



ECONOMIC SECURITY



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The ICRC defines economic security as the condition of an individual, household or community that is able to cover its essential needs and unavoidable expenditures in a sustainable manner, according to its cultural standards.

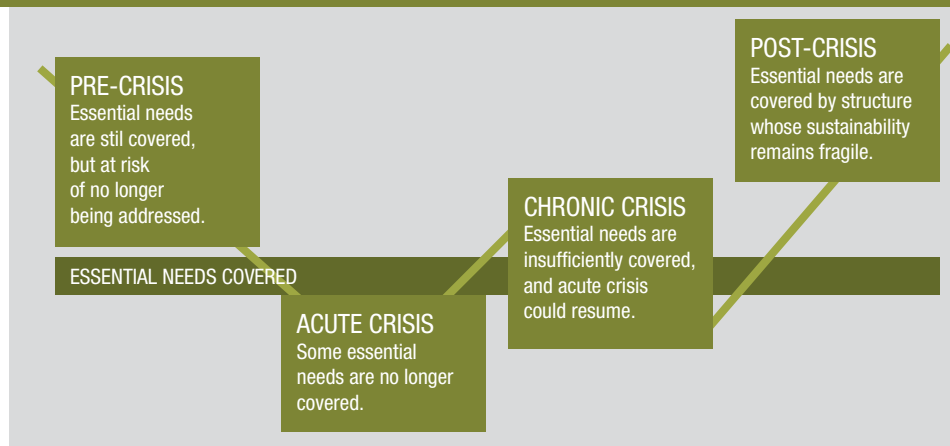
Needs include food, shelter, access to health care, education, and taxes, among others. Food alone is not sufficient.

Because public health is viewed globally, Economic Security programmes are closely connected to efforts in complementary fields: Health programmes (hospital management, first aid) and Water and Habitat programmes (access to water and proper sanitation). All these activities depend on reliable and efficient logistical support.

In all cases, because of the ICRC's overarching mandate of protecting the victims of armed conflict, economic security operations combine as much as possible with protection efforts.



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CRISIS

Degree of Crisis

The ICRC has defined four degrees of crisis regarding the coverage of essential needs, (see above). The Economic Security Unit assesses needs at household level in order to obtain first-hand local information.

Crisis Security Responses

Responses vary with the degree of crisis.

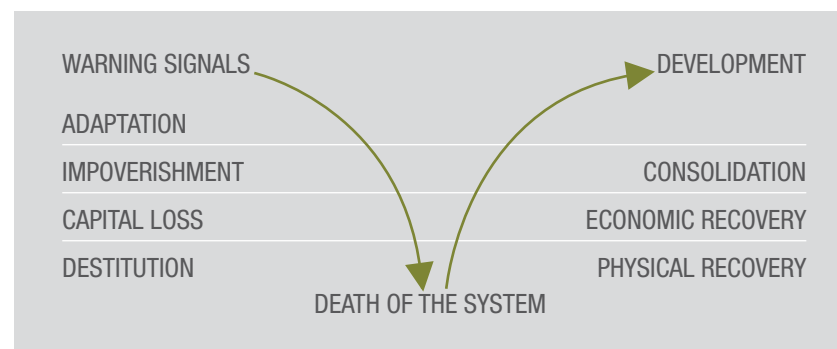
- In pre-crisis and acute crisis situations, the response meets essential needs. The aim is to save lives.
- In chronic crisis and post-crisis situations, the response promotes economic consolidation and/or reconstruction. The aim is to support livelihoods.

Different modes of action may be combined:

- substitution: the direct provision of services (in lieu of service providers that have failed to cover essential needs);
- support to local service providers;
- persuasion of relevant authorities to shoulder their responsibilities;
- mobilization of third parties to act, or to persuade relevant authorities to do so.

Crisis Process

The following diagram helps to explain ICRC activities that promote economic security. Relief aid aims to save lives or halt economic decline (illustrated by the descending curve). Livelihood support aims to restore economic security, in particular when recovery is under way (illustrated by the climbing curve). Livelihood support consists of production aid and structural aid (see below).



TYPES OF AID

Relief aid

Relief aid is primarily intended to save lives and protect livelihoods when they are at immediate risk in pre-crisis or acute crisis situations. This is done by giving people access to goods essential for their survival (such as household items, food, seed and tools) when they can no longer obtain them on their own. Aid of this kind should be combined with dialogue with parties that are in a position to enhance the protection of the people concerned.

Livelihood support

Production aid is intended to spur food production and/or generate income, and ultimately to restore sustainable livelihoods in pre-crisis, chronic crisis and post-crisis environments. This means preserving household or community productive assets.

Production aid takes the form of the vaccination, culling and restocking of livestock herds, the distribution of agricultural implements, seed and fishing tackle, micro-economic initiatives and capacity-building efforts.



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Structural aid, furnished mainly in chronic crisis and post-crisis settings, is intended to revive the output of sustainable productive assets (such as crops) by encouraging service providers and other parties concerned to provide the required input, such as seed and tools. It may also be used to promote improvements in such areas as agricultural extension services and State-delivered social welfare programmes.

Production aid can be delivered by means of grants or services. Other stakeholders should be encouraged to take action and/or persuade the authorities to do so.

NUTRITION

Many, if not most, of the communities the ICRC is working to help face a daily struggle to meet their essential needs, especially for food. An adequate understanding of the circumstances surrounding this struggle is therefore of paramount importance.

In confined environments such as prisons and hospitals, this analysis provides the basis for the response to inmate and patient health. Responses include feeding programmes and support to food handling and processing. They should complement other programmes that aim at restoring economic independence.

Nutritionists take part in ICRC surveys of needs and help assess living conditions and gauge coping mechanisms.

FOOD PRODUCTION

Support for food production is part of the ICRC's efforts to boost economic security. Because its response to observed needs is comprehensive, it gains insight not only into the consequences but also into the causes of armed conflict and tension.

Livestock issues and plant production are central to this type of intervention. Agricultural support is in fact pivotal to most ICRC EcoSec activities in rural settings, especially in Africa but not only.

MICRO-ECONOMIC INITIATIVES

Micro-economic initiatives aim to strengthen income generation in households and entire communities in a sustainable manner and in a set time frame.

The projects are tailored to meet individual needs, as expressed by the recipients.

The most commonly used micro-economic tools are productive grants, vocational training and small loans.

TRAINING

Courses for training staff and key partners (such as National Society staff) accompanies economic security programmes worldwide, and is delivered by qualified national staff and expatriate teams.

Skills

In order to achieve its objectives, the Economic Security Unit relies on a broad range of skills in the following fields:

- livelihood analysis;
- agronomy and agro-economics;
- veterinary science;
- livestock production and management;
- economics and financial management.

Partnerships

Economic security efforts – especially relief operations – are usually conducted in close partnership with the National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society of the host country, and frequently also with other National Societies.

Further reading

Nutrition Manual for Humanitarian

Intervention (ICRC, 2008).

Regional Livestock Study in the Greater Horn of Africa (ICRC, 2005).

Farming through Conflict (ICRC, 2007).

The ICRC's Economic Security Unit employs some 90 expatriate and almost 200 national staff who work in some 30 countries. The unit's budget – between 200 and 300 million Swiss francs annually – accounts for roughly a fifth of ICRC field expenditure.

Economic Security

The ICRC's work to promote economic security is intended to ensure that households and communities can meet essential needs and maintain or restore sustainable livelihoods. These activities range from emergency distributions of food and essential household items to programmes for sustainable food production and micro-economic initiatives.



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