

Evaluation report

Confidence in Recovery

Implemented by CARE
Funded by the European Commission



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation, based on a review of project document, implementer and partner reports, monitoring and evaluation data, project-generated knowledge and visibility products, as well as individual and group interviews conducted during a seven-day visit to the region, looks at the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of the project Confidence in Recovery – a 22-month project funded by the European Union's Instrument for Stability, managed by CARE and implemented jointly by CARE and two national partner organisations – in Armenia, the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly-Armenia (HCA-Armenia) and in Azerbaijan the Women's Problem's Research Union (WPRU).

The project establishes Educational Clubs in communities of persons displaced by war in both Armenia and Azerbaijan and, through local activists from the target communities themselves, runs a programme of educational courses and cultural/informational programming that looks to provide beneficiaries with more opportunities to find gainful employment, more opportunities to integrate with their surrounding (host) communities, and more opportunity to gather and socialise with a view to building cohesion in order to tackle community problems together. The project also looked to encourage tolerance amongst participants towards people from the other side of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict divide by organising joint project meetings and by exchanging information about planning and lessons learned from the programming of the Educational Clubs.

The project intended to establish two Educational Clubs in Azerbaijan and one in Armenia. However, serious obstacles in Azerbaijan, and in particular the introduction of a new law on foreign-funded projects, meant only one Club was established and activities in that country were on hold for a significant part of the project. Savings made in Azerbaijan, allowed a no-cost extension of the project, during which activities in the spirit of the Educational Clubs were conducted in four new communities, in deprived areas surrounding the Educational Club in Armenia.

The evaluation commends the high level of efficiency with which the project is implemented, made possible by CARE's in-house expertise on cross-conflict work, the strength of the partnership with local implementers, and past investments made by the implementing team (CARE and partners) in activism in the target communities. It considers the project highly relevant to the mandates of the implementers, the conditions of the beneficiaries, and to the context in which it took place. It also notes the effectiveness of the approach of empowering local activists to plan and implement the local programming. It commends the project for bringing new persons from Armenia and Azerbaijan into contact with one another across conflict lines at a time of great political sensitivity. It notes that the project has had considerable impact on the participants in terms of developing organisational skills and motivation. While this impact implies sustainability of the action, the evaluator considers that sustainability may be dependent on ongoing engagement with these communities from the point of view of providing moral support.

The evaluation considers that there was not sufficient planning to mitigate the political risks that transpired in Azerbaijan, with the result that impact in that country was considerably lower than in Armenia. It further considers that the approach taken to building the capacity of the activists in target communities did not develop their analytical capacity in a way that would enable them to bring in all parts of the community. It suggests that a uniting theme to the project that ran throughout all of the activities would have contributed to greater impact as well as sustainability.

The evaluation draws lessons from the implementation of this project to make recommendations to CARE, its implementing partners, the donor, and to international



stakeholders looking to contribute to an enabling environment for a peaceful settlement of the conflict surrounding Nagorny Karabakh. It makes the following recommendations:

To CARE

- Document CARE's methodology of empowering conflict-affected communities in the South Caucasus;
- Continue to work with the four new communities in Armenia;
- Research what legal forms exist across the South Caucasus for establishing organisations and what potential they have to make an impact at a local level;
- Integrate the project's Specific Objective into the CARE Programme Theory of Change;
- Mainstream the implementing partners' expertise on cross-conflict communication as a strand of work throughout CARE's programming.

To the implementing partners

- Prepare files for each target community in line with the sustainability plan in the Description of Action;
- Research public opinion towards the Educational Clubs with a view to establishing a model for financial sustainability;
- *In cooperation with CARE*, develop a set of trainings to increase the analytical capacities of activists in the target communities.

To the European Union

- Develop quick reference information sheets on other EU-supported organisations working on conflict transformation surrounding the Nagorny Karabakh conflict.
- Prioritise work with those communities that are most impacted by the non-resolution of the protracted conflicts.

To other international donors engaged in the South Caucasus

- Consider a joint approach on how to open space in Azerbaijan for both local and international NGOs to work more effectively and without unreasonable restraints from the authorities.



INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of an external evaluation of the project Confidence in Recovery, a 22-month project funded by the European Union's Instrument for Stability, managed by CARE and implemented jointly by CARE and two national partner organisations – in Armenia, the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly-Armenia (HCA-Armenia) and in Azerbaijan the Women's Problem's Research Union (WPRU). The evaluation was carried out by Peaceful Change initiative (PCi) in the period 19 November to 19 December 2015 involving a document review, an evaluation inception meeting with CARE senior staff in the South Caucasus representative office, and a field visit to Georgia and Armenia to talk to project participants, peer organisations and other key informants such as the international donor community. This visit included full participation in the final event of the project – a regional meeting that brought together Armenian and Azerbaijani participants for a learning exchange and offered the opportunity to interact directly with the project participants. Planning and organisational pressures meant that it was not possible to visit the target communities in Armenia, and visits by the evaluator were restricted to Yerevan. Owing to the pressure under which the Azerbaijani partner was operating at the time of the evaluation, it was requested that the evaluator not travel to Azerbaijan.

Confidence in Recovery was designed to work by establishing Education Clubs (ECs) in communities of persons displaced by war, in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, which, by running a programme of educational courses and cultural/informational programming for the members of these communities would provide more opportunities for the community members to find gainful employment, more opportunities to integrate with their surrounding communities, and more opportunity to gather and socialise with a view to building cohesion in order to tackle community problems together. By working in parallel in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, the project aimed to inform project participants of progress in community development being made on the other side of the conflict divide. On three occasions during the implementation period, the project brought together the ECs' Coordination Teams and programme beneficiaries in order to exchange experiences of participating in the project and to establish relations as community activists and/or as populations affected by the unresolved conflict. In this way, the project looked to broaden the field of possible participants in Armenia-Azerbaijan peacebuilding initiatives, bringing in hitherto less-empowered sections of the population, who are also among the most affected both by the conflict and its unresolved, protracted consequences.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Confidence in Recovery was planned to run between February 2014 and May 2015. The original project foresaw working in three communities: one in Armenia, in which CARE and the local partner had considerable outreach and previous experience of collaboration, and two in Azerbaijan, of which one would be similarly familiar to CARE and the Azerbaijani partner, while another would be new and selected in consultation with the donor. This new community suffered problems in the inception phase, as it became apparent that it did not have the infrastructure to host the type of Educational Club foreseen by the project, and the decision was taken to select a new community. After three months into activities, which were initiated in one community in either country, the Government of Azerbaijan announced new regulations that would govern the way NGOs receiving grants from foreign donors are able to work within the country, which led to the freezing of the bank accounts of the partner in Azerbaijan pending the issue of a new, updated law on receiving grants. Work in Azerbaijan was, therefore, seriously hampered from April and had to take place outside of the formal framework of the project, though Azerbaijani participants were still able to take part in cross-border meetings under the project, which were held in and organised from Georgia. CARE requested a suspension of the project in Azerbaijan in December 2014 after an extended



period of no progress on the issue, and then in May 2015 submitted a request for an amendment to the project that would make use of the savings made on activities in Azerbaijan in order to strengthen the work in Armenia. For this amended implementation plan the partner in Armenia selected four new target villages in the area surrounding the original Educational Club. Activities under this extension looked to replicate the approach undertaken in the original Educational Club and also to build the capacity of active members of the community.

The revised law on working with overseas grants, entitled "Rules on Submission of Information about Amounts of Donations Received by NGOs as well as by Branches or Representations of NGOs of Foreign States and about the Donor"¹ were finally released on 13 November 2015, when the present evaluation had already been commissioned and only days before the lead evaluator's visit to the region.

¹ <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/azerbaijan.html>



SECTION ONE: ASSESSING THE RELEVANCE OF THE ACTION

The present section assesses seven different aspects of the relevance of the action. It analyses the consistency of the intervention logic by looking at the relevance of the results and activities to the stated objectives. It examines the relevance of these objectives in turn to the beneficiaries of the project and the local partners involved in implementation. It then looks at the relevance of the action as a whole to the context of the South Caucasus region and the relevance to the work of the EU in the region, looking at these areas alongside the risk analysis and assumptions in the project document. Finally, the action is contextualised in relation to the mission of CARE both as a global organisation and to its specific approaches to development in the South Caucasus.

CONSISTENCY OF INTERVENTION LOGIC

The action is divided into three separate results that focus on (Result 1) building the capacity of a defined Coordination Team, that is to run the Education Clubs; (Result 2) the success of the Educational Clubs themselves to provide their beneficiaries with marketable skills and useful contacts to improve their socio-economic conditions; and (Result 3) the success of cross-border meetings to foster learning and mutual curiosity across the conflict divide.

FROM PROJECT LOGFRAME

Overall Objective – Create fertile ground for peace initiatives to take root among conflict-affected populations on both sides of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict

Specific Objective – Educational Clubs in communities of displaced persons in Armenia and Azerbaijan create more active, informed, cohesive and tolerant communities that have more access to economic opportunities and are more integrated into mainstream society

Result 1 – Locally based coordination team of Educational Clubs have skills to engage communities, elicit needs and interests and design inclusive programs, monitor their implementation and respond to monitoring data.

Result 2 – Displaced community members build multiple skills and raise their knowledge of and contact with mainstream society through Educational Clubs' programming.

Result 3 – Displaced community members learn from clubs on the other side of the conflict and from other community activists in the South Caucasus how to meet needs and interest of conflict-affected groups.

The project therefore states that by building the skills of the Coordination Team to assess needs, design responsive programming and monitor the impact of these activities, by building the vocational skills of the project beneficiaries and bringing them into contact with mainstream society; and by bringing coordination team and project beneficiaries from either side of the conflict divide together to exchange views on community building, the project would transform the social economic environment of the target communities, which are settled by persons displaced by the war of the early 1990s, in such a way that it would lay the foundation for their residents to be more effectively engaged in peacebuilding in the future.

The consistency of the three Results appears to be theoretically sound, with Result 1 contributing the 'active' and 'cohesive' dimensions of the Specific Objective, Result 2 covering 'more informed' and Result 3 aiming at 'more tolerant'. On closer inspection, the theoretical separation between the participants in the Educational Clubs' activities under Result Two and the members of the Coordination Team, who are themselves members of the target communities, may in practice become difficult to maintain. What is more, no clarifications were made in this regard with the introduction of four new target communities



in Armenia as the Coordination Team from the original target community was expected to work there, as well as new activists identified in the start up to this new phase of the project.

RELEVANCE OF THE ACTION TO THE IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

The action brought CARE together with implementing partners with whom they already had a history of collaboration dating back to 2010, and the two partners themselves have years of contact and collaboration prior to that, meaning that the project was founded on firm mutual understanding of priorities and approaches. The implementing partner in Armenia is a human rights organisation whose head is also active as a trainer with specific expertise in community mobilisation. The Azerbaijani partner specialises on women's empowerment through both training and advocacy. Both organisations have different aspects of peacebuilding in their respective organisations' mission statements. Both organisations have a long record of bringing together Armenians and Azerbaijanis to build relations across conflict lines and consider the preparation of participants for such meetings to be one of their specific areas of expertise. In the case of the Armenian partner, in particular, continuing to find ways of transcending the conflict divide is a specific area of interest:

Our own particular interest is to continue to engage with Azerbaijanis, and it is a concern that the opportunities to do so are rarer and rarer. There was a time when we were conducting such work in the hope of finding a way for peace. Now we look at it as essential just to avoid falling back into war. This threat makes it more urgent that we continue this work.

- *Nataliya Martirosyan, Head of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly - Armenia*

The two partners have worked together in the format of a regional project on promoting UN Security Council 1325 on women, peace and security in the South Caucasus region, which led to the creation of a set of teaching materials available in Armenian and Azerbaijani (and Georgian) for peacebuilding, community mobilisation and similar subjects relevant to UNSC 1325, which they are able to implement in parallel projects. Both heads of organisations are prominent spokespeople for the inclusion of women in peace process and regular invitees to international events on UNSC 1325. They also worked together in partnership with CARE in the larger regional project *Strengthening women's capacity for peace building in the South Caucasus region*, which worked in two of the target regions selected for the present action and established some of the main methods of work outlined in the project proposal. Both partners are members of the Civil Minsk Group, which looks to provide the Minsk Process, which is accompanying the search for a peaceful resolution to the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, with a second track in order to generate new options for proposed solutions.

The action's focus on marketable skills, as found under Result 2, lies somewhat beyond the expertise of both organisations. While representations of both organisations indicated that providing livelihood options is an important way to engage marginalised communities in this kind of work, and their organisations contained the community mobilisation skills necessary to initiate such work, this did not constitute a key area of work for either organisation.

RELEVANCE TO THE NEEDS OF FINAL BENEFICIARIES

The action promotes several specific areas of improvement, each of which may be perceived by the final beneficiaries, displaced persons in Armenia and Azerbaijan, of different levels of relevance. The two key communities were already well known to CARE and the implementing partners, having been included in the earlier project *Strengthening women* and been the subject of participative action research exercises, through which activists identified areas for engagement.



At the level of the Overall Objective, the action is looking to find ways of opening up new channels across the conflict divide, with a view to contributing to a peaceful settlement. Prima facie, this may be seen to speak to the priorities of Azerbaijanis. Polling data has consistently placed 'unresolved territorial conflicts' as the most important issue to the population, and the latest poll (2013), sees this as the runaway leading issue with 38% saying that it is the most important issue facing the country (unemployment came in second at 25%). At the same time, it is not clear that dialogue with the other side is seen as the most appropriate approach. Indeed, international organisations working in the area have highlighted the difficulties they have in finding participants for such cross-divide meetings, engagement with the other side is openly discouraged at the official level, and there have been high-level arrests of activists known to have contact with Armenians. From the Armenian side, 'unresolved territorial conflicts' only poll at 3% as the most important issue facing the country, with unemployment overtaking all other issues by far. Given the above situation, the action can be seen as taking a covert approach to peacebuilding, with both CARE and the implementing partners identifying the need to maintain contact and improve relations across the conflict divide and looking to convince the communities of this same need.

At the level of Specific Objective the actions looks to create more access to economic opportunities for the members of the community. With official statistics putting unemployment among IDPs in Azerbaijan at three times the unemployment rate of the general population² and a similar rate among the general population in Armenia, access to economic opportunities is at the forefront of concerns for the target areas. The newly selected villages in the project were selected for the presence of refugees, their depressed economic situation, and for their isolation from the urban centre.

The Specific Objective also speaks about the integration of the target population into mainstream society. This need had been established through CARE's earlier work in the communities, as well as by some of its broader programmatic work with displaced communities in the South Caucasus (especially in Georgia), which shows that rather than assets and skills, such communities often experience a greater lack in the support networks, the informational channels, and the contacts in different areas that create opportunities. The project looks to speak specifically to this need.

RELEVANCE TO THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE REGION

The three major themes treated by the project are issues that international agencies have attempted to have an impact on for a period of over 20 years: opportunities for employment and personal growth, development of civic activism, integration of persons displaced by war, and re-building relations between societies on either side of a protracted conflict.

While socio-economic issues consistently rank as questions of the highest concern in polling in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, the question of work with the displaced communities is of different significance in the two countries. Whereas in Azerbaijan persons displaced from Nagorny Karabakh and surrounding territories constitutes a significant part of the population who maintain the status of IDPs and a high profile in the consciousness of the overall population (Azerbaijan has one of the highest proportions of displaced persons in the world), in Armenia the majority of persons displaced from Azerbaijan after the collapse of the Soviet Union were given full citizenship and a form of resettlement package, which meant that they had no official status as displaced persons. Many of these families came from urban settings and were resettled into rural areas. This, together with the general socio-economic difficulties

² <http://www.internal-displacement.org/europe-the-caucasus-and-central-asia/azerbaijan/2014/azerbaijan-after-more-than-20-years-idps-still-urgently-need-policies-to-support-full-integration/>



faced by the Armenian population as a whole, meant that they faced considerable challenges to integration that remain to this day. However, former Armenian refugees are unlikely to receive the same attention from relief and development organisations as displaced persons elsewhere in the region. Their relevance to this project is rather through their former connections to Azerbaijan or their status as victims of the conflict.

Of key import is the extent to which the project's attempt to contribute to an enabling environment for conflict resolution makes was appropriate for the time at which the project was implemented. The project began at a time when events in Azerbaijan demonstrated a clear worsening dynamic with respect to the freedom to act of civic organisations, with many of the individuals involved openly accused of inappropriate connections with Armenia. In such an environment, the project's overall objective to 'make a contribution to widening the space within society for more people to become engaged in peace building initiatives', while in some ways a modest target may nevertheless be seen as a maximalist statement of intent in the specific context that was taking place at the time the project started and which continued to deteriorate over the implementation period, partly under the influence of the crisis in Ukraine over its association with the European Union.

RELEVANCE OF THE LOGFRAME ASSUMPTION AND RISK ASSESSMENT

The project logframe integrated the following assumptions into the project logic:

At the level of the Overall Objective

- No renewal of hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan during the project implementation period

At the level of the Specific Objective

- Communities are not re-settled for duration of the project
- There is no deliberate agitation within communities against engaging with initiatives that involved participants from the other side of the conflict

At the level of Expected Results

- Members of the Coordination Team do not migrate from target areas
- Members of target communities can be convinced to take proactive steps to build relations with people in surrounding areas
- 10 months is sufficient time to build interest of target communities in each other's work across conflict lines.

Further, the Description of the Action, which gives a narrative explanation of the above assumptions, states that 'it was assumed that there will not be a dramatic decline in the conditions for national and international organisations to function in these countries and that there are no new requirements or arrangements concerning organisations' ability to work in the regions.

The above assumptions can be seen as those factors that the project implementers see as beyond their control, or else 'calculated risks'. There is no assessment of the likelihood or impact of these risks and there are no mitigation strategies to manage them. It can be inferred that the assessed likelihood for each of these risks is low, since in some cases these could put an end to the project as a whole.

In this context, the project did not have a strategy to adapt to the realities of the drastic deterioration in environment for implementers in Azerbaijan, which coincided with the project's implementation period. The implementers could consider that this was extremely



bad luck. However, the environment for engagement in Azerbaijan, especially in projects that target the Nagorny Karabakh issues had been deteriorating consistently at least since 2011, as evidenced by changes in visa regulations, parliamentary bills targeting persons who had visited the territory of Nagorny Karabakh, the blacklisting of specific individuals, the expulsion and harassment of international NGOs, and a spate of arrests of individuals with connections to Armenia. While CARE's implementing partner had no record of government dissent and, on the contrary, was seen as having strong government relations, and had already successfully partnered with CARE on a project in a similar (and more controversial) format, more far-reaching restrictions on NGO activities could have been anticipated. While CARE appears to have reviewed a number of options for continuing operations, including seeking advice from other international organisations faced with similar problems and engaging directly with Azerbaijani officials responsible for this area, anticipating the possibility of such an eventuality earlier at the design stage could have laid the ground for a contingency plan that could have taken advantage of CARE's position in Georgia as an easily accessible meeting place for both Armenians and Azerbaijanis. There were successful examples from other implementing organisations that the evaluator spoke to of continuing to work with Azerbaijanis in Georgia.

The Description of the Action contains a more detailed assessment of risks related to each activity. These are:

Activity	Risks	Corrective measures
A1.1 Purchase equipment to set up Educational Clubs.	No associated risks	
A1.2 Information meeting and action research exercises in Ramana to identify Coordination Team members	Low participation and interest in first meeting. Action research receives negative response	- Proper preparation will be conducting, including through influential persons in Ramana. It may be necessary to conduct an additional meeting to reach enough people at the opening stage. The travel budget foresees the possibility of additional trips - Approaches to action research have been tested previously to make them acceptable. In case of great resistance, as an extreme measure a light version of the research could be conducted by a smaller community sample in the partners' office in Baku.
A1.3 Ongoing accompaniment by project partners of design implementation and review of Educational Clubs activity programs	Lack of commitment by Coordination Team members in the work of the Clubs	- Adequate preparation of this component has been planned. It may be necessary to change the members of the Coordination Team during the project.
A1.4 Accompaniment and mentorship of Ramana Coordination Team to build capacity in organisation and community outreach	Lack of motivation of Coordination Team members	- Adequate preparation of this component has been planned. It may be necessary to change the members of the Coordination Team during the project.
A1.5 Compile the results of the monitoring and evaluation data gathered over the course of the project to seek to leverage other resources from both the private and public sectors to support the clubs' activities in the future	Poor quality of material being gathered at the level of the Coordination Teams.	- Particularly intensive work will be carried out in the first months of the project to raise reporting standards.
A2.1 Organise and oversee Educational Courses that offer members of target communities marketable skills (at least two courses per week).	Difficulty in finding qualified trainers in locality of target communities.	- It may be necessary to bring experts from further afield. The consultancy budget line acts as a contingency for this eventuality.
A2.2 Organise and oversee a Cultural/ Informational Programme (film screenings, lectures, discussions, etc) that brings in knowledge and expertise from surrounding community with a view to establishing links with mainstream society.	Difficulty in attracting persons from locality of target communities to meet these communities' interests.	- The project will look to raise the status of the community with the quality of the events. In early stages, the project may bring higher profile persons from the capital in order to build visibility of the programming.



<p>A3.1 Hold two joint working group meeting/ study visits for Coordination Team members from both countries.</p>	<p>- Community members from Ramana may refuse to take part in this meeting in a bi-lateral format.</p>	<p>- The response of Ramana to the format will be gauged very carefully in the early stages of the project to ensure that controversial themes are not introduced in a way that may endanger the implementation of the project. It may be necessary to run this first workshop without participants from Ramana, if that is the assessment of the implementer in Azerbaijan at this stage of the proejct.</p>
<p>A3.2 Hold one joint workshop in Tbilisi for selected beneficiaries/ participants of the clubs to share impressions and experiences of the clubs' activities and their impact on their community.</p>	<p>- Community members may refuse to participate in such a bi-lateral format with conflicting communities - Participants may display negative attitudes towards people from the other side of the conflict at such a workshop, which may lead to disruptive behaviour.</p>	<p>- CARE is prepared to change the presentation of the format for the meeting by including the work of Georgian groups working on the same subject matter. - CARE has a developed methodology for focusing the attention of participants at such meetings on the subject matter and away from political issues, which depends on adquate preparation of the meetings.</p>
<p>A3.3 Share and translate programs and activity reports from the work of the clubs across the project areas.</p>	<p>- Community members respond negatively to seeing activities from communities from the other side of the conflict line. - Provocations are caused against participants in the project for association with the other side of the conflict</p>	<p>- This series of activities will be managed extremely carefully, with frequent testing of the political temperature. It may be necessary to lower the visibility of the activity manuals or to incorporate it with initiatives from CARE's partners' work in Georgia in order to lessen the edge of the bi-lateral format of the project.</p>

While this assessment sets out corrective measures related to each risk, these are not evaluated for either likelihood or impact. Since the activities have largely been tested in previous project work with the two partners, the corrective measures lay out CARE's learning to date on how to work with conflict-affected communities. As in the case of the logframe assumptions, the risk assessment failed to take into account a key unknown factor, which did, in fact, force a change in the implementation of the project – the lack of adequate facilities in the community of Ramana.

RELEVANCE TO CARE'S OVERALL PROGRAMMING

CARE International in the Caucasus (CIC) operates a programme that looks to integrate programming (projects) and build alliances with partners to achieve the following Impact Goal: Rural poverty, vulnerability and social injustice in the South Caucasus is decreased and conditions for sustainable development are improved, thereby contributing to stability and peace in the region. The programme approach is an organisation-wide reform within the CARE system that seeks to look beyond the limited-term impact of projects and to conceptualise how longer-term impact goals can be achieved (CIC aspires to achieve its Impact Goal over 20 years – approximately by the year 2031). It consists of a number of components that are used to plan and evaluate how the organisation's activities are moving towards the Impact Goal³.

These are:

Impact Groups

This is the population whose lives should be improved as a result of CARE's work. For the CIC the impact group is rural households with income below the poverty line or at risk of falling below it. For more precise targeting, this is further divided into four subgroups:

³ http://care-caucasus.org.ge/uploads/reports/Report_on_Social_Injustices_for_Rural_Poor_in_SC_09-01-14-FINAL.pdf



- socially and economically marginalized people cut off from markets and services;
- people affected by or vulnerable to political instability;
- young people aged 18 to 31; and
- women.

Domains of Change

This is the specific areas in which change needs to be achieved in order to achieve the impact goal. In the case of CIC, it views its Domains of Change as:

- governance;
- civil society;
- market linkages and market response; and
- conflict prevention and security.

Theory of Change

The Theory of Change is series of logical steps that demonstrates how concrete actions (stepways) and results (breakthroughs) in the Domains of Change will lead towards achieving the impact goal. While stepways take place within a specific Domain of Change, breakthroughs generally result from several actions aiming towards a similar result and may cut across different Domains of Change.

The present action is consistent with the overall CARE International in the Caucasus approach of linking development with peace and stability. The action works with conflict-affected populations (IDPs and refugees) and focuses on women as the agents of change in the target communities, therefore bringing in two of the Programme's sub-Impact Groups. The action is also relevant to two Domains of Change. It is looking to broaden civil society activity (Domain 2) and to work in the area of conflict prevention and security (Domain 4). The project's attempts to improve the employability of the target population through vocational training may lead to the development of entrepreneurship that could qualify it under Domain 3 (market linkages and market response), though this is a secondary consideration.

Despite a good fit between the general approaches and key stakeholders of the action and the CIC Programme approach, there is no part of the Programme Theory of Change that is reflected in the action's programme logic. The first-level breakthrough that CIC's Theory of Change looks to achieve is 'De-escalation of conflict rhetoric by civil society and decision makers'. Not only does this not feature in the present action or any other actions recently undertaken by CIC, but it also does not appear to reflect CIC's strengths of working with rural communities or CARE's global focus of working with the poorest.

In addition to the Programme, CARE has developed a business model that seeks to look beyond traditional institutional funding, but rather to 'position CIC as the key node amongst actors in the South Caucasus'.

The CIC Business Model

With its experience and extensive understanding of the region, CIC will leverage its network of partners and allies as opportunity scouts to recognize and support local entrepreneurs.

First, CIC intends to identify social entrepreneurs among the local population with innovative ideas for how to realize social change.

After finding social entrepreneurs, CIC will vet their ideas and build local capacity to transform the ideas into social enterprises—commercially managed businesses that also create social value and reinvest revenue back into the community to address injustice and local need.



To support these enterprises, CIC will leverage its networks, experience, and expertise to conduct advocacy and remove policy barriers to social change. After identifying ideas and fostering their transformation into feasible business plans, CIC will act as translator to communicate these ideas to potential partners, government officials, allies, and funders. Funders will include institutional donors, philanthropists, private corporations with corporate social responsibility mandates, and individual investors. CIC will liaise between donors and local entrepreneurs to verify that entrepreneurs get a good deal, to facilitate the transactions, to troubleshoot the relationship, and to ensure that both sides follow through on their commitments.

The project is consistent with the 'business model' in as much as it looks to seek out agents for change in the South Caucasus and build their skills to transform their own societies.



SECTION TWO: WHAT HAS BEEN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ACTION?

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS EMPOWERED TO MAKE AN IMPACT ON THEIR COMMUNITIES' LIVES?

Responses from participants and beneficiaries throughout the project indicated a strong sense of empowerment on every level. Core Coordination Teams in each of primary target communities, Sandi Dzor settlement in Goris, Armenia, and Kizil Kum IDP collective centre in Pirshagi, Azerbaijan, consisted of four people who worked consistently on mobilising communities around the activities of the Educational Clubs. In the case of Kizil Kum, in Azerbaijan, where activities had to be formally stopped after a mere 3 months of work, the group continued to work under its own resources. In total, eleven local events, engaging 225 people, were held in this community. In Sandi Dzor, 24 community events were held, engaging a total of 905 persons. In addition, another five events took place in three of the four new target villages (Khot, Shinuhayr and Artashen), taking in 216 new participants.

Interviews with the beneficiaries of the events revealed broader changes. While the structure of the project distinguished between Coordination Teams and participants, with the Coordination Team members seen as the implementers, accompanied by the local partners in designing and organising the programming, group interviews showed that participants in the events did not see themselves as mere consumers of the programming:

A lot of problems have been solved in the community since the project started. We have started to think in a different way. We have become more analytical and started to think about how we can solve the problems that we meet with.

- *Community member, Kizil Kum IDP settlement, Pirshagi, Azerbaijan*

Since the programme started, we have received a lot of active suggestions on what kind of programmes need to be run in the region.

- *Community member, Shinuhayr village, Armenia*

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED BASED ON THE INDICATORS DEFINED IN THE PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOGICAL FRAMEWORK?

While the organisational success of the Coordination Team are significant, the project logframe evaluates the success of the capacity building of the Team (Result 1) not in terms of their ability to deliver the programming, but in their ability to foster balanced inclusion in the programming. From the point of view of gender balance, the project aimed that 'at least 40% and maximum 60% of participants in each of the Educational Clubs' (Logframe Indicator 1.1) annual activity plan are women'. In actual fact, women were overwhelmingly overrepresented in both the trainings and the cultural programmes. In Armenia, for those areas where data on individual participants is available (accurate demographic data was not logged for the larger community events), monitoring shows that 84% of participants were women. In Azerbaijan, there was a similar imbalance, with 75% of participants being female.

Interviews with members of the Coordination Team in Armenia showed that achieving such balance was not seen as a priority. Decisions on which trainings should be included in the programme were partly informed by the initiative of the Coordination Team members to consult with the local employment centre, which helped to identify which skilled vacancies exist in the area. The most consistent channel of information to the Coordination Team about the attitudes of men towards the Educational Clubs seemed to come from spouses of women who were actively participating in the Clubs' events. These indicated that there was



a certain amount of suspicion towards the Clubs, especially in the villages, where it was not understood why they are providing services for free.

The implementing partner in Armenia did look to identify ways to engage men in the activities, and in particular in the trainings. Staff of the partner tried several options, including jewellery making and car mechanics as options to specifically meet the needs and interests of men, and while at different stages of preparation there appeared to be interest, in the final delivery of the activities men decided not to engage.

In the case of Azerbaijan, the Coordination Team took a narrower approach to identifying training needs. The Team members looked specifically to meet those gaps in their community's needs that are left by the government as a result of the community's status as an IDP settlement and not fully integrated into mainstream society. While this is a logical and admirable goal, it was not likely to meet the objectives of the project as set out in the logframe, since it preselected certain groups for the programming. The first round of courses (English language), were targeted specifically at school-leavers, who would need to develop in this area for their final exams. This responded to an identified need in support schooling for people to pass state exams. The second class, in Information Technology, was made available only to staff at the local school, who had specific need of this on account of the computerisation that was being introduced in the school system. After the completion of these two rounds of training, the project had to be frozen, meaning that there was not the opportunity to engage other parts of the community.

In addition to aiming at gender balance, the project had the aim that 'programming of Educational Clubs responds to the needs of different age groups proportionally to their representation in their target communities' (Logframe Indicator 1.2). In implementation, actual participation was not evenly spread among different age groups, with the Clubs in Armenia appearing to have greater success among the 'young adult' category (18-30), while the Club in Azerbaijan attracted more people from the 31-50 category.

The Coordination Team in Sandi Dzor did try specific strategies to engage the elderly, who, they had noted, were very active in terms of suggesting ideas for the community but were not able to participate until something was specifically developed for them. It should be noted, that in both countries the programming for the Educational Clubs was largely developed based on meetings between the Coordination Team and general discussions of needs. Given the indicators set in the project document, a more scientific approach, relying on surveying of the residents, might have been a more appropriate approach which, at the same time, would have built a database for the activists to use to attract other possible resources. This, however, would likely have required specific training of the activists, which was not foreseen in this project, which was limited in time and resources.

Finally, the logframe looked for the project to achieve outreach in the communities it was working in by having 'at least 60% of the population of the target communities aware of the existence of the Educational Clubs and the activities that they conduct' (Logframe Indicator 1.3). Organisational limitations of the evaluation meant that it was not possible to conduct a full survey on the issue. However, the small size and high attendance of events in Sandi Dzor means it is reasonable to state that this was over achieved. This is similar for the community of Kizil Kum. It is unlikely that this was achieved in the new villages, which have a higher population and are less compact than the two IDP settlements. However, the amount of time that was spent there was short, and indications from residents of these villages whom the evaluator spoke to indicate that the Clubs caught the attention of the community.

In our case, coming across a project like this was unexpected. The village is very isolated, and we were surprised to be invited to the information meeting that presented the project, but there was a lot of interest for that reason.

- *Project participant, Karashen village, Armenia*



There was a lot of talk in the village about the project after it became known that some of us would be travelling to Georgia. After that there was a lot of interest.

- *Project participant, Khot village, Armenia*

Logframe indicators for Result 2, about the impact of the Educational Clubs focused again on inclusion, as well as the success of the programming to improve beneficiaries' wellbeing and integration. Indicator 2.1 states 'every need or interest that at least 20% of the community articulate a demand for is met either through educational courses or the cultural/ educational programme'. No baseline or ongoing monitoring data was available on the interests of the community members. This indicator overlaps somewhat with the spirit of the indicators of Result 1. In the planning of the vocational trainings, this may have been the most effective approach since trainings were not only well attended, but also led to the creation of concrete economic opportunities for the participants (see Impact section of this report). In the case of the informational/cultural activities, however, the programming of the cultural centres might have benefited from a more structured approach in eliciting interest from the target communities. These events were well attended in Armenia, with tens of people at most events and a diverse range of activities, that included film showings, community clean ups, painting and photography exhibitions, and musical evenings. In Azerbaijan, the majority of these events were roundtable discussions on subjects that had been introduced to the community through their previous collaboration with CARE under the *Strengthening women* project: women's leadership, UNSC 1325, conflict resolution, etc. These themes were also evident in the Armenian cultural programme, suggesting that UNSC 1325 is seen as an important binding theme for their work in this format, even though it was not directly related to the work of this project.

Indicator 2.2 states that 'at least 75% of project beneficiaries consider skills and knowledge received as useful to improving their wellbeing.' The concrete case studies documented in project reports and interviews conducted by the evaluator give an indication of the extent to which the learned skills were applied. The approach taken in Azerbaijan to organising the trainings meant that they specifically met the needs of the participants at the time that they took them. This was seen as particularly important for the school leavers who took the courses in English:

There is an opportunity in our community to attend the 'lyceum' or the 'technikum'. In the first case you need to achieve higher grades, and passing the English exam is essential. Generally speaking most people try to avoid the technikum as it doesn't open the door to government jobs, which are seen as the most stable. Also, you don't have much prospect of career progress with a technikum education, and this is reflected in the wages that you see.

- *Coordination Team member, Kizil Kum IDP settlement, Pishagi, Azerbaijan*

In Armenia, a wide range of trainings was conducted and people appear to have been taken on a more open basis. Training in hairdressing skills was conducted in every community, and in each area at least one person has begun to practice. In general this has begun with cutting hair for neighbours and being paid small amount or in kind. However, there is also a case of a family making the investment of purchasing equipment and converting part of the house into a salon in order to carry out the work professionally. In addition to the income, all of those involved were also enthused by the ability to go out, learn and to put their learning into practice.

The classes in English language were seen as important for the participants and opened doors:

Our city is a tourist centre, so there is always an opportunity to practice English, which is an international language of communication. Even for me, working in a café, I am seen as a more valuable member of staff for



being able to speak to customers in English. English is not generally available in our school system, as everyone is required to study German.

- *Community member, Goris city, Armenia*

Indicator 2.3 stated 'at least four Club events are 30% attended by people from outside the target communities'. While participation in Educational Club events was well monitored, it was not possible for the team to monitor this information, especially in the case of the larger cultural events, where the Team was not able to log the exact number of participants or where they came from. Interviewed participants in Armenia were not able to say whether the participants in events in Sandi Dzor engaged outsiders. However, in addition to those events that were held on the territory of Sandi Dzor (in the physical space of the Club), eight other events were held in the city of Goris engaging 194 people. It is likely that this would have contained a high number of people from outside of the Sandi Dzor settlement.

In the case of Azerbaijan, while, again, there is not concrete data, events were held in partnership with surrounding areas, especially with neighbouring schools. It can reasonably be surmised that interaction between the 'host' community and the IDPs was of a reasonable level at these events. In addition, there were concrete examples in both Armenia and Azerbaijan of professionals brought in for cultural and informational programmes maintaining contacts and opening doors for members of the target communities. In Azerbaijan, a university lecturer from Baku held a university place for a young man from the Kizil Kum community when he saw his art at an event held in the community. In Armenia, the teacher in table setting design made a job offer to one of her students from the target communities. No indicators were ascribed to such examples, but these are important instances of more contact between displaced and host communities building networks that help improve well-being.

Result 3, which focused on the work of the cross-conflict meeting, looked at the extent of idea exchange and increase in tolerance. Indicator 3.1 set the aim that 'by the end of the project, each Club adopts at least 2 ideas from Clubs on the other side of the conflict'.

Unfortunately, owing to the new constraints from the Azerbaijan government, the format for idea exchange was severely compromised after the first quarter of work. The Armenian side continued to prepare and share its activity plans and reports with the Azerbaijani participants. However, with the mounting pressure being put on activists seen to be associated with relations with Armenia (at least three significant figures were jailed in the project implementing period on the charge of spying for Armenia), the Azerbaijani recipients of these plans were not able to disseminate them more widely in their own communities.

On the Armenian side, there was clearly more flexibility to engage with the issue of relations with Azerbaijan, and interviews with project participants validated the soundness of the general approach of attempting to maintain contacts through an exchange of practice:

Everyone was very interested in what the Azerbaijani side had to show, and for us it was also a stimulus to work better. We wanted to see what they had done so that we can do something even better.

- *Exchange participant, Sandi Dzor settlement, Goris, Armenia*

Comparing the activity programmes of the Coordination Teams on the two sides of the conflict it is clear that there are many activities in common, including roundtables on conflict themes and the celebration of UN dates. In interviews, Azerbaijan Coordination Team members reported that they had adopted ideas on working with youth from their exchange with Armenia. The Armenian side had received less information about the work in Azerbaijan, and it was unclear whether any actual ideas were incorporated into their programming, but the interest in the work in Azerbaijan was clearly evident.



There was evidence in progress in Indicator 3.2 – ‘participants in Clubs’ activities demonstrate an interest in meeting people from the other side of the conflict.’

I really do want to know what their views are – we only hear bad things about them from our news.

In my view, it is also good for us if they also spread information about us.

We know we have to live together.

I realised that it is possible to meet and have some kind of relations. I would never have considered this before.

- *Exchange participants, Kizil Kum settlement, Pirshagi, Azerbaijan*

The statements are noteworthy, when factoring in that in Azerbaijan the project worked with survivors of extremely violent incident in Hocali, meaning that these were particularly traumatised people and particularly sensitive to engagement with Armenians. A number of people participating in the regional meeting had family stories of loss and trauma. The same community had already worked with CARE and this combination of partner organisations to arrange cross-conflict meetings, meaning that a foundation had already been laid for better interaction with Armenians. However, opinions on such interactions were still varied.

For me they are still the enemy.

I know 49 people who died – we will have to live with them

The meeting was OK because we were all women. However, there were two boys on the Armenian side. I think if my sons were here, then there could have been some problems.

- *Exchange participants, Kizil Kum settlement, Pirshagi, Azerbaijan*

Interviews about the meeting also revealed that there may be shortfalls in the format to really build relations.

The meeting is OK with me because we don't have to talk to each other since we use translators. It's like we are talking to the translators instead of one another.

- *Coordination Team member, Kizil Kum settlement, Pirshagi, Azerbaijan*

The problem of translation runs deeper still. Where Russian had been the language of communication during the period of coexistence between Armenian and Azerbaijanis, the cross-border visits in this project highlighted the problems of language gaps that have grown between the people since that time. The level of Russian language among the Azerbaijani community was low, but representative of persons from the provinces. While it was higher among Armenian participants, they still preferred to give their presentations at the cross-border meetings in Armenian rather than Russian. The result was that all communication during the exchange of learning was through interpretation. In the view of Azerbaijani participants, this was also a factor in taking the edge away from the meeting, as there was not that same sense that they are engaging directly with one another, but going through an intermediary.

It was also clear that meeting with Armenians remained a controversial issue in Azerbaijan. There were specific requests on behalf of the organisers for no pictures to be taken at the regional meeting that the evaluator attended for fear that disseminated pictures could cause problems later on. In addition, the fact that the meeting was in Georgia and also



attended by Georgians was significant as it formally changed the format of the meeting from bilateral (talking with the enemy), to regional.

If there were no Georgians here, then no one would have come.

- *Coordination Team member, Kizil Kum settlement, Pirshagi, Azerbaijan*

From the Armenian side, participants declared a more flexible position, while at the same time acknowledging barriers that need to be overcome.

There is acknowledgement that a lot of extreme positions are propagated within their own communities.

There is a lot of anxiety about the possibility of meeting with the other side, but it is generally the case that people feel calmer about it afterwards.

Initially, people who have not participated in such meetings before are not keen to talk about it. However, they tend to be more open about it afterwards.

Meeting and talking is all we can do. The two sides are not ready to do anything practical together.

There is a need to establish dialogue with the younger generation.

- *Exchange participants, different communities, Armenia*

In addition, the logframe set a third indicator on cross-conflict relations: 'Participants demonstrate more willingness to travel across conflict lines, should the opportunity arise.' It was evaluated, in consultation with the implementing partners that this question was not appropriate given the rapid deterioration of relations that had been experienced between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the previous years. Evaluating the indicator may have provided useful information to some international parties that had attempted to arrange meetings across the line of contact. However, it should be noted that all such recent attempts have been unsuccessful, and these attempts are often looked upon poorly by both sides as untimely, considering the context. While this indicator remains unchecked, the evaluator considers it reasonable to conclude that the idea of travelling across the line of contact would not be considered by any of the project participants.

HOW WAS THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE LOCAL PARTNERS AND CARE?

The 22 months of the project brings the total months of project collaboration between CARE and this combination of implementing partners up to 63 – over five years of project collaboration. It appears that CARE and the partners have a good understanding of what support they can offer to one another. For example, CARE interacted with international organisations working in the same project areas, and represented the project in Azerbaijan during the period of uncertainty concerning the ability of the project to continue there. CARE appears to trust the partners to deliver activities on time and to report accurately. The partners appear to be comfortable with the reporting requirements that CARE has for its partners.

The history of cooperation between CARE and the partners opens considerable potential for them to collaborate in the framework of the 'business model' since this, too, focuses on identifying and working with activists across the region. The partner organisation in Armenia has collaborated extensively with CARE in the format of the business model, working as a



resource person on multiple fronts (representing CARE at events in Armenia, networking, working as a trainer). In Azerbaijan, CARE and the partner are impacted by the problems experienced by all NGOs related to the overall restrictions on the work of international organisations.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ACHIEVEMENT OR NON-ACHIEVEMENT OF THE OBJECTIVES?

The success at the community level was influenced in great part by the record of consistent and supportive work already carried out in the two main target areas by the implementing partners. Members of the Coordination Team speak highly and with respect of the heads of the partner organisations, who, in turn, trust the Coordination Team to take the lead in the organisation of events. One return on this investment of time in accompanying local community groups in remote areas, is the efficiency with which such groups are then able to implement local activities. Part of the value for money achieved in running the programmes of the Educational Clubs is thanks to the strength of the team in the communities who have the appropriate contacts, the trust of the rest of the community and the knowledge of the community's needs and interests. The project did not look at further skill building of these people on the analytical dimension of the work, which was what was demanded to meet the project approach, and it is not clear whether these people would have responded well to such training.

At the level of cross-conflict engagement, a key factor was likely the expertise of the partner organisations in preparing specifically for this type of meeting, which both partner organisations have many years of experience in. Attempts to bring groups together across the conflict divide are more and more often facing difficulties, with many well-known examples of incidents that cause setbacks to processes. In addition, the partners were able to draw on the expertise of a partner organisation in Georgia, who was able not only to contribute to regional meetings with suitable experience, but also to transform a potentially confrontational bi-lateral format into a more acceptable 'South Caucasus Region format'.

CARE's established pattern of relationships and working practices with the partner organisations was the key factor in a project completing such a number of activities in such a short period of time and with so many obstacles along the way.



SECTION THREE: WHAT WAS THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ACTION?

QUALITY OF DAY-TO-DAY MANAGEMENT

The project was generally well managed, with both partner organisations satisfied with the level of support and oversight that was given by CARE. Activity reports from the partner in Armenia were submitted regularly, with detailed content on what activities were implemented, how key decisions were reached, the results of activities, and in some cases testimonies from participants in activities about their impressions and the impact it has had on their lives. Reports from Azerbaijan largely stopped after five months, in relation to the freezing of the project in that country. However, data was maintained by the partner in Azerbaijan about the activities that the Coordination Team implemented under their own initiative and full reporting was restored in the project extension period (5 months).

Planning meetings took place on a regular basis and involved both partners, despite the imbalance in the project after the events in Azerbaijan. CARE took responsibility for coordination with international partners. The Project Coordinator established a good exchange with the coordinator for Conciliation Resources project in the framework of the European Partnership for Nagorny Karabakh (EPNK) – which is the EU's main initiative to contribute to a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

WERE ACTIVITIES COST EFFICIENT?

The entire 22-month project budget was less than 152 000 euros, including indirect overhead costs, and the project was closed with a small saving (less than 1%). There were significant fluctuations between budget lines, which reflected the way in which the project was required to adapt to the new realities of a severely restricted operating environment in Azerbaijan.

The project size is clearly small considering the three-country format (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia as the location of cross-conflict meetings). As an organisation with in-house peacebuilding expertise among national staff, with specific expertise in Armenia and Azerbaijan, and located in the region, CARE may be one of the most cost-efficient organisations to conduct this form of work.

The large number of activities conducted in a short period of time demonstrates the efficiency savings that can be made through long-term investment in people in target communities.

WERE OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED ON TIME?

The original project had a challenging timetable that involved complicated start-up procedures in difficult circumstances, a fast turnover of training courses, and an intensive schedule of events. This sense of urgency was lost once the Azerbaijani side was frozen out of the project. Nevertheless, the Armenian side of the project continued at the agreed pace. With the late decision to redistribute money from Azerbaijan to Armenia, there was only a short period of time available to start up and see through activities in four new communities. This was achieved with incredible efficiency, which speaks to the organisation of the implementing partner.



WAS THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTED IN THE MOST EFFICIENT WAY, COMPARED TO ALTERNATIVES?

The evaluator was not able to identify cost efficiencies that could have been made. With human resources constituting the greatest cost, these could have been more efficiently applied if the selected community in Armenia had been closer to Yerevan. However, this would run counter to one of CARE's main themes of work, which is to work with communities from more remote areas.



SECTION FOUR: WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE ACTION?

WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT IN THE TARGET COMMUNITIES?

The project was local in its focus and did not look to make a broader impact elsewhere in the target countries, at the level of policy or in some other way to influence other events. Some progress was made in each of the indicator areas under the Specific Objective:

SO. 1 – 50% of project beneficiaries demonstrate tolerance towards people from communities on the other side of the conflict

Interviews with participants in the regional workshop have shown that while progress may be slow, contact between people from either side of the conflict divide is an indispensable first step for people to establish relationships through which they can begin considering how some kind of mutual coexistence can begin. At the same time, participants on both sides have indicated the curiosity that exists in their societies about the views and understandings of the other side, even if talking about this openly is not, as yet, socially acceptable. To this extent the project has produced at least 19 new persons who have the experience of participating in cross-conflict meetings and could be effective participants in such events in the future, should conditions in the enabling environment change.

SO. 2 – 75% of project beneficiaries actively look to capitalize on skills developed during the project.

Beneficiaries in every target community have managed to turn knowledge or contacts gained through the Educational Clubs' programming into opportunities for their own development. What is more, persons interviewed have actively made the connection between finding and taking advantage of opportunities and their own skills and initiative in contributing to the creation of these opportunities. This is a significant conceptual leap for marginalised persons in depressed and isolated areas emerging from the Soviet heritage of government paternalism. Each of the six target communities has an example of a person who has some form of income as a result of their contact with the Educational Clubs, which has not only improved their own livelihood opportunities but have also added to the stature of the Educational Clubs and their support in the community. This includes 24 participants in the knitting courses in Sandi Dzor who receive orders for their work through the Goris Women's Resource Centre, a group of beneficiaries of the table design classes, who receive orders from businesses in Goris and at hairdressing businesses in Kizil Kum and the four new target villages surrounding Goris.

SO. 3 – 30% of target community members join Educational Clubs.

There was no specific conceptualisation in the Description of Action around what might constitute membership of the Clubs. Indeed, the present indicator is the only reference to 'joining' the Clubs. This notwithstanding, different persons working around the Clubs have conceptualised their participation in different ways. In Armenia, in addition to a five-person Coordination Team (one for each of the four villages and one for Sandi Dzor), another eight persons in the community consider themselves to be Club members. In Azerbaijan, meanwhile, there is a four-person Coordination Team, plus another fourteen people who see themselves as 'activists' for the Club. In the case of Azerbaijan, in particular, where the teams responsible for realising a programme have proven their commitment by continuing activities even while not being paid, the activation of this group is significant.

SO. 4 – At least two project participants from each target community capitalise or develop relationships with guests from the cultural/ informational programme.

As mentioned in earlier section, there are concrete examples in each of the target areas of new contacts made through the project opening doors for members of the displaced communities to realise themselves.



In addition, the project has created an environment for more effective collective action. While the creation of the physical space of the Clubs may have provided additional opportunities for residents to interact, a more significant impact was likely to have been the strong personalities of key members of the Coordination Team, who have become prominent in the community and able to bring people together to find solutions to common problems. This progress is all the more significant for women, as interviewees from both target countries highlighted notable barriers to women participating in society on an equal basis:

All of the main spaces for socialising in the centre – this is mainly the café and the yard – are not considered appropriate for women. In such a situation, the Centre is one of the only places outside of the home where we can meet and talk.

- *Activist from Kizil Kum IDP centre, Pirshagi, Azerbaijan*

The educational component of the Clubs is very important. The way our community is thinking at the moment is that they shouldn't prioritise the education of girls as much as they do of boys, meaning some may not be permitted to go out of the village in order to study.

- *Coordination Team member, Sandi Dzor settlement in Goris, Armenia*

Despite the progress that has been made, all of the communities are to a great extent limited by the room for economic, political and social development of the larger development context. Of the six, Kizil Kum has perhaps the most difficult living conditions, with irregular supply of municipal services (IDPs vote for their representatives 'in exile', meaning they are distant from the local government representatives), cramped living conditions and relative isolation from the rest of the community. This is not to say that they have the worst opportunities. Indeed, many people from within the community agree that they have more opportunities than 'normal' people, as IDPs benefit from a number fee exemptions (e.g. a fee to register a business) and benefit from free education. While unemployment is high, there are a number of people with good jobs, including stable jobs in government in Baku, who have the opportunity to move to a place with better conditions. However, none of the residents of Kizil Kum are prepared to risk the possibility of losing out on compensation for their wartime losses by moving away from the IDP settlement.

In the case of Sandi Dzor, this much smaller community resides in a block especially built for refugees with the assistance of international donors. With the construction of the block a 'condominium' legal structure was set up to manage the affairs of the community. While the block is on the edge of town, which is taken by many of the residents as deliberate discrimination against them as perceived outsiders (most of the residents were displaced from Baku and have noticeably different style and behaviours from the more provincial population of Goris), the block is much better located than, for example, Kizil Kum, and a more active integration into the life of the city could realistically transform the pattern of communications between the block and the centre (under the Confidence in Recovery programme, the Coordination Team ran charter busses to bring people from the block to the centre of the city).

In the case of the new target villages (Hartashen, Karashen, Khot, Shinuhayr), the general depressed situation limits the opportunities for development. With no public transport between the villages and Goris, practically any entry-level job in the city would effectively be a subsistence wage (though some said that they would still accept this in order to build their networks). The implementing partner in Armenia, together with a team of former partners helped activists from these villages conduct participatory socio-economic assessments in each village. Such assessments had been conducted in Kizil Kum and Sandi Dzor in earlier collaborations with CARE, and the results were used to advocate for support for the community and to help activists strategise what kind of actions they could undertake to give value to the community. A presentation of the results of this research from the four new villages were planned as part of the closing event for the project. These took place after the



evaluation visit and so were not evaluated. However, these could form the basis of any future engagement between activists in the village, the implementing partners, and CARE. A longer period of engagement will be required before lasting results can be expected.



SECTION FIVE: HOW SUSTAINABLE WAS THE ACTION?

WHO OWNS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE PROJECT?

Local partners appear to be well versed in good development practice, which focuses on giving ownership of the results to the partners themselves. From the point of view of CARE and the partners the small amount of money that is made available for each activity is testament to the fact that the greater contribution is made by the Coordination Teams. However, activists in all areas clearly hold the partner organisations (and also CARE) in great esteem. Attention from the implementing partner is clearly an incentive for these teams to continue their work. The Coordination Team and activists in Azerbaijan ended the programme by developing an action plan for their further work, which includes further ideas developed on the themes presented by the project, suggesting significant ownership of the activities that they had already conducted. In Armenia, the project essentially finished by establishing two tiers of work – the original target community in Sandi Dzor, and the four new villages that were added during the no-cost extension (5 months). Significant work would still need to be conducted in order for the new communities to take ownership of this community work.

HOW SUSTAINABLE IS THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE LOCAL PARTNERS?

The local partners have many years of experience in collaborative work, which has stood the test of a number of fluctuations in the political context. It is fair to assess that they are one another's 'partner of choice' for Armenia-Azerbaijan work, and they will turn to one another when the opportunity arises for a joint call for proposals. The greatest threat to the partnership may be the deteriorating work environment for CSOs, which not only includes greater restrictions on receiving and spending grants, but also entails intimidation from official figures.

HOW SUSTAINABLE ARE THE NEWLY CREATED EDUCATIONAL CLUBS?

The sustainability strategy for the project focused on:

- The linkages created between community members and professionals encountered in the Educational Clubs' cultural programme;
- A set of knowledge products that summarise the successes of the project, which could be used to attract the resources of other potential funders;
- The skills transferred to the Coordination Team members.

In addition, the action makes reference to integrating the Clubs into CARE's wider programme, as being moved forward by the business model.

The knowledge products mentioned in the sustainability plan are based around the activity plans and activity reports that the action intended to generate in order to maintain the cross-conflict contact between the Coordination Teams. An effective monitoring system established by CARE and partners mean that the activities and their impact are extremely well documented. However, the final knowledge products discussed in the Description of Action had not been produced at the time of the evaluation, so it was not possible to evaluate whether or not this was seen as a significant contribution to empowering communities to build their own alliances.



Crucially, there was no specific strategy in the Description of the Action to build the sustainability of the structure of the Educational Clubs. Capacity building of the Coordination Team members focused on their ability to attract people to their events and to target their programming in a way that reaches all different groups within the community. A logframe indicator (SO3) aims that 30% of target community members join Educational Clubs, though nowhere else in the description document is there any explanation of what 'joining' might mean. Some form of strategy to develop the idea of Club membership, entailing some form of work contribution to the running of the Club or, where possible, even a monetary contribution, might have constituted a successful exit strategy for the project. However, this would have had to have been integrated into the accompaniment of the Coordination Team and included some dedicated training in this area. While an opportunity may have been missed to explore such a model for sustaining local initiative groups in small communities, this is justifiable considering the small size of the project overall.

The experience of the Coordination Team in Sandi Dzor, with which CARE and the local partner in Armenia already had more than three years of experience of collaboration, demonstrates the limitations of providing this form of continuous support for the same community without more fundamental changes in the enabling environment. In the words of the Armenia coordinator, the decision to move to new communities surrounding Sandi Dzor, was made partly out of an acknowledgement that 'there was nothing more we could give the activists we are working with at present.'

As stated in the Description of Action, 'the project does not set out any deliberate aims to achieve structural change in the area of legislation' and notes the project is not resourced to 'provide the sustained support that is required in the South Caucasus for advocacy actions to achieve policy change'. However, considering the central role that self-organised groups of active citizens play in the CARE programme strategy, better understanding the enabling environment in which they function in the South Caucasus and identifying strategies to improve that enabling environment seems a natural area of advocacy activity within the CARE business model, which looks to 'build movements' of people that hold government accountable and broaden the range of possibilities for citizens to contribute to just and inclusive development in the South Caucasus'. Possible actions might be to map the legislation on forming legal identities (sole traders, non-profit organisations, social enterprises, etc.) in all three countries of the South Caucasus (and possibly also in the unrecognised entities in the region), to provide a service through its network for groups to find the most appropriate legal form for their intended activity, and to look to influence legislation in order to contribute to a more favourable environment for such activity. CARE's experience in advocating on the Law on Cooperatives in Georgia could serve, at least in part, as a model for such advocacy.

Both of the Educational Clubs have successful experience of attracting other resources. In Azerbaijan, this has been based on the leadership skills of key people within the Coordination Team, who have grown in stature in their own community. Funding from international donors has been on the decline in Azerbaijan. A significant number of organisations had taken the decision to leave Azerbaijan with the onset of large government incomes from the energy sector. The majority of the organisations remaining in the country decided to close operations in the implementing period of the present action, as the environment for international NGOs deteriorated drastically.

In Armenia, effective cooperation has been established with different organisations, including international organisations that have supplied resources to the participants in the CARE project. The networks of the implementing partner have been a critical success factor in attracting these resources.



With or without project funding, the moral support of an established organisation seems to be key for the active continuation of the work that the Coordination Team has been carrying out on the ground. The description of action refers to the importance of this continued support, when it says 'CARE will continue to work with these and similar activist groups as part of its regional strategy'. Both of the implementing partners in the project have a strong record of maintaining contact with communities they had previously worked with, and it can be assumed that the network established within the country, as well as across conflict lines, will be maintained after the project comes to an end.



SECTION SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Confidence in Recovery was a low-cost, multi-country action that made use of existing partnerships with tested methods of work to maintain contact between communities divided by conflict at a time of particular tension and pressure. The ability of the implementation team to maintain a link across the conflict divide, to maintain its implementation schedule despite multiple impediments and to expand the reach of the project in a short time shows a commendable *efficiency* facilitated by CARE to work in this context, based on its geographic location, its in-house expertise, the strength of its partnerships and its commitment to working with the most vulnerable (in this case – conflict-affected populations).

The project was of high *relevance* to CARE, the partners, the beneficiaries, and was in line with the approach of the donor to working on the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, and it set appropriately modest objectives that took into consideration the stage of the conflict cycle, in which very few peacebuilding initiatives were still active. However, it failed to foresee the blockages that emerged on Azerbaijan during the implementation period, having a serious impact on its effectiveness in that country.

This notwithstanding, the project demonstrated the *effectiveness* of long-term engagement with marginalised communities in the South Caucasus, with a large number of activities conducted at low cost or solely making use of the resources and enthusiasm of the activists themselves. What is more, the project has shown that despite the considerable weight of political pressure and public opinion it remains possible to conduct people-to-people work across the line of conflict and that this is appreciated by the participants themselves. The project is notable for having brought *new* persons from Armenia and Azerbaijan into contact with one another – an opportunity that very few people from either country have in the present situation.

Despite this effectiveness in mobilising the communities during the implementation period, it is not clear whether the project was able to have the *impact* of establishing new foundations for ongoing activity. In its previous initiatives with conflict-affected communities, the project team had worked in the framework of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which located the work as an essential part of the gender equality agenda and its connection to conflict resolution. There was no such explicit theme in the present project, and all of the implementers involved – CARE, the implementing partners, the Coordination Teams – recycled many of the themes from UNSC1325 in their programming as the socio-economic themes of *Confidence in Recovery* did not appear to offer any 'binding glue' to the activities that were being implemented.

The individual initiative that was shown by project participants in the two main target communities of Sandi Dzor and Kizil Kum appear to indicate sufficient capacity and motivation at the level of the target activists for the *sustainability* of the action without further project funding for their capacity development. However, the role of CARE and the implementing partners remains key from the point of view of moral support and advice, and the ability of the project team to maintain contact with them and include them in future initiatives will be important to maintaining their activity. In the case of the new communities targeted in Armenia, further capacity building work will be necessary to build a sustainable engine for civic activism.

The evaluator team makes the following recommendations:



To CARE

- Document the approach taken with the implementing partners on how to build capacity for activism in conflict-affected communities, specifying which skills need to be delivered over which period of time and with what intermediate results.
- Find ways of continuing to work with the four new communities in Armenia in line with the methodology documented above.
- Consider the possibility of conducting region-wide research into the different forms of legal institutionalisation for organisations across the South Caucasus with a view to being able to provide expertise to individuals and groups within its networks on the most favourable legal form to take in order to work most effectively and to be able to advocate in an informed way on improving the enabling environment for NGOs, CSOs, small businesses, social enterprises, etc.
- Review the current Programme's Theory of Change in the Conflict Prevention and Security Domain to put the Overall Objective of the present action as a first-level breakthrough, before moving on further towards the Impact Goal. Consider which alliances need to be made in order to achieve this first breakthrough.
- Consider integrating the specific expertise of the implementing partners on 'preparing people to meet across conflict lines' as a strand of work to be integrated in other types of programming (beyond peacebuilding).

To the implementing partners

- Gather all information collected in the course of the project on the target communities into a single file (one file per community) and organise it in a way that would allow the communities to present the information to outsiders who may be able to bring resources into these communities. The files should include the results of any research carried out, any capacity in the community identified or built, as well as any feedback gathered about the needs of the community for the preparation of programming for the Educational Clubs. The files should also contain information on key contacts that had been made in the target municipality, such as local NGOs, representatives in the local authority, and local service providers.
- Consider the possibility of carrying out a manageable but thorough opinion survey in each of the target communities in order to identify the value that the community ascribes to each Educational Club in order to see whether a feasible funding model could be developed to ensure that the Clubs continue their activity.
- In cooperation with CARE: Consider what kind of trainings could be conducted in such communities to increase the analytical capacities of activists so that they are better able to capture, analyse, present and respond to information from their activities.

To the European Union

- Develop quick reference information sheets on the partners and activities of the members of the EPNK consortium as well as their implementing partners, so that staff across the region are able to engage with these and see how peacebuilding complements or can be complemented by other development activities.
- Consider a series of work that supports maintaining or re-establishing contact across conflict divides for those parties that are most impacted by the non-resolution of the protracted conflicts. Such work could form one component of the EU's comprehensive policy towards the South Caucasus, as proposed in Article 3 of Council Decision 2011/518/CFSP of 25 August 2011, appointing the European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia



To other international donors engaged in the South Caucasus

- Consider a joint approach on how to open space in Azerbaijan for both local and international NGOs to work more effectively and without unreasonable restraints from the authorities.



LIST OF ANNEXES

- I Terms of reference for the evaluation
- II Profile of the evaluating organisation
- III Evaluation methods
- IV Persons/organisations consulted
- V Documentation consulted