



FROM EMERGENCY RELIEF TO DURABLE SOLUTIONS

THE DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL IN NORTH CAUCASUS 1997 TO 2012 AND BEYOND

CONTENT

FROM EMERGENCY RELIEF TO DURABLE SOLUTIONS / 3

BUILDING HOMES – HOUSING PROJECTS / 7

DEFENDING RIGHTS – COUNSELLING AND LEGAL ASSISTANCE / 13

FINDING A FUTURE – LIVELIHOODS / 19

WORKING WITH LOCAL PARTNERS – CIVIL SOCIETY / 25

STATE-CIVIC DIALOGUE AND CAPACITY / 31

THE LONG-TERM COMMITMENT / 35

FUNDING A FUTURE / 36

PHOTOGRAPHS BY: Jon Norddahl (www.jonnorddahl.dk)

WRITTEN BY: Villads Zahle, Danish Refugee Council

EDITED BY: John Stiles & Taisa Zhunidova, Danish Refugee Council

DESIGN AND LAYOUT: Willads, HEP Kommunikation



FROM EMERGENCY RELIEF TO DURABLE SOLUTIONS

“If my years of experience from zones of conflict around the world has taught me one thing, it is the fact that change is possible. However, only through the combination of humanitarian expertise, cooperation with regional and local authorities, willing donors, dedicated

staff and beneficiaries change is possible. Together we have come a long way in North Caucasus and we still have a long way to go – so our hope is to take the next step through mutual efforts on all levels.”

John Stiles DRC country director

THE DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL IN NORTH CAUCASUS 1997 TO 2012 AND BEYOND

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) has a long history in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation. It began in 1997 with assistance for internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the first Chechen war through social programs and provision of micro-credit. With the outbreak of the second Chechen war in 1999, a humanitarian crisis rapidly unfolded and DRC began major relief operations, feeding several hundred thousand displaced persons who had fled from Chechnya to Ingushetia. In 2002, DRC added further projects in livelihoods and housing. DRC also supports local civil society organisations in recovery projects and provides free information, counselling and legal assistance to vulnerable war-affected persons. While the majority of DRC assistance has been directed at Chechens in Chechnya and Ingushetia, DRC also works in North Ossetia and Dagestan.

“ DREAMS COME TRUE; WITHOUT THAT POSSIBILITY, NATURE WOULD NOT INCITE US TO HAVE THEM ”

John Updike, American author and poet 1932 - 2009.

DRC now focuses on partnership with and increased engagement of local government and local organisations. The mutual goal is to ensure protection and promotion of durable solutions to refugees and displaced persons on the basis of humanitarian principles and human rights. Over the years, DRC operations have transformed in accordance with changing conditions. From emergency relief operations to durable solutions, all of our efforts have been made possible through the persistent support of our local, regional and international partners and the tireless engagement and endurance of our beneficiaries.

North Caucasus is slowly recovering and the years of war and conflict are no longer visible through devastated buildings and dead bodies, but are still highly existent in the lives of people they affected. Some have lost close relatives, some are disabled and most have lost their homes. In stark contrast to the fact that all of them share traumas of the past, the drive for building a better future is still most vivid. The following story of personal accounts will reflect their memories, their problems and their dreams.







BUILDING HOMES – HOUSING PROJECTS

Although most of the hundreds of thousands of Chechens who fled to Ingushetia during the wars have now returned home, many displaced families are still finding shelter in

box tents or other inadequate and temporary accommodation. Ingushetia constitutes one of the centres of DRC housing clusters in the North Caucasus region.

ESIRA GAZDIYEVA JILAGOMEDOVNA – KARABULAK, INGUSHETIA

The dusty plain seems to stretch forever before meeting the snowy mountains in the horizon. Although some residents are still in the process of establishing themselves, the lines of red brick houses already seem to form a community in the middle of the impressive scenery. Gardens are being established, water is carried from taps outside and the rocky soil between the houses is being cleared.

“THE WAR IS OVER NOW BUT IT TOOK MY BROTHER, OUR HOME AND EVERYTHING WE OWNED”

Esira Gazdiyeva Jilagomedovna

Esira rolls her eyes with a grin, “my six daughters are in hiding – they are not very comfortable with strangers.” Only the youngest daughter eventually enters the room but stays in hiding behind a teddy bear on her mother’s lap. “The father of my children is in jail and she sometimes comforts her teddy bear by telling it that daddy will come home soon.” Esira’s husband tried to get compensation for what he considered a wrongful arrest and received a seven year sentence instead.

“The war is over now but it took my brother, our home and everything we owned. We fled from Grozny during the second Chechen war and were living in local farms, IDP camps and finally a box tent provided by DRC and UNHCR.

Esira has survived two wars and a stress related heart attack but she is still the strong centre of a seven all female household. “We have a house now. We were the first family to move in and the children were happy and proud – they are in school but they help me out every chance they get. They actually painted the gas pipe running outside and earned some money for the household.” Esira is glancing at the closed door still hiding five of her daughters, “My children have certainly had their share of traumatic experiences – but it is all about their future now.”

Watching Esira turning the stony soil with a hoe seems reaffirming. She is not only a dreamer as a small garden is already taking shape behind the house.







LOUISA KULAEVA – SAMISHKI, CHECHNYA

The red brick house has two separate buildings, one is the home of a family of six while the other is a nearly finished corner shop. Louisa is receiving us in the front the house. Two small children are escorting their father towards us leading him by the hand.

“My husband is blind. He was wounded when his village was attacked during the first Chechen war.” Louisa’s husband, Yunus, joins the conversation, “I was just a young man when I lost my sight and I never would have had the nerve to talk to Louisa even though I had always liked her – I was handicapped and never thought she would consider marrying me.” Despite initial resistance from her family the couple did marry as Louisa got in touch with Yunus after hearing about his difficulties. Through war and strife they have kept the family intact.

“During the second Chechen war we fled to Ingushetia. First we were in a refugee camp and received emergency relief from DRC – then they provided a box tent and finally a house and a corner shop. We will not be rich but we will be able to make a living and build a future for our children.” Louisa’s smile is genuine as she makes a gesture of relief.

Yunus is leaning forward adjusting his sunglasses. “You cannot blame Russians or Chechens – war is a terrible thing and civilians always pay the highest prize. Members of my family were lost during the Second World War and the entire Chechen population was deported by Stalin.”

The oldest son of Yunus and Louisa has a broken nose as a result of a boxing match. Rather than complaining he displays some of the medals he has won and the pride is reflected on his father’s face. This is truly a family of fighters seeking nothing but peace...

“YOU CANNOT BLAME RUSSIANS OR CHECHENS – WAR IS A TERRIBLE THING AND CIVILIANS ALWAYS PAY THE HIGHEST PRIZE. MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY WERE LOST DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE ENTIRE CHECHEN POPULATION WAS DEPORTED BY STALIN”

Louisa Kulaeva





DEFENDING RIGHTS – COUNSELLING AND LEGAL ASSISTANCE

In a region defined by conflict and limited presence of civil society and where large parts of the populations have been displaced, access to basic rights and social benefits demands education, representation and

direct assistance. DRC is providing legal assistance to beneficiaries in need, cooperating with and supporting local partners as well as involving authorities through training.

ZAREMA SUSAYEVA KARIMOUNA – MAYAKOVSKOGO HOSTELS IN GROZNY

The grey blocks of flats on the outskirts of Grozny resemble the ones in suburbs across Europe, just in a slightly worse condition. Children are playing in front of the buildings some of them with plastic versions of the AK 47. Despite their youth, the imitation of the sound of machine guns is based on personal experience. Inside the building an intrusive smell of gas reveals that this is one of the few resources available in large quantities in Grozny.

Zarema has 17 bomb fragments in her body as a constant reminder of the war that stole the lives of her husband, four of her daughters and her brother. “I am now alone with one son and one daughter – a future for them is the only thing I dream about,” says Zarema. Her 12-year old son, Adam, has a dream of his own: “I would like to visit the local stadium and watch a game,” he says in a shy whisper.

However humble Adams dream may seem, the one-room flat in the hostel he shares with his mother and sister and the modern and newly constructed stadium might as well be located in different worlds. The impressive but strangely deserted mid-town area features



“OUR HOUSE BURNED DOWN DURING THE BOMBINGS OF GROZNY AND WE LOST EVERYTHING. DRC HAS PROVIDED THE BASIC THINGS FOR THIS APARTMENT – STOVE, REFRIGERATOR, BEDS AND LINEN”

Zarema Susayeva Karimouna

hotel, university and the largest Mosque in Europe, but a large population of former refugees and displaced in Grozny are seeking temporary shelter in overcrowded hostels like the ones in Mayakovskogo.

“Our house burned down during the bombings of Grozny and we lost everything. DRC has provided the basic things for this apartment – stove, refrigerator, beds and linen. But I am disabled and the loss of all papers and legal documents was an even greater concern. Without documents we do not have access to basic rights, housing and social benefits and the most important assistance from DRC was to help us obtain passports, legal documents and to apply for the disability pension I am entitled to.” Detecting his mother’s distress, Adam approaches placing a hand on her shoulder. The gesture is both sweet and tragicomic rendering the detail of a 12-year old boy trying to act as patron for the family.

Adam is no longer an unregistered alien in his country of birth. He is a young Chechen man who survived the war. His future will not be uncomplicated, but unlike so many children of his generation he does have one.





MAGOMED MALSAGOV IDRISOVICH – NAZRAN TANZILA IDP SETTLEMENT

“WE HAVE COME A LONG WAY SINCE PROVIDING RELIEF AID FOR HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF DISPLACED DURING THE WAR. BUT EVEN THOUGH THE NUMBERS HAVE GONE DOWN – THESE PEOPLE ARE THE MOST VULNERABLE AND WE MUST KEEP ON ASSISTING AS LONG AS EVEN ONE PERSON IS STILL IN NEED”

Magomed Malsagov Idrisovich

The poverty of the temporary IDP settlement of Nazran Tanzila is striking. Although small, the weathered box tents are often the home of several families cramped together between improvised kitchens, piles of clothes and worn-out furniture.

Magomed has a long history as DRC staff member and is clearly an appreciated and well-known guest in the settlement. Between greetings, handshakes and hugs his notebook is filling up with information from the residents. “This place holds 28 families – about 120 people all in all. Most of them are IDPs from Chechnya and North Ossetia. More than six thousand IDPs are still finding shelter in box tents, barracks, hostels or even stables of private farms in Ingushetia.”

The families in the settlement represent both IDPs and locals. “These people represent the most vulnerable group with the least resources and when you mix them with the poorest locals it creates tensions. The local government is looking for ways to close down temporary hostels and camps like this one. They even promise to find alternative accommodation but they have a hard time delivering. These people have learned to trust the local organisations – they have received emergency aid from DRC during the wars, they know we build houses and provide materials and they know we do everything we can to assist them legally.”

Magomed is summing up the situation over a cup of tea at a local café. “We have come a long way since providing relief aid for hundreds of thousands of displaced during the war. But even though the numbers have gone down – these people are the most vulnerable and we must keep on assisting as long as even one person is still in need.”





FINDING A FUTURE – LIVELIHOODS

Almost half the Chechen population have returned from displacement or remain displaced. The years of war have stolen their former lives and left many with disabilities, traumas and sickness. Numerous families are scattered and children have lost parents. At the

same time job perspectives are limited, uncertain and poorly paid leaving the families exposed to poverty. DRC is working to enable war affected families throughout the North Caucasus region to support themselves.

RUSLAN ITAYEV SHAMUEVICH – MAYAKOVSKOGO HOSTELS IN GROZNY

Every apartment door in the dim corridors of the Mayakovskogo hostel is hiding another personal story about war and loss. Too few of them provide the surprising optimism personified by Ruslan Itayev Shamuevich – the DJ of Grozny.

Ruslan and his wife Larisa have four children. The family lives in a small but cosy apartment with carpets covering the walls and floor. The couple complement each other as they tell their story. Ruslan's brother was killed during a bombing, "My father died shortly after my brother – I think it was the grief that killed him. During the fighting we were living in a refugee camp in Ingushetia for three years. We were able to survive on relief aid from DRC but with so many thousands of displaced Chechens we were not popular in Ingushetia – we were often humiliated and felt unwanted."

When the family returned to Grozny they were moving from place to place until they were finally lucky enough

“ I LOVE MUSIC. ANYTHING FROM TRADITIONAL CHECHEN MUSIC TO MORE MODERN STUFF – BUT MOSTLY I LOVE AMERICAN MUSIC FROM THE 80S – GUNS N’ ROSES, SCORPIONS AND BONEY M ”

Ruslan Itayev Shamuevich

to get an apartment in the Mayakovskogo hostels. Ruslan has undergone surgery four times and is unable to do hard physical labour. There is no way he could join the daily battle to find a temporary job at a construction site. However, as the patron of a family of six he needed to find a way to provide for his loved ones and the solution would turn out to be as practical as it was creative. "I love music. Anything from traditional Chechen music to more modern stuff – but mostly I love American music from the 80s – Guns N' Roses, Scorpions and Boney M," Ruslan is gesturing and smiling for the first time during the conversation. "DRC gave me a computer and two photocopiers. I use the computer to download music and sell it from a stand at the local market – I have a friend that helps me design covers. I rent out the two photocopiers and although we are not rich, we are able to make a decent living.

On a hanger on the wall behind Ruslan is a leather suit. The design seems straight out of the 80s but the leather is still shining, embodying that love of music from another decade has turned into a future for Ruslan's family.







AISHAT KHAYAURY SALAMOVNA – ASSINOVSKAYA, CHECHNYA

Coming from the muddy street outside and stepping into the small and well-organised workshop is a complete change of scenery. Aishat is a shy and quiet woman but something in her soft spoken voice demands respect. In her own understated and unpretentious way she is clearly a survivor.

“Our village was destroyed twice during the first and second Chechen war. My two brothers were killed and my husband disappeared. I was an IDP in Georgia and Ingushetia with my three children, always moving from place to place and only surviving through assistance from DRC and other organisations.” Aishat’s voice trembles softly as she seems to fight the bad memories and pull herself together.

“DRC staff saw a potential in my sewing skills and now I have this workshop with two employees and we do custom tailoring and sewing for the locals as well as producing for the market – we are relatively successful and I can pay rent and put food on the table. I am also

able to save up – the future of my children has already been washed away twice and I am not going to let that happen again.”

Despite all difficulties, Aishat has her moral values as well as her emotional commitment intact. “My husband disappeared ten years ago and I miss him every day. I wish a miracle could bring him back to us. It does not matter if he is disabled or sick – it is not a question of having someone to provide for the family, but of moral and love – having a father and a husband as the natural centre of our family.”

Rather than awaiting a miracle, Aishat returns to her sewing machine and stitch by stitch she continues building a future for her children.

“DRC STAFF SAW A POTENTIAL IN MY SEWING SKILLS AND NOW I HAVE THIS WORKSHOP WITH TWO EMPLOYEES AND WE DO CUSTOM TAILORING AND SEWING FOR THE LOCALS AS WELL AS PRODUCING FOR THE MARKET”

Aishat Khayaury Salamovna





WORKING WITH LOCAL PARTNERS - CIVIL SOCIETY

Despite the absence of a tradition of civil society, North Caucasus is blessed with engaged and competent local organisations. DRC has supported many of them. They are now a key humanitarian actor providing vital

assistance to war-affected populations as well as a reliable and competent partner for DRC in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan and North Ossetia.

LIBKAN BAZAEVA, DIRECTOR OF WOMEN'S DIGNITY – KILTSOVA STR. GROZNY

Libkan has an aura of statesmanship sitting behind her desk in her well-organised office, but her words reveal a modest approach to her position as director of Women's Dignity.

"I am like a caring mother making sure everything runs as smoothly as possible – this, of course, includes anything from dealing with economy to taking care of frozen pipes."

Libkan changes expression and tone of voice, assuming polite exchanges to get down to business, "we advocate and support women's rights through education, events and representation. Women are disadvantaged in the legal system, for instance in cases of heritage, divorce and their rights to live with their children. It is a mix of religion and cultural tradition – we still have women being kidnapped by their future husbands. However, nobody really discussed this issue when we started out ten years ago. Many women are now participating in the debate."

**“ I AM LIKE A CARING MOTHER
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Libkan Bazaeva

Over the years Women's Dignity has grown strong, well-organised and efficient. "We work with the UN, EU and try to involve the federal government as the Russian constitution is quite liberal when it comes to women's rights. Libkan leans forward to make an important point, "I want to make one thing perfectly clear – we are not anarchists and diplomatic skills and respect for traditions are important. We are not here to make some kind of overnight revolution or create friction between women and men – we quite simply want to ensure that women are heard, educated and counted on to take an active part in developing this republic and creating a future for themselves."

In another room a group of young women are training to become hairdressers and judged by their level of concentration they are well on their way in building a future for themselves. Women's Dignity also has other educational programs like cooking classes and computer training. These activities aimed at young women will potentially elevate the lives of their future families.







ADLAN MUKHAMEDOV, HEAD OF LET'S SAVE THE GENERATION – KOSHEVOGO STR. GROZNY

**“ THIS IS A PLACE OF PEACE
– TOO MANY CHILDREN HAVE
SUFFERED BOTH MENTALLY AND
PHYSICALLY FROM THE WARS ”**

Adlan Mukhamedov

In the community playroom a group of children are solving a jigsaw puzzle on the carpet. Some boys are drawing and a group of girls are singing. “This is a place of peace – too many children have suffered both mentally and physically from the wars. Now the wars are over but many formerly displaced children have seen their families scattered, have been denied formal education and feel isolated from the surrounding society. They need attention and help from adults and a safe place to play, learn and feel at home. Being a former IDP himself, Adlan knows what he is talking about. He is calmly making his statements without signs of indignation or sentimentality, just a quiet and intense focus.

Let's Save the Generation has a long and impressive history of assisting war-affected children of Chechnya. 7000 traumatized children have received psychological assistance, hundreds of children with disabilities have received rehabilitation with a personal trainer or operations from specialists in Moscow and by voluntary German doctors, others have received lessons in computers, music, dancing or woodwork.

“Funding our work is a challenge and it takes up a lot of resources. However, over the years so many people

and organisations have helped us and DRC has assisted us since the very beginning – through the time of war, and still to this day.” Adlan is what you might call a pragmatic optimist as he has been around long enough to know that results never come easily but at the same time long enough to know that with the right level of commitment there is always a way.

Adlan is the third head of Lets Save the Generation and despite the violent deaths of his predecessors he is not worried about the security situation in Chechnya. “I believe we should all look ahead now – the worst is behind us.” Standing at the stairs in front of the building waving a single time as our car is leaving, Adlan looks ready to cope with whatever the future holds and no doubt it will hold a generation of children assisted in coping with (if not ‘saved’ from) the traumas of their past.





STATE-CIVIC DIALOGUE AND CAPACITY

The Russian Federation is a key strategic partner playing a central role in regional and global forums. The scale of the Federation, however, signifies that resources are limited in some regions. Conflicts have tormented North Caucasus and prevented a smooth

transition from the Soviet period to present day. DRC is partnering with local governments and Civil Society organisations to develop citizen participation, to foster an open and constructive dialogue and to build a stronger nation.

MALIKA YAKUBOVNA KHAKIMOVA, COMMANDANT OF HOSTEL ON VIBORGSKAYA STR.

Malika looks very official behind her office desk and there is something in her charismatic presence that demands respect. Nevertheless, it soon becomes clear that Malika is a woman strongly engaged in the well-being of the inhabitants of the Viborgskaya hostels and that she is a popular commandant. She seems to have an ear and a shoulder for everyone entering the office. “The more than one hundred families living here are a mix of IDP’s and returned refugees with no immediate place to live.”

Malika adjusts the Federal Russian and Chechen flags on her desk without losing eye contact. “We are the luckiest hostel in Grozny receiving support from the government as well as DRC. I believe in justice and I try to do my utmost to ensure that they are taken care of and that they know their rights. When people know their rights, civil engagement grows stronger and in the long run enables people to participate in the general development. DRC is very strong on rights and legal aid and the combination of government and local organisational expertise and resources represents a great opportunity in Chechnya as well as the region of North Caucasus.”

As we are leaving Viborgskaya hostel Malika is standing in the middle of a group of residents all seeking her attention. She delivers advice in all directions and appears to personify the right combination of governmental authority and flexibility.



“ WE ARE THE LUCKIEST HOSTEL IN GROZNY RECEIVING SUPPORT FROM THE GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS DRC. I BELIEVE IN JUSTICE AND I TRY TO DO MY UTMOST TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE TAKEN CARE OF AND THAT THEY KNOW THEIR RIGHTS ”

Malika Yakubovna Khakimova





THE LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

DRC has been operating in the North Caucasus region since 1997. At the height of emergency relief operations, DRC had more than four hundred local and international staff members in Chechnya alone. Many were once displaced themselves and have been with us from the very beginning. From IDP camps to housing projects, from war and conflict to gradual reconciliation and from emergency relief to durable solutions. Be that as it may, their work in the North Caucasus region is not done yet.

At present, the conflict in the Caucasus (North and South) has frozen. In the South, the issue of Abkhazia and South Ossetia remains unresolved. In the North, Prigorodny, militancy and national separatist movements persist. Some people have been displaced for

so long that they are merging into the general picture of economic underdevelopment, trapped in chronic poverty. It is increasingly difficult to target the displaced and address their needs as separate from the general population. Whilst the problems persist, the solutions lie with locally led efforts by local partners. DRC's exit strategy is to ensure that local organisations have the staff, skills and knowledge to take this challenge forward and are enabled to advocate, fund-raise and represent the displaced population.

This goal may indeed seem ambitious, but our commitment for more than a decade in the North Caucasus has illuminated that visions can be fulfilled and dreams do come through.

FUNDING A FUTURE

The Danish Refugee Council has depended on dedicated donors and partners throughout our years of operation in the North Caucasus. They have been persistent in their dedication to a humanitarian vision that may have seemed distant or even unattainable at times. The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Danida), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the United Nations and the European Union are central partners for DRC in 34 conflict-affected countries around the globe and in the North Caucasus. Among our current donors and partners in the North

Caucasus are the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM)

The future of the North Caucasus is in the hands of its population. Ultimately their efforts and engagement will determine the future of the region. A well-functioning civil society is the driving engine for progressive development and it thus remains vital that the international society provides the needed support.





The dedicated staff in DRC's Grozny office. Many of the local staff members have a history of displacement themselves and they personify the broader hope of transforming former tragedy into a future of possibilities in North Caucasus.





CONTACT

DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL

Borgergade 10, 3rd floor
DK-1300 Copenhagen K.
PHONE: +45 3373 5000
MAIL: drc@drc.dk

DRC VLADIKAVKAZ

5 Stanislavskogo Str. 362003
Republic of North Ossetia-Alania
PHONE: +7 8672 54 04 38
FAX: +7 8672 54 04 38

DRC GROZNY

2 Karaeva St
Russian Federation (for both offices please as this is the official country)
PHONE: +78712242226
MAIL: zhunidova@drc.ru

