monitoring and performance monitoring to ensure the systematic and continuous assessment of progress over time in using selected indicators. This monitoring system will promote timely and appropriate decision making.

6.7. Review and evaluation

Monitoring must be supplemented by reviews and independent evaluations. These are intended to draw lessons that can be used to improve policies and practices, and help enhance the organization's overall performance, transparency and accountability.

7. Conclusion

The present Assistance Policy reflects the need to have a simple, consistent framework that will allow for effective consultation and decision making while at the same time remaining sufficiently flexible to take account of the current and future complexity of the situations in which the ICRC works. The Policy reconciles these two needs by channelling them into a logical and transparent decision making process.