

CASH FOR WINTERIZATION PROJECT IN WESTERN GEORGIA 2008-2009

General Situation

After its independence in 1991 and the collapse of its economy under the impact of a civil war, Georgia had to additionally face two separatist claims of the autonomous regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. At that time, these two armed conflicts put a heavy burden on the socio-economic situation of the country, adding more than 200 000 internally displaced persons, fleeing the devastated areas, to a local population already living in precarious conditions.

Following a 15 year period of frozen and unsolved situation with the breakaway regions, armed conflict erupted again in South Ossetia in August 2008 between Georgian army and South Ossetian forces supported by the Russian army. It quickly widened with fighting reported in Abkhazian borders and Russian air strikes all over Georgia, in addition to its ground military presence. The one-week conflict ended with a ceasefire brokered by the European Union and resulted with over 160 000 newly displaced persons fleeing the fighting areas, out of which around 40 000 were not able to return to their homes before the winter. Temporarily sheltered, their living conditions were far below basic standards required for hard winter situation and inadequate for physical and psychological recovery.

Cash Project as Immediate Response

After a feasibility assessment done by middle September 2008, SDC decided to launch with no delay a Cash Project which aim was to assist a certain number of Georgian's internally displaced and most vulnerable Household/Families during the winter season in Western Georgia. The assistance was foreseen through a self-help approach by means of cash based humanitarian assistance in order to support the beneficiaries in buying wood, fuel, clothing, medications or other basic items they would need to live in acceptable conditions during the winter 08/09. A credit of CHF 1 000 000.- was allocated by the Swiss Confederation for the alleviation of the consequences of the ongoing crises through a six months operation in Western Georgia.

The Project Set Up

In order to implement the Cash for Winterization Project, SDC established for the period of six month its own office in Kutaisi. Two Swiss expatriates and 5 local employees implemented the task supported by an external expert provided by the SDC Headquarter.



The CfWi Project was designed to work in close partnership with three Georgian Ministries (Ministries of Refugees and Accommodation, of Labor, Health and Social Welfare and the State Ministry of Regional Issues), and in collaboration with other international humanitarian actors to avoid any kind of overlapping. The People's Bank and People's Post were the partners selected to announce their selection, establish a personal bank account and deliver a withdrawal card, for minimal fees, to each SDC beneficiary.

The Beneficiaries

The selection of beneficiaries was done in October 2008 and covered 4 categories of persons in extreme need, all affected at different levels by the conflict, and selected as follows:

- The entire number of Household/Families (350) who were still displaced in Western Georgia from the August 2008 conflict
- The entire population of Household/Families (414) displaced from the August 2008 Conflict who were able to return to their places of residence in Western Georgia
- 600 Household/Families of the most vulnerable IDPs displaced from the 90' conflicts and still residing in Western Georgia
- 260 of the most vulnerable Household/Families among the local population residing in Western Georgia.

The selection process involved Georgian Governmental Bodies and experts, as well as an electronic double checking and a extensive SDC field verification of beneficiaries.

The Assistance

After analysing the diverse governmental allowances and available humanitarian support in Georgia, as well as the prices of the families most needed items, it was decided to assist the selected beneficiaries with an amount

respectively 120 and 100 Laris during 6 subsequent months (November to April) according to categories as follows:

- Laris 720.- (~ CHF 482.-) for New IDPs and New Returnees
- Laris 600.- (~CHF 402.-) for Old IDPs and Most Vulnerable among the local population.

This assistance was paid in two instalments (2/3 in December and 1/3 in February) according to major identified periods of needs.

The Implementation

After the selection of the SDC beneficiaries and the establishment of their Bank accounts and withdrawal Cards, each identified recipient received a personal announcement letter explaining his selection, the amount they were entitled to and the strict procedure put in place to get it. After the first instalment, SDC ran a monitoring process in order to systematically verify the accurate use of the assistance and readjusted, if necessary, the second instalment. A complaints process was also put in place in order to consider additional cases for SDC assistance, if relevant. Three Small local IDPs Assistance Projects were also supported here.

The Results

The SDC Cash for Winterization Project adequately and successfully assisted 1624 Household/Families (approx. 6000 persons) during the harsh winter 2008/2009 all over Western Georgia. The SDC realistic and chosen balanced approach, its fair selection process, as well as its quick implementation, allowed the SDC beneficiaries to reach, with this assistance, a minimum of basic welfare in a hardship situation.