

From a Chaotic Emergency aid – to a Sustainable Self Help Programme

by Christine Etienne¹

The very first imperative of emergency aid is to act immediately and rapidly. However, valuable and always limited donations are quite often wasted and lost because we act impetuously and commit avoidable errors. A professional organisation can combine both: immediate action and efficient emergency aid acknowledging principles of sustainability. Caritas Switzerland's cow distribution programme in Kosovo is a convincing example, which evolved from a chaotic emergency aid programme to an efficient self-help programme with long-term effect.

An answer to a vital need – a profitable investment

Livestock plays a central role with farming families in Kosovo. Nearly every smallholder owns at least one or two cows, providing them with milk, yoghurt, cheese and sometimes additional income. Milk products are staple food and are an ingredient of almost all traditional dishes. To have one cow at home, signifies a better diet for at least seven people.

With the end of the war in 1999, early assessments counted a loss of more than 50% of the former livestock population. Many families not only lost their houses and goods but also all their animals and with that a basic part of their livelihood. Consequently, the replacement of lost animals asked for an effective aid with an immediate impact on living quality for hundreds of families!

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Pictures and many informations by Raymond Rohner, Caritas, Switzerland.



Two Graufi cows in front of modern stable in Savrova. This stable is often used as training and demonstration object by the Graufi breeders association.

Immediately after war, many international organisations, and among them Caritas Switzerland, began to import heifers and bulls from European countries, and distributed them to the most vulnerable groups living in rural areas of Kosovo. Cattle distribution to smallholders was part of an extensive humanitarian aid programme trying to satisfy an obvious and vital need. Other than bringing immediate relief, imported cows also promised two other important benefits:

- They offer a long-term investment providing food security and offspring with every calving and milking period for more than ten years.
- The genetic potential of modern cattle breeds result in much higher milk yields than local breeds, leaving surplus milk available for sale.

Risks and failures of emergency cattle distribution projects

Since cows and milk production have a long standing tradition in Kosovo, most aid organisations presumed that only minimal further support would be required

after the delivery of the cows. Therefore, little effort was invested to find out how the animals were traditionally kept and cared for. The consequence of such impetuous action became quickly visible and now sheds serious doubts whether the intended benefits could not have been gained by more efficient and less costly means.



Milking cows and caring for calves is women's business in Kosovo.

Cows are a long-term investment for families and as such form part of a quite complex farming system involving issues like shelter quality, animal feed, veterinary services, management skills, breeding know-how, gender roles, etc. Many organisations had to learn that imported modern breeds were not fit for the smallholder system in Kosovo. Animals which made it through the first winter in traditionally dark and closed shelters continued to lose their physical condition because the beneficiaries were not used to give them the quantity and quality of fodder which these breeds actually need. Since local breeds do not require foot treatment, few farmers had the skills and tools to cut the quickly growing claws of their new animal. Lameness and bad physical condition, however, are most often reasons why cows do not get pregnant again. Other reasons were as simple as that: a frustrated farmer who argued that he sold his new cow because it was too tall for the local bull to mount! No wonder as well the commentary of a widow: "these modern cows are useless; they do not even produce a calf"!

Does this mean, that it only takes to wait and see how this Darwinian selection process passes by before the expected fruits appear? Probably yes, since at the moment it is only survival which counts. The genetic potential, however, and with it a chance to improve income generation of hundreds of families will be lost in a few years, because there is little effort undertaken to foster careful breeding and to preserve the precious gift.

Challenges for donor organisations

As simple as it is to distribute goods and animals, as complex and demanding are aid programmes which aim for sustainability. Aid programmes are confronted with tremendous challenges:

- To work in a culturally new and unknown environment.
- Help is first provided to a socially and economically vulnerable population and not to well-off farmers being experts in cattle keeping.
- Vulnerable smallholders possess little land, and the quality and quantity of fodder may not be satisfactory. There is no purchasing power for buying supplements.
- Conflict management: Everybody is in need, everybody wants to be helped and in general first of all the powerful personalities of the village. But only the most vulnerable do receive help.... Elaborate and apply selection criteria for the beneficiaries (and stick to them!) with the participation and full agreement of the concerned population is a laborious and tricky task and can lead to new fights if not handled with delicacy, ability and determination.
- Necessity of training, capacity building and advisory services when smallholders are confronted with new techniques and investments.
- Principles of participation and local ownership – prime conditions for sustainability – ask for the co-operation with local authorities and civil society (Agricultural Departments, Ministry of Agriculture, woman organisations, farmers' associations, village committees, etc.).
- Involvement of these stakeholders in planning, implementation and evaluation processes.

- Development and improvement of other parts of the system.
- A minimum of conditions must be fulfilled: e.g. without land no animal can be fed!
- Incalculable climate and fragility of the agricultural production.
- Desperate market situation and therefore difficult income generation. My first breakfast in Kosovo consisted of orange juice from Greece, cheese from Germany, fresh cheese from Slovenia, milk from Hungary, margarine from Italy and marmalade from Turkey. All of it available of excellent quality and at a very low price.

Some factors of success

Caritas Switzerland followed the international aid community, and has implemented a large cattle distribution programme since 2000. Within three years more than 600 heifers were imported into Kosovo. The programme, however, was very different from most others in three very important aspects:

1. Close follow-up by an expert

As a result of lessons learnt with similar activities in Bosnia, Caritas employed a trained animal husbandry expert from the very beginning to plan and develop a sustainable follow-up programme after the initial emergency distribution phase was over.

2. Choice of a robust and better adapted cattle breed

With the “Tyrolean Grey Cattle“, Caritas chose a small and robust alpine breed which stands difficult environmental conditions better. Smallholders in Kosovo require robust animals, which withstand precarious animal husbandry traditions. High production breeds, in contrast, are prone to suffer, become infertile or die from insufficient care and food.

3. Plan and work conform to the principle of the “continuity and contiguity”

Most organisations preferred quick action with basic support services which ended only a year after the distribution of the animals. In many cases frustration soon followed the initial enthusiasm and the celebrated publicity. Caritas Switzerland, however, has bestowed



Graufi cow at the Gjakova Cattle Fair on 15.05.2004. The Graufi Breeders Association regularly exhibits Tyrolean Grey Cattle in Kosovo. This owner even attached pedigree information to the neck of the animal!

care upon applying the instruments of emergency assistance, rehabilitation and co-operation in development simultaneously and has developed successive plans and projects based on evaluations and results of the humanitarian emergency phase.

Results four years after the war

- A local breeders' association called “Graufi e Kosovës” is officially registered with UNMIK, and runs a small office in Malisheva.
- Already third generation off-spring is ear-tagged and registered in the Kosovo Graufi herd-book.
- Since 2002, the Tyrolean Grey Cattle Breeders' Associations in the countries of origin have been supporting Graufi breeders with a separate follow-up programme, including breeding and marketing activities for milk & meat produce.
- This year, the Graufi association imported the first transport of 33 Tyrolean Grey heifers under their own name, and secured 60% of the costs from local buyers.
- The Graufi association regularly shows selected animals at regional and national cattle exhibitions.
- Being the only registered and formally organised breeders' association in Kosovo the Graufi association receives ample attention by national and

visiting international breeding experts. They are regularly invited to seminars and meetings at the Ministry of Agriculture (MAFRD) in Prishtina.

Despite all these promising activities there are no doubts that the co-operation between Caritas Switzerland, the Graufi association and their members has still a long way to go until it reaches sustainability. Of primary concern is the association's difficulty to register and keep pure bred Graufi bulls and with them the genetic potential of the breed. The difficulty is an effect of the previous emergency aid principle that only one cow must be given per family. Smallholders with one or two cows cannot afford to feed a bull, and there is no tradition amongst farmers in Kosovo to share the cost of keeping a common pure bred bull. A set-back in the number of locally born pure bred Graufi will likely occur, but the firmly networked Graufi association and the proven advantages of the robust Tyrolean Grey are a solid base for further development.

Conclusion

Many organisations become increasingly focused on humanitarian aid, and specialise in projects of rapid distribution. Moreover, most emergency situations and the pressure to obtain a part of forthcoming funds don't allow aid organisations to carefully decide whether development projects will be feasible and to assess long-term need and potential of the hard-set community.

Nevertheless, every organisation must consider the cost/benefit relation of planned aid input, which is often marked by its life span. Inputs with a short-term life are usually commodities such as seed, fertiliser, simple tools, etc. Inputs with a long-term life, however, gain their real value only over a period of years, and have to be seen as investments rather than commodities. Where investment inputs, such as cows and machinery, form part of the initial delivery aid, organisations must account for a sustainable follow-up to avoid frustration or even negative effects on future development. Simultaneously to the distribution of hardware, software must hence be supplied! Moreover, a professional NGO must have the will to consolidate help through an ongoing commitment. This approach excels right from the beginning by introducing development orientated dynamics without being a development programme at this stage yet. It allows later to plan and implement a solid long-term-development programme. Caritas Switzerland acknowledges this principle of "continuity and contiguity", and the results observed in Kosovo are encouraging.

Lessons learnt by Caritas Switzerland clearly conclude that if you're going to bring cattle to farmers you will have to commit yourself for the natural length of a cows life, at least!



Many smallholders in Kosovo keep one or two cows in small stables with unfavourable conditions.