

# THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE INDEX 2009



Whose Crisis? Clarifying Donor's Priorities

**DARA**



# **The Humanitarian Response Index 2009**

*Whose Crisis?*

*Clarifying Donor Priorities*



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DARA – Development Assistance Research Associates – is an independent, international, non-profit organisation, which works to improve the quality and impact of development and humanitarian interventions. We do this through research, evaluations, promoting learning and knowledge sharing.

DARA aims to enhance global efforts to reduce human suffering and inequity and encourage prevention. Our focus is on the improvement of humanitarian action, the promotion of international stability and development, and the reduction of disaster risk.

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*Crisis Reports*  
**Georgia**



## Georgia at a Glance

### Country data

- ▶ Population (2007): 4.4 million
- ▶ Under five mortality rate (2006): 32 per 1,000
- ▶ Human Development Index Ranking (2008): 96
- ▶ Life expectancy (2006): 71 years
- ▶ Official Development Assistance (2007): US\$382 million

### The crisis

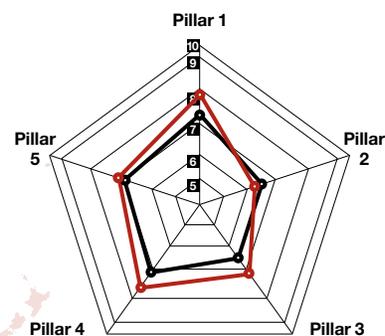
- ▶ Armed conflict broke out in August following Georgia's bombing of the South Ossetia region and retaliation by Russia;
- ▶ Conflict lasted only 13 days but left 158,000 displaced and caused billions of dollars worth of economic damage. Elderly one of the most vulnerable groups;
- ▶ Despite the ceasefire, tensions remain high.

### The response

- ▶ Political, economic and security interests seem to have influenced donors, who committed to provide more than US\$4.5 billion in aid, mainly to banking and transport sectors and in budget support – equivalent to almost \$1,000 per person;
- ▶ Donors covered 64 percent of US\$114 million UN Flash Appeal;
- ▶ Donors and humanitarian organisations did reasonably well covering initial needs for food and shelter; significant gaps remain for needs related to early recovery, livelihoods and income generation;
- ▶ Coordination among humanitarian agencies worked fairly well, yet was problematic with the Georgian Government;
- ▶ Access to South Ossetia remains a major obstacle – only ICRC has access to the population of the autonomous region.

### Donor performance

- ▶ Overall, donors rated highest in Responding to needs (Pillar 1) and Promotion and International Law (Pillar 4), and lowest in Prevention, risk reduction and recovery (Pillar 2);
- ▶ Donors rated relatively higher in questions related to protection of affected populations and supporting neutral and impartial humanitarian action, but poorly in questions related to preparedness, prevention and capacity building;
- ▶ Political, economic and security interests seem to have influenced generous immediate response; donors criticised for lack of advocacy, prevention, and meeting longer-term needs.



### HRI 2009 scores by pillar

- Pillar 1** Responding to needs
- Pillar 2** Prevention, risk reduction and recovery
- Pillar 3** Working with humanitarian partners
- Pillar 4** Protection and International Law
- Pillar 5** Learning and accountability

- Georgia
- All crisis average

Sources: World Bank 2009, UNICEF 2008, UNDP 2008, OECD 2007 IDMC 2008a; European Commission External Relations 2008; ICRC 2008; OCHA FTS 2009.

## Georgia

### *Too Many Eggs in the Same Basket<sup>1</sup>*

Marta Marañón and  
Marybeth Redheffer

In August 2008, conflict between Georgia and Russia over the autonomous region of South Ossetia forced 158,000 to abandon their homes and rely upon humanitarian aid (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC 2008a)).

The conflict sparked a huge response for Georgia from donor countries: far greater than one might expect for a middle-income country with a functioning government, and beyond the bounds of the joint needs assessment.

The scale of the response showed the high degree of political, economic and security interests vested in this small country. However, the nature of the response itself, although generous, was not always in line with *GHD Principles*: there was too much focus on visibility rather than appropriateness; too much in-kind aid and too little funding for recovery.

Donors also fell short on measures to hold the Georgian Government and implementing agencies fully accountable for funding received: a weakness that makes the results and impact of the aid hard to calculate.

#### The conflict and its consequences

The conflict began on 7 August 2008, when Georgia began bombing Tskhinvali, the capital of the autonomous region of South Ossetia. Georgia claimed that the bombing was needed to “restore constitutional order” (International Crisis Group 2008), a claim Russia denies.

Georgia, which gained independence from the Soviet Union in April 1991, has a history of problems around territorial integrity. Before the August war, Georgia engaged in several conflicts over the autonomy and/or independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Separatist movements in Abkhazia led to war in 1992, which forced 300,000 people to abandon their homes during the fighting. Many of the 220,000 to 247,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who remain from this war continue to live in poor conditions in collective centres (IDMC 2008b).

Tensions were running high before the August conflict. Days before the bombing started, Russian troops were lined along the border and 3,000 people fled South Ossetia because of tension in the area (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC 2009)). When Georgia began bombing Tskhinvali, Russia sent in troops, under the pretext of protecting its citizens in the area (International Relations and Security Network (IRSN 2008)). Heavy combat ensued and both Russia and Georgia have been accused of deliberately targeting civilians and using unnecessary force (IRSN 2008). 158,000 people were displaced within Georgia and an additional 30,000 sought refuge in North Ossetia (IDMC 2008a). According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the elderly and feeble were most vulnerable – those without help were often left behind (2008).

Meanwhile, Russia defeated Georgian troops in South Ossetia, and looted and burned houses in the region (IRSN 2008). Russia continued onwards into Georgian territory and stopped just 60 kilometres from Tbilisi. The infrastructure in Tskhinvali was especially damaged, and there was a great loss of livestock. Gori, the ‘breadbasket of Georgia’, suffered severe agricultural damage (Han, Packer and Parker 2008). Before the conflict began, international organisations were engaged in development activities, and many agencies that were crucial in responding to the crisis had already left the country (including the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) and the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)), or were preparing their exit strategy (World Food Programme (WFP)).

On 8 September 2008, a peace agreement was reached in which Russia agreed to withdraw its troops from the buffer zone around South Ossetia and Abkhazia (IRSN 2008). At the time of DARA’s field mission only the ICRC was able to access South Ossetia through North Ossetia in Russia – Georgia does not allow access through South Ossetia as it considers this would violate its territorial integrity. Other humanitarian organisations have not been granted safe access to the population – a major hindrance to the response.



### An overwhelming response

Donors rapidly committed funding to cover the first Flash Appeal, released on 18 August, with an original requirement of US\$58,653,319 (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA 2009).

The subsequent joint needs assessment conducted by the World Bank and UN, in collaboration with the Georgian Government, identified the need for US\$3.25 billion over three years.<sup>2</sup> Outside of the Flash Appeal, international donors pledged US\$4.536 billion in total aid to Georgia (European Commission External Relations 2008). This was significantly more than had been requested and seemed excessive to many implementing agencies. Comparison with countries with greater needs is inevitable. In Sudan, for example, a country with 4.9 million displaced (IDMC 2009), and US\$2.1 billion in funding requirements for 2009, donors have committed less than half of what is needed, US\$983 million (OCHA 2009).

DARA conducted a field survey of humanitarian organisations in Georgia to record their opinions of how well donors supported the response to the crisis. Many interviewees noted a disproportionate response to Georgia.

The swift and generous donor response can be put down to the political, economic and security interests of many foreign agendas:

- ▶ A Christian country located between Europe and Asia in the Caucasus region, Georgia is surrounded by politically important neighbours, including Russia, Turkey and Iran. It also provides alluring access to the rich oil and natural gas reserves in the Caspian Sea (Levine 2008).

- ▶ Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, who was brought to power in the non-violent Rose Revolution of 2003, had a great deal of support. Western countries saw hope in Saakashvili, who promised to restore democracy and eliminate corruption in Georgia (BBC 2005). To the surprise of many, however, in 2007, Saakashvili used violence to repress protests and has concentrated political power in the executive, decreasing the role of parliament.
- ▶ The involvement of Russia in the conflict galvanised support for Georgia. The stability of a country that played an important geo-strategic role was at risk, and donors sought to counterbalance the power of the regional hegemon. Therefore the largest donor, the US, channelled its aid through the Department of Defense.

The breakdown of the aid package to Georgia reveals the political, economic and security focus of the response. As one interviewee expressed: “Donors ran away from the humanitarian and social approach to budgetary support, infrastructures, investments and supporting the banking system.” This clear political and economic emphasis is shown by the fact that the banking sector received the most support, with US\$853 million, followed by transport with US\$682 million, budget and macro-financial support with US\$586 million, and energy with US\$381 million. In comparison, US\$350 million was allocated for IDPs (European Commission External Relations 2008). Of the US\$4.536 billion donated, approximately US\$1 billion is allocated for humanitarian assistance.

Underlying interests aside, donors generally did well funding the initial emergency response, especially food and shelter. However, many sectors such as health, water and sanitation were underfunded, and needs remain related to restoring the livelihoods of IDPs and the recovery phase. This can be seen in the budgetary support provided, as well as in the funding of the Flash Appeal. Several interviewees mentioned the slower response to the revised Flash

Appeal. Released in October, 64 percent of the required amount had been committed as of May 2009. After the generous response at the donor conference, humanitarian agencies probably expected more, yet the average coverage of appeals between 1999 and 2006 has been 59.9 percent, according to OCHA Financial Tracking Service (2009).

### Generous, yet disproportionate funding

The real problem lies in disproportionate funding. “Donors have put too many eggs in the same basket,” explained an interviewee. For example, 99 percent of the food requirements have been met, compared to only 14 percent for health requirements, 17 percent for education and 25 percent for economic recovery and infrastructure. As one interviewee said: “There is a missing link from relief to rehabilitation... There are no funding tools for rehabilitation... and recovery work has not started.” Many interviewees stressed concern that if longer-term approaches are not adopted soon, IDP housing areas could become slums. A Transparency International study on the situation of IDPs reported that “people often cited lack of employment, income and simply ‘things to do’ as major problems,” (2009, p5). Donors need to do more to support a more holistic, longer-term approach.

A major failure of the response has been the lack of safe access to South Ossetia. Donors should have dedicated equal effort to diplomatic efforts to achieve access, as they did to providing monetary support. The ICRC was the only humanitarian organisation able to access the buffer zone until November, and the only body able to access the population in need in South Ossetia (via North Ossetia in Russia). “Not having attained safe humanitarian access is a failure of the whole international community,” said one interviewee.

The quality of the response could have been improved if donors had made a greater effort to cultivate good working relationships with the government. Coordination was challenging between humanitarian agencies and the government – and even within the government due to the high turnover. Each ministry was eager to prove its worth to the president, even acting in areas that were not its responsibility. Many interviewees cited the unilateral decision of the Ministry of the Interior to privatise the collective centres for the IDPs from the 1992 Abkhazia war, and to build houses for the IDPs from the August war. Neither humanitarian organisations addressing IDP shelter or the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Shelter, which oversees IDP issues, knew about this. Furthermore, the government officials assigned to each sector were constantly changing, leaving agencies never sure how long individuals would be in situ and if it was worth the effort to build their capacity.

As a result of this poor coordination, the government ended up acting alone. Much to the surprise of the humanitarian agencies, the state began building housing for the IDPs. Some interviewees complained that the government-built accommodations did not meet international standards. Had donors tried to build a better relationship with the government and improve coordination, humanitarian agencies could have provided expert advice to guide their interventions. The government should be commended for fulfilling its “primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons” (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 1998), but while the displaced now have housing, they still need livelihoods and ways to generate income.

An unexpected positive outcome of the crisis has been the increased attention towards almost a quarter of a million IDPs from the 1992 Abkhazia war. The vast majority continue living in deplorable conditions in former hotels or Soviet administrative buildings. The government is currently privatising their housing, or providing alternative accommodation. Many humanitarian organisations are collaborating on this front, repairing the buildings and preparing them for the winter.

*“This is more than a humanitarian crisis. During one month, Georgia was the capital of the world for diplomacy.”*



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### Safe access and co-ordination

According to our field survey, donors performed well in several areas, but need to devote greater attention in other directions to meet the commitments of the *Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship*.

Agencies largely agreed that donor support was consistent throughout their involvement in the crisis. Funding was provided in a timely manner (Principle five), with flexibility in the use of funds. Both USAID and Norway were reported to be especially flexible in modifying funds to changing needs. Donors were also highly rated for their support for the implementation of relevant laws and guidelines related to IDPs (Principle four), as well as for their support for coordination mechanisms (Principle ten). Many praised the effective use of the cluster system in Georgia and donor participation in coordination and information-sharing meetings. Most donors were considered to be impartial, although the US scored lower in this area.

Agencies considered that donors could better their performance in several areas:

- ▶ Donors should improve their support for agencies' organisational capacity in areas such as preparedness, response and contingency planning (Principle 18). The outbreak of the conflict in August shows that organisations must be prepared for emergency situations – many humanitarian organisations reported that their donors do not contribute to this.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Donors need to build local capacity and early recovery. This can also be seen in disproportionate donor support of the revised Flash Appeal – sectors such as agriculture, economic recovery and infrastructure, education and health were significantly underfunded, while food received 99 percent of the requirement.
- ▶ Donors need to respect Principle two, which addresses the independence expected of them. The survey suggests that funding for Georgia was influenced by political, economic and security interests.
- ▶ Donors should consider the appropriateness of in-kind aid. The US military reportedly flew in bottled water, even though water from the Caucasus Mountains flows throughout the country. The same party brought in ready-to-eat military rations, which the Georgians refused to eat. Poland, a new donor, wanted to fly in cows because they are culturally important to the Polish – the implementing agency rejected them. Estonia and Korea, also new donors, wanted to send clothes to South Ossetia, but the local government rejected them as they would damage the national market. Germany wanted to send 80 beds left over from the German military in a flight that would have cost more than \$100,000. Georgia, with its established pharmacy network, also had no need for the massive donation of medicines several donors hoped to provide.
- ▶ Donors should think carefully about using the military to distribute humanitarian aid. While the humanitarian community welcomed the logistical support from US Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DARTs), channelling humanitarian aid through the military compromises the independence, impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian action. Perception of the US' independence as a donor suffered in the survey.

### The GHD Principles in practice

As the largest donor in Georgia, the performance of the US is central to the overall quality of the response.

The political, economic and security interests at play may explain the involvement of so many US agencies: OFDA, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), DART, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM), the Department of Defense, the State Department and Food for Peace all supported the response. Perceptions are different for each agency.

OFDA, DART and BPRM were deemed the best US donor agencies, for their independence, neutrality, impartiality and effectiveness in addressing the needs of the population and coordination efforts. USAID and the military were not rated highly in these areas. Implementing agencies criticised them for not sharing sufficient information with other stakeholders, especially the military, which conducted its own needs assessment. However, humanitarian organisations considered that all US donor agencies were quick to respond and flexible as a whole.

The EC is the second largest donor in Georgia. Interviewees rated the EC higher than the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) average in most areas. Implementing agencies found the EC to be neutral and impartial, making informed decisions based on needs assessments and supporting coordination efforts. There are four areas where the EC scores lower than average: supporting linking-relief-rehabilitation-and-development (LRRD), flexibility of funding, timeliness of response and longer-term funding arrangements. Reflecting criticism of the limited “conditionalities” in the EC's budget support to the Georgian government, it was felt that the EC should demand greater accountability (Transparency International 2009).

Many new donors helped finance the response to the conflict, especially neighbouring countries and states with historical ties to Georgia. Humanitarian organisations felt Turkey acted with neutrality, channelling funds from the Turkish Red Crescent to the Georgian Red Cross. Other Eastern European countries, however, did not perform as well. One interviewee explained that “either they did not have the experience or lacked capacity”. It was felt that more experienced donors should work with new donors to help them provide aid respecting the spirit of the GHD.

Interviewees felt donors should be commended for mobilising funding rapidly, and implementing agencies for assisting accessible populations quickly. The affected population received assistance in a matter of days. This swift response, however, was felt to be due to the political, economic and security interests at play. As one interviewee expressed: “This is more than a humanitarian crisis. During one month, Georgia was the capital of the world for diplomacy.” Donors need to be accountable to their commitment in the GHD to provide independent humanitarian assistance.

### **Lessons learnt and recommendations for the future**

- 1** Donors need to support longer-term solutions and link the emergency response to early recovery and rehabilitation by focusing more on needs assessments. If donors continue to provide disproportionate funding, the conditions of the affected population could deteriorate.
- 2** Donors must pay greater attention to the expertise of their field staff. Too much in-kind aid was provided in Georgia, which was completely inappropriate for a middle-income society. Many items that were brought in were already available in the country, and the money spent would have been better used to support underfunded sectors. Donor staff members who are working in Georgia were familiar with the realities of the country, and donor headquarters would have done well to trust their advice.
- 3** Donors should focus on using their leverage to gain safe access to South Ossetia. Donors have a responsibility to ensure that international humanitarian law is respected, and that the parties to the conflict ensure safe access to those in South Ossetia in need of assistance and protection (UNHCR, no date) Donors should increase their diplomatic efforts to guarantee this safe access. As one interviewee said, “it is crucial to preserve humanitarian space in order to respond only on the basis of need”.
- 4** Donors need to invest in conflict prevention and preparedness. Considering the history of the autonomous regions, the war in August could have been predicted – and it may not be the last. Donors need to do more to support emergency preparedness, especially among local governments and communities.
- 5** There is a great need for accountability and learning. Governments need to be accountable for all the money they receive through budget support, just as donors need to conduct evaluations of the aid they provide. A great deal of funding has been committed in Georgia, and evaluations are important to ensure it is used in the most effective and efficient way.

## About the Authors

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Marta Marañón was the Deputy Director of DARA from 2003 to 2009 and currently works as an independent consultant. Ms. Marañón is an evaluation expert committed to improving the quality of aid and the empowerment of local populations in partner countries. She has experience in evaluation in the fields of international development, humanitarian action, capacity building and organisational performance, and has carried out work in complex situations, conducting evaluations or studies in Afghanistan, Algeria, Brazil, Bolivia, Chad, Colombia, Kenya, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Niger and Uzbekistan. She holds a BA in geography and three Master's: in Landscape and Land Use Management, Cultural Management, and evaluation of public policies and programmes. Her areas of expertise include environmental sustainability, sustainable livelihoods, community and rural development, disaster risk reduction and educational systems. Founding member of Fundación Educación Activa, she is also a member of the Royal Geographic Society, UK.

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Marybeth Redheffer is an Editor and Research Assistant at DARA, where she has worked since 2007. As a trained evaluator, she has participated in field missions for the Humanitarian Response Index (HRI) to Colombia, Ethiopia and Georgia and has been active in the publication and editorial process of the HRI for the past three years. Within DARA she is responsible for following the donor policies and strategies of the US and the UK. Prior to joining DARA, she worked for several NGOs and think-tanks in the environment and conflict resolution fields. She was also a visiting researcher for UNESCO: Territory and Environment, where she carried out a comparative study of conflict resolution for nuclear energy in Spain and the US. She holds a BA in Spanish (University of Richmond) and two Master's degrees, in Spanish (Middlebury College) and International Policy (Monterey Institute for International Studies).

## Notes

- 1 Information based on field interviews with key humanitarian agencies in Georgia from 1 March 2009 to 7 March 2009, and 102 questionnaires on donor performance (including 72 OECD-DAC donors).

The HRI team, composed of Marta Marañón, Marybeth Redheffer and Dolores Sánchez, expresses its gratitude to all those interviewed in Georgia. The opinions expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of DARA.

- 2 The joint needs assessment was conducted simultaneously with a revised Flash Appeal. The revised Flash Appeal was extended to 7.5 months to correspond with the first six months of the joint needs assessment. (UN and World Bank 2008).
- 3 One of the main findings in the HRI 2008 was the need for donors to invest more in preparedness and prevention.

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