
Wagner Kuhn

Introduction

This article is dedicated to Dr. Jerald Whitehouse who for many years was involved in holistic ministries involving both relief and development work in Muslim contexts. He, along with Paul Kulakov, was part of an ADRA team to visit Naxcivan, Azerbaijan, back in 1993, where this story first began. ADRA1 (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) is responsible for the humanitarian work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide, and its objectives are primarily to help people in serious need. The motto of the agency is expressed in the following words: “changing the world one life at a time.”

The Agency believes that “through humanitarian acts we make known the just, merciful, and loving character of God” and its mission “is to

1See ADRA’s official web site: http://www.adra.org
provide assistance in situations of crisis or chronic distress, and work toward the development of long term solutions with those affected” (ADRA c.1996:B1-4). In 1993 ADRA learned that hundreds of thousands of the people in Azerbaijan and in the Naxcivan Autonomous Republic were in desperate need, and thus decided to respond.

**ADRA’s Arrival in Naxcivan and Its Relief Assistance**

ADRA sent its representatives to visit Azerbaijan and Naxcivan in mid-1993. As a result of a visit to the central government of Azerbaijan (in Baku) it was decided that ADRA’s priority would be to work in the enclave of Naxcivan, which was suffering the most due to the war with Armenia and its consequent isolation because of its blockaded situation.

In October 1993, ADRA representatives returned to Azerbaijan and signed a Memorandum of Understanding in which an agreement was reached: ADRA would provide assistance to the people of Naxcivan and the government of Azerbaijan would facilitate all the required documents, visas, etc., to help ADRA perform its work.

ADRA received a grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and its staff arrived in Naxcivan in December 1993 to start a winter emergency food distribution program. The work in Naxcivan was established under extreme hardships and difficulties. Some of the expatriates arrived in Baku in October 1993, and after having visited Naxcivan and having tried to adapt to the situation, decided they could not live there. Others came in December and endured a little longer. Marty Phillips agreed to interrupt his studies in Argentina in order to join ADRA and played a vital part in laying the groundwork for the establishment of the ADRA relief program in Naxcivan.

On April 4, 1994, two ADRA workers, Marty Phillips and Swight Woods, were interviewed by Helsinki researchers from Human Rights Watch (HRW), and in the HRW/Helsinki Report of December 1994 the following statement was published:

In Nakhichevan the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), the only western humanitarian organization to have a presence in this enclave, disburses twenty kilogram food packages to 20,000 families a month. The United States government pays for the food parcels, which are shipped from Mersin, Turkey over the Bridge of Hope. According to an ADRA official who

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2For a detailed and comprehensive description of ADRA’s work in Naxcivan, see Kuhn 2004:182-255.
is stationed in Nakhichevan, “the blockade has totally ruined the economy. Agriculture is at a standstill, people are eating their seeds. Irrigation also collapsed—no spare parts for the pumps. Everything is deforested. You really have to go up in the hills before you see trees that haven’t been turned into stumps. Both sides do it. Some of my drivers are terrified to take parcels to some remote villages.” Small kitchen gardens and subsidized prices for bread prevent real undernourishment. (HRW 1994:76-77)

The above description shows the reality and conditions in which the people of Naxcivan were living and how much they were in need of help.

Encounters, Challenges, and Culture Shock

One of the greatest challenges to ADRA workers was the need to learn the cultural patterns and traditions of Naxcivan. There was also the isolation and loneliness but these would fade away as the ADRA expatriates developed friendships in the local community.

In July 1994, my wife and I arrived in Naxcivan to work as relief workers. We found the place to be quite different from what we expected—in fact, it was much worse than we had imagined. Not even basic needs could be met at that time. The mountains, along with the kindness of the people, were the only things that brought encouragement and beauty to any foreigner who lived there. The government officials received foreigners with admirable hospitality, and the people from different places where we needed to go were very friendly. Neighbors also did their best to help the foreigners even though there was hardly any communication due to the language barrier.

Being the only foreigners living in Naxcivan was quite a unique situation. Living in a traditional Muslim culture and society was especially challenging. As foreigners, my wife and I were the focus of attention in our neighborhood, by the national ADRA workers, the police, the mullahs, the government officials, and even the KGB. Everyone took an interest in the lives of any foreigners living in the country.

The living conditions in Naxcivan were very poor. In the major cities electricity was rationed in cycles of two to three hours. Frequently entire sectors of the city would have electricity for only two hours per day. In most places in the rural areas there was no electricity at all, and for most houses or apartments, running water did not exist. The extremes in temperature varied
in the summer and winter, from +50 to -35 degrees Celsius.³

For a foreign woman living in Naxcivan, life was much harder, for the cultural patterns were very much dictated by men. Local women were often supported by their female friends and family members, whereas a foreign woman first had to be accepted in order to be considered part of the community. It was really challenging for foreigners to live and work in Naxcivan because of the hardships encountered, the isolation, and the loneliness that pushed them to the limits of what they could endure.

**Spiritual Life and Spiritual Needs in Context**

Religion is important to the Naxcivani people. As the relief workers observed the people's spirituality they came to understand that the emergency food assistance would impact the community more if relief was done in relation to all the many needs of the person, not only the physical needs or just the need for food. There was also the need for friendship, for new and better opportunities, and care for the spiritual needs of each person.

In both the cities and rural communities in Naxcivan people are quite spiritual. Most do not go to the mosque every week but their whole lives or the way they relate to one another and the way they understand themselves have to do with understanding spiritual values or the religious values of their Muslim tradition. If something good happens it is because God allowed it to happen. The same perception is seen when negative things happen. Most people strongly believe that God is in charge of everything that happens to human beings, thus their way of life or worldview is heavily reliant upon the spiritual world.

Because of this worldview value most of the vulnerable and destitute people who were beneficiaries of ADRA's food distribution program believed it was by God's providence that they were being helped and were receiving food. However, if the ADRA workers did not understand that the food aid they were distributing was seen as also spiritual in nature and did not act accordingly, they would certainly have failed in their responsibility to serve people in the full range of their needs and would have also failed to honor the philosophy and operating principles of ADRA.

³Due to the extremely hot weather and very long hours of work, in August 1994 I got so sick that I thought I would die. Apparently the sickness was caused by an intestinal infection and dehydration. It was through God's providence, my wife (a nurse), and our local Azeri neighbors that I recovered. The local medicine proved to be good for this dying foreigner. One week later my wife also became so sick that she fainted twice, but she soon recovered, to our relief.
ADRA’s beliefs and mission statements provide the basis for a holistic ministry and do not neglect the spiritual side of life. The following sentences from ADRA’s belief statements confirm this fact with clarity (ADRA c. 1996:B2):

1. Through humanitarian acts we make known the just, merciful, and loving character of God.
2. To work with those in need is an expression of our love for God.
3. The compassionate ministry of Jesus is its own abundant motive and reward.
4. It is an agency of change, and an instrument of grace and providence.

There are in these statements a strong emphasis on the spiritual side of life, on the fact that ADRA workers believe in God, in his just, merciful, and loving character, in his providence and grace, in the compassionate ministry of Jesus as motivation and example, and that ADRA as an agency of change can make the world a better place to live, changing and touching lives one at a time.

ADRA’s first purpose statement also declares that “ADRA’s mission is to reflect the character of God through humanitarian and developmental activities,” and its first operating principle indicates that “ADRA upholds its beliefs and mission in its decision making at all levels” (ADRA c. 1996:B3-5). Thus, it is within ADRA’s operating principles, mission, and belief statements to plan, carry out, and implement programs that provide relief and development to people while taking into consideration all aspects of human life. All programs should support this goal of holistic development.

Although there were few if any Christians in Naxcivan at the time we worked there (1994-1996), many people were committed to a spiritual life in a way that impressed us and many of them had serious physical needs that had to be ministered to. But there were also those who, in spite of their great physical need, had even greater spiritual needs. They wanted ADRA to minister not only to their physical needs but also to their spiritual needs.

Not only did ADRA help hundreds of thousands of people through relief assistance programs (mostly feeding programs) in Naxcivan, but ADRA workers also ministered to the spiritual needs of those living there, for “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt 25:40).
Transition from Relief to Development

Between 1997 and 2000 a transition took place as a result of an effort by ADRA to bring to Naxcivan programs that were more developmental in nature. The shift from emergency relief (food distribution) to development was gradual during this period, but the relief programs still had not been discontinued even by 2000.

From 1997 to 2000 a lot of effort was put into training and developing the leadership skills of national employees. Many developed and grew and later assumed key positions of leadership within the ADRA programs in Naxcivan.

The development programs started in 1996 when 500 family greenhouses were distributed to refugees and vulnerable families. Also, the Health Emergency Initiative program that started in August 1997 and ended in May 1998 was the precursor for the health development program. The Micro-Credit program commenced directly as a development program and was not considered a transitional project from relief to development.

With effort, and despite opposition from several fronts, the transition from relief to development took place, and those who believed in and supported it were the ones who most benefited from it. They were not only the thousands of ADRA's direct beneficiaries, but also individuals and communities, as well as a few government officials who understood that the presence of ADRA was a benefit for them.

Contextual Challenges

There were several challenges that ADRA faced during the years between 1997 and 2000. While ADRA did not engage in evangelization, it kept faith with the government in regard to its belief in holistic development and Christian values. In all its activities ADRA showed respect for the government and the people of Naxcivan.

As the pressure from religious authorities (Muslim and Orthodox) to force the government to restrict the religious activities of Christians increased, ADRA workers faced increasing problems. ADRA was perceived to be a Christian NGO and this created problems for ADRA and its expatriate staff.

Notwithstanding the challenges, the holistic ministry of ADRA was first seen in its employees, mostly those who were spiritually committed and technically and professionally competent. The relief and development programs also demonstrated a degree of God's love towards ADRA's
beneficiaries, but only and insofar as the persons managing the programs lived out and demonstrated it.

The Struggle to Maintain a Holistic Development Program

From the beginning of 2001 to mid-2003 ADRA Azerbaijan passed through some very difficult times including severe persecution and accusations from the media, government officials, and also religious leaders. Nevertheless it kept moving forward with the intention of expanding and strengthening its development programs. During that same period ADRA was faced with an internal request to restructure and review its country programs and procedures, and also with the need for a new strategic plan. During these challenges and activities ADRA struggled to maintain a program that was balanced between its developmental principles and practice, but also spiritual in nature—a holistic program.

Although ADRA Azerbaijan oversaw the activities of the whole country, including the Naxcivan enclave, the programs implemented in Naxcivan represented about 50 percent of ADRA’s activities. Some of the observations of the Country Review document in regard to the Vision/Mission/Strategies of ADRA Azerbaijan highlighted the following about ADRA’s programs in Azerbaijan, but especially in Naxcivan:

1) Interviews indicate a slightly more developed articulation of the ADRA Mission, especially among staff in Naxcivan; 2) Numerous interviews characterized ADRA with terms such as; integrity, committed, disciplined, ethical, and transparent when describing ADRA Azerbaijan’s strengths; 3) ADRA conducted a Strategic Planning process with a report in 1997; 4) The Country Director is valued for his patient spirituality. (ADRA 2001, 2002a:2)

It would seem from the description above that elements of a holistic mission were seen by the observations of ADRA personnel in Naxcivan and by their articulation of ADRA’s mission. Moreover, through words such as integrity, ethical, transparent, and committed, ADRA personnel were exemplifying in themselves some of the attributes of a holistic ministry aimed at the whole person; most assuredly they were describing what they saw in each other, and also what the beneficiaries testified about ADRA.

ADRA was not only distributing food, clothes, seeds, and relief items, or implementing developmental programs, but was also enabling people to see hope beyond the things provided to them through the character of ADRA’s employees who were the bridges and agents and who demonstrated
the loving character of God. Thus, holism, seen in its proper perspective, requires that each and every person working towards the good of the neighbor would do his/her work the best way possible (professionally) and with utmost Christian commitment.⁴

## Expansion of Development Activities—Programs and Systems

At the end of 2001 the activities of ADRA Azerbaijan, as reported in the annual report, showed a total of 627 employees, 12 different programs (8 of them were development programs), and a total of 11 million U.S. dollars in implemented activities. The total number of beneficiaries who had received help, were trained or developed, or who had been touched by ADRA was 595,920 (for more details see ADRA 2002b:16). This demonstrated the need ADRA faced to recruit and train dozens and dozens of new employees and at the same time retain its professional and committed staff while trying to hire better personnel.

With new programs and the growth and expansion of its ongoing development programs, ADRA was forced to rethink its own structure. Of special concern was the way the Administrative Committee (ADCOM) was structured, the number of its members, and the types of agenda items discussed there. Moreover, the lack of field ADCOMs impacted directly on the management and size of the country ADCOM.

Early in 2001 the ADRA Azerbaijan Institutional Assessment Tool revealed several discrepancies in the organizational structure. A specific issue was the following:

Committee agendas (The Country ADCOM has been overwhelmed with lower-level admin issues resulting from the increase in number of programs. The number of voices has also been increased. Both of these issues have resulted in less committee efficiency.)

The agency is currently dealing with these issues through a combination of strategies, including expansion of the Baku administrative staff to include a Programs Officer, decentralization of decision-making authority within established parameters to the Regional ADCOMs (to streamline the agenda for the Country ADCOM), empowerment of Regional ADCOM Chairpersons to provide monitoring and technical backstopping to programs in assigned

⁴This is a characteristic that can be seen throughout ADRA’s belief statement, mission statement, and operating principles. It is also substantiated by ADRA’s philosophical basis which states that the basis for ADRA’s “existence, its reason for being, is to follow Christ’s example by living for, helping and working with those in need” (ADRA c. 1996:B5).
regions, revisions of policies and procedures (e.g. procurement) to ease the burden on the Baku office. The process is also requiring agency staff to increase their communications skills to ensure that requests and responses are timely, as well as clearly understood the first time. (ADRA 2001:24)

It took awhile for the country administration to convince the regional offices, including Naxcivan, to create their own ADCOMs and Technical Committees (TechComs). The changes were implemented gradually, but the Naxcivan field office started to hold TechCom meetings more often and to discuss most of the program issues at the field level. Then on October 15, 2002, the Country Board took several actions to restructure the administrative meetings, but even more important they voted to establish Technical and Management Committees for the country and for all the field regional offices. The action also decreased the membership of the committees and restructured the terms of reference of the country ADCOM.5

With an increase in and a further expansion of the development programs, several inter-country visits were organized. On several occasions the management of the Naxcivan Health Development Program (NHDP) sent key personnel to other regions of Azerbaijan to visit different health programs. ADRA also sent health personnel from its other programs in the main areas of Azerbaijan to visit and exchange experiences with the NHDP in the Naxcivan enclave. The Health Reform Team from the Ministry of Health in Azerbaijan accompanied by health personnel from other NGOs also went to Naxcivan to see the NHDP. Other inter-country visits between the staff of the NHDP and the staff of the health program of ADRA in Georgia (a neighboring country of Azerbaijan) took place in 2001 and 2002.

This type of exchange was even more utilized by the Naxcivan Enterprise Development Program (NEDP). Several inter-country visits were organized by Jeff, Conrad, and Sevinj during 2001, 2002, and 2003. Inter-country visits also took place between the staff of the reforestation and nursery (greenhouse) programs. In 2001 and 2002 several visits occurred between the Naxcivan and Ganja USDA-funded agricultural programs. Gerald and Adalat from Ganja and Julio and Bahman from Naxcivan were the ones most involved in these inter-country visits. Gerald visited places outside his region within Azerbaijan and also other countries such as the United States, Georgia, and Brazil. He brought back many new techniques, tools, and seeds to be utilized by ADRA in its agricultural programs in Azerbaijan.

5For the specific actions please see “ADRA Azerbaijan Board Meeting Minutes” (October 15, 2002c: actions #028, 029, 030, 031, 032).
ADRA's reforestation programs in Azerbaijan were the first of their kind in the country and became a role model for other NGOs, national government departments, and private enterprises.

The Need for Strategic Planning for ADRA as an Agency

Periodically ADRA needed to evaluate and redefine its policies through self-appraisals and assessments in order to improve its programs and operations. Through country board meetings and the less frequent strategic planning meetings, ADRA kept working on its relationships with its partners and constituents, which in turn provided effective channels for mutual growth and action.

By the middle of 2000 it became clear that ADRA Azerbaijan had outgrown its 1997 Strategic Plan and a new strategic planning process was needed. It was tentatively scheduled for November 2000, was delayed until February 2002, and then the first phase of the strategic planning process (workshop) finally happened on April 11-12, 2002. Later a major strategic planning summit was held in Baku from September 3-6, 2002.

The whole process, both the workshop in April and the summit in September, was extremely important to articulate the vision and strategic objectives of ADRA as it planned its development activities and portfolios for at least the next three years (2003-2007) (see ADRA 2000; ADRA 2003a:3; ADRA 2002d).

Participation in ADRA's Master Degree Program

ADRA's Operating Principles numbers 13 and 14 state the following: “ADRA acknowledges that its personnel are of essential value and must, therefore, be treated with fairness, respect, and equity” and “ADRA carries out policies which define and dedicate appropriate resources to the development and upgrading of its human resources” (ADRA 1996: B-5). These principles have to do with the development and appropriate training of ADRA's personnel, both national and expatriate.

In order to develop the capacity and skills of the national staff, ADRA Azerbaijan sent nine of its employees to be part of the ADRA Professional Leadership Institute (APLI). The program was a partnership between ADRA International and Andrews University and offered a master's degree (MSA) in International Development. Over a period of four summers the students were able to receive a master's degree, and thus ADRA helped to build the
capacity of many of its national staff, enabling them to better perform their responsibilities (see committee actions ADRA 2002f:#2002-017m ADRA 2002e:#2002-033).

Four of the nine participants were from Naxcivan and by participating in the MSA/APLI program ADRA hoped that they would better understand the principles and practices of a holistic approach to relief and development and would be able to apply them in the field. This involvement with the master’s program also provided an opportunity for the ADRA staff in Naxcivan to better understand the relationship between body, mind, and spirit as espoused by the Seventh-day Adventist Church and implemented in many of ADRA's development programs worldwide.

**Lessons Learned**

1. As new government rules and regulations were being put in place and implemented, some government authorities had difficulty understanding that although ADRA carried the word Adventist in its name, it was not there in Naxcivan to be directly involved in religious activities on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This taught ADRA that it was imperative to dialogue and communicate who it was and what it did to its counterparts in the host country, especially government officials in various levels.

   Moreover, as the government of Naxcivan understood more about the scope of the Adventist Church throughout the world and the role that ADRA played in relief and development, it realized it needed to treat ADRA different from other religious non-government organizations. All this was happening during a time when the local authorities were placing enormous pressure on the local Seventh-day Adventist Church but the government was more flexible and friendly towards ADRA and its relief and developmental activities.

2. Another important lesson is that there is a tremendous need for people to be trained in holistic ministries if they are to effectively work for and represent ADRA. It is not always easy to find people who have the courage, enthusiasm, passion, and love to go to different places and become relief and development workers. Before anyone engages in holistic ministry, be it relief or development, that person, along with his/her family, should receive serious training in holistic ministries.

3. A further lesson that should be learned is that holistic programs or programs that integrate the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of the human person are rare and not easy to implement. It is one thing
to talk about integration and holism, but it is another to put the theories and principles of biblical holism into practice, especially when the Christian faith is perceived as a threat to the host community.

Conrad Vine was working in Naxcivan when he wrote an article entitled “To Change the World . . . an Impossible Dream.” In it Vine states that “a life of selfless service to others can, by the grace of God, transform the life of an individual—even millions. Together, as individuals in unison, we can change the world, one life at a time! Let the change begin today with me” (2002:11). I also believe that an integrated or holistic program only happens when all those involved are united and share the same goals and objectives. The one who manages such a program must be transformed by God first, and then transformation and changes in the lives of many, even millions will follow. However, holistic ministry and integration will always remain a challenge.

4. The last lesson is that there is always the danger of dichotomy between being and doing. The challenge of “to be” and “to do” is directly linked with holistic programs. For a program to be holistic, it is necessary that those who implement it also be whole in their being and doing, in their words and deeds.

**ADRA’s Holistic Ministry in Naxcivan**

There were many challenges and opportunities as ADRA worked in Naxcivan. ADRA, for the most part, lived out the principles of the gospel, thus rightfully being able to interpret the gospel. In loving God above all, and in loving their neighbors as themselves, ADRA was able to interpret and live out the gospel in Naxcivan, and thereby its programs were holistic in nature and practice.

Certain restrictions were applied to ADRA so it could not engage in Christian witnessing. However, there were no restrictions on the amount of good, or serving others, or being good and kind to everyone. ADRA was able to interpret the Christian gospel by healing, educating, providing water, food, clothes, shelter, credit, and in many other ways. I have also observed that people in Naxcivan respected ADRA not because of the religious affiliation of its employees but because they initiated conversations about the people’s spiritual concerns and because they respected and revered God.

This is at the core of a genuine holistic ministry and is what the ADRA employees were trying to do. They were trying to do what Jesus did, what Jesus would have done. To restore health, to restore dignity, to restore respect, to reconcile people with people and people with God through relief
and development programs is genuine holistic ministry. I have seen a lady, a widow, with half a dozen children getting a loan and after several months being able to build a home with two small rooms for herself and her children. That is authentic and holistic ministry, an activity consistent with the spirit of Jesus, an action that expresses the holistic gospel of Christ, an action of transformation.

Having been directly involved as part of the ADRA team in Naxcivan, as well as later being the ADRA Azerbaijan country director for more than seven years, I have had the privilege to experience firsthand what it means to be part of holistic relief and development programs that carry and encompass Christian values. In November 2003 I received a letter from one of my colleagues from Azerbaijan, Mr. M. T., a former ADRA employee, a medical doctor, a good Muslim, and a man of God. The letter read:

I thought a lot about you and your family all these last days when we were busy with celebration preparations. You must be proud of the work you did here in Azerbaijan.

I will say something very important, but believe me this is truth. If the country director would be another person at that time ADRA Az would be just as commercial as other int NGOs here.

Yes, yes […], only the way you did everything with all the time remembering and praying to God, brought ADRA to condition when spirituality every worker can feel presence of God in our organization. God bless you, …!
(e-mail message to author, November 4, 2003)

This was quite an interesting and gratifying experience as one never thinks one’s own influence could be so positive. The gratitude and honor goes to God, the one who has allowed ADRA to be established and minister to the needs of people in Naxcivan, as well as in Azerbaijan. ADRA’s holistic ministries in that country are a demonstration of God’s character of love and kindness to his children.

**Toward a Holistic Approach to Relief and Development**

Having described ADRA’s Relief and Development Program in Naxcivan, it is now time to reflect on these experiences, draw some conclusions about the program, and offer recommendations with regard to holistic ministries. The program was undertaken at the invitation of the new government of Azerbaijan in 1993. The government had not yet developed its policies, but the country faced urgent needs and requested help in meeting both emergency
relief needs and long-term development goals. Assistance was sought from both foreign governments and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

The framework for this article involves the interplay between ADRA, with its vision of holistic development, and the Government of Naxcivan, Azerbaijan, that was seeking solutions to immediate needs for food, social welfare, and longer-term development. During the period of this study the government policies and regulations were being formed, but ADRA also was challenged to clarify its philosophy and program approach.

Thus, it is from the context of this particular Christian relief and development journey in Naxcivan (1993-2007), together with biblical/theological, historical, and contemporary understandings of human development that the following suggestions and recommendations are offered in the hope they can be of help both to ADRA, to the scholarship of this discipline, to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and to countless relief and development workers.

**Redefining Development**

If development has to do with the restoration of human dignity, as demonstrated in this study, then it follows that development must encompass every dimension of human existence: physical, moral, psychological, social, and spiritual. ADRA's philosophy is based on the assumption that love is the foundation for a Christian vision of human development (1 Cor 13) because development is relational. Although development will include material, and technical and capital inputs, these alone are inadequate. A person without dignity is a person who is not loved and valued. The goal of holistic development is a person-in-community transformed by love, whose dignity has been restored, and who has found a productive and socially responsible role in the community.

As a Christian development and relief agency, ADRA assumes that sound human development will be based on the Bible. This assures a framework for integrating the multiple forms of ministry: relief, development, plus the social and spiritual dimensions. The foundation for ADRA's approach is laid out in its Philosophical Basis for ADRA's Existence as an Agency of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

True development is achieved when the poor, the oppressed, the sick, the vulnerable, and the miserable in a society have been enabled to participate as responsible members of the community with each one contributing to the realization of a just and free society. When people’s basic needs are met,
individuals become responsible members of a community and participate in shaping their own future because they have access to resources and opportunities. This kind of development is multi-dimensional, encompassing every dimension of human life.

Jesus said: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). That is the mission of Christ, a mission that wants everyone to live abundantly. This is true mission, a mission that integrates all of life’s aspects. That is also what gradually happened in Naxcivan. ADRA has worked in Naxcivan for close to fifteen years and many good things have happened. ADRA first entered the country to help the refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and the extremely vulnerable through its relief programs. After establishing its relief program, ADRA began to start some development programs, and did so quite successfully.

These humanitarian relief and development programs and the other aspects of missionary work certainly happened because God saw that all of them were necessary in order that his loving character would be demonstrated in Naxcivan.

The Challenges as ADRA Moves Forward

In the future the challenges for ADRA in Naxcivan or Azerbaijan will not be that different from the challenges faced by ADRA and other NGOs in other parts of the world. The main challenge, which is also a task, is to provide opportunities for people so that through developmental programs that are holistic in nature and through the people’s own initiatives, individuals and communities are transformed.

Moreover, it remains a fact that ADRA’s development workers in Naxcivan cannot predict or control how the government will make decisions or act, nevertheless the government is a necessary partner. Accordingly, ADRA can continue to work in Naxcivan so long as the government sanctions its presence and desires its contribution. Government policies and regulations continue to develop and ADRA must always work within these guidelines. Inevitably, there will be points of disagreement and tension due to differing philosophies and goals; but one can be hopeful, in view of at least a dozen years of fruitful cooperation, that ADRA’s development programs have had and will continue to have a positive impact on many lives and communities there.

For ADRA in Naxcivan, the challenge to pursue holistic development programs will continue. To fulfill this task requires a great deal of continuous
dialogue and cooperation with the government and other partners, and considerable and consistent training in holistic development—training that not only aims at preparing technically competent persons but also at providing a balanced understanding and knowledge of holistic relief and development programs which are build upon moral and spiritual values that are Christ centered.

Appropriate Training

An ADRA relief and development worker should be a person with the courage and enthusiasm to work in another country, to serve and help in the designing, planning, and implementation of holistic development programs. Such a person needs appropriate training, training that will provide the skills and required understanding.

It is not easy to find people who have the courage, enthusiasm, passion, and love to go to different places and become relief and development workers. When these persons are found, in many cases they do not initially have the skills which are necessary for them to be effective relief and development workers. Others have the skills, but may lack the most important qualities: love, passion, enthusiasm, and courage. To build professional and technical skills while at the same time developing spiritual gifts would be the best approach, therefore there is the need for appropriate training to prepare workers that would include a holistic and integrated approach to relief and development activities.

I believe that before anyone engages in a cross-cultural assignment, be it relief, development, educational, medical, and so forth, either in an overseas assignment or a local one, appropriate training should be given to that person, the spouse, and the children.

Because of some past negative experiences and the necessity of having professionals involved in any cross-cultural assignment, appropriate training is a must. Many times candidates will have all the good qualities or skills needed to go as a relief and development worker but will have no idea of how to apply those skills. Even worse is when the skills and good qualities the person has are not relevant to the place he or she has been assigned to. If ADRA wants fewer dropouts or negative experiences in any given cross-cultural experience, training must be required of all who are hired and sent as relief and development personnel.

Appropriate training for ADRA workers should be offered in as many places as possible. The modes of training and education should include three
modalities: formal, non-formal, and informal. Formal training is directly related with schools and what is taught there. Non-formal education has to do with the administration of planned learning outside schools or universities, and is generally administered through seminars, workshops, conferences, and education by extension programs. Informal education is based more on the interactions the person has in various social settings.

It is important for ADRA to continually provide appropriate training for candidates as relief and development workers through the Seventh-day Adventist educational system, through its master’s program in International Development offered in partnership with Andrews University in several parts of the world, and also through local seminars and workshops. ADRA workers also must be sent abroad where they can receive the appropriate training as required for them to perform their responsibilities.

In my opinion, appropriate and relevant training should be given to candidates before they go to their field. This avoids misunderstandings and unnecessary problems and also provides the opportunity the candidates need to decide not to go, or if they do go, to arrive better prepared for the task and place they are assigned to. When training cannot be given before going to the field, arrangements should be made for the training to be provided as soon as possible after arriving in the field. Another option is that during the first furlough or vacation, training should certainly be sought by the ADRA worker or anyone working for a relief and development organization.

It is also recognized that it is not always possible to train people before they go overseas due to time constraints, cost of training, appropriate types of training, lack of teachers, no facilities for training, no materials or resources, and perhaps, no interest in offering training or being trained. With that in mind one has to be flexible and adaptable in order that the best could be done even in the worst circumstances.

The purpose of appropriate education and training is to prepare and equip ADRA relief and development workers to be the best professionals while fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to them. Through this preparation they should reflect professionalism and act accordingly, and should be able to bear fruit as they minister to other people through the activities assigned to them (see Elliston 1996:236).

Any training that espouses Christian values must take the Bible seriously and apply its principles to the situation in a relevant way. If that is done appropriately, holistic relief and development programs will always have the purpose to help, heal, build, save, transform, and redeem, not only for this life, but for the life to come because Christ’s example of care is the true motivation for our service.
Inter-Agency Cooperation

It is unfortunate that there is little cooperation among Christian relief and development agencies. Sometimes there is little cooperation even within the same agency or NGO constituency. There are still a lot of restricted access countries, and in order to enter these countries and implement successful programs, relief and development agencies (such as ADRA) should work in a rigorous and disciplined and cooperative way among themselves.

Another aspect to be considered within this context is dialogue. Many times there is no cooperation because there has not even been any intentional dialogue. It is usually after dialogue occurs that agreements are made and cooperation can be established. It is through dialogue and cooperation that agencies can pull together and in the same direction for the common good of all involved in holistic relief and development programs.

Stephen Hoke and Samuel Voorhies wrote the following:

Time is short and resources are too limited for Christian relief and development agencies to not commit themselves to more rigorous and disciplined cooperation in implementing the training function. There must be intentional cooperation between the community, churches, and agencies in the region for wholistic development to be truly effective. Closer cooperation would include networking human resources, sharing of facilities, coming together for prayer, needs assessment, and careful long range planning. (1989:233-234)

At Pentecost the disciples were all united in the same spirit, were in one accord, were praying together, and had laid aside all differences. The spirit of unity and cooperation that existed among the disciples was certainly the trademark of the early apostolic Church and its mission, and contributed to its growth and expansion. Certainly ADRA, other church entities and departments, and other NGO relief and development workers must cooperate with each other in an effort to carry out and implement holistic relief and development programs.

Communication and Dialogue

The challenges that ADRA faces in various contexts: geographical, political, religious, economic, and so on, require that ADRA continually improve its communication skills and strategies as well as the way it dialogues with its partners. It is of great importance for ADRA to maintain a healthy
and continuous dialogue as it enters into partnerships with governments and local authorities that do not know or understand its operating principles and are biased against Christian NGOs.

ADRA should also continually seek to improve how it communicates its belief and mission statements to its constituency, its employees, its partners, and the vulnerable and needy people it serves. As more people come to know and understand what ADRA is and does, it will be able to better carry out its holistic relief and development programs.

**Vision for the Future**

While engaged in relief and development activities, both ADRA as an agency, and the relief and development worker, must keep alive a vision for the future, a vision that is accurate and focused (see Hickman 2009). Vision also involves sustainability, which is a development component that can only be accomplished when a holistic approach is present in every intervention. Thus, both sustainability and a holistic approach must be an integral part of this vision for the future.

As ADRA’s development workers and the members of the community look towards the future, their vision must be one that has to do with desiring and seeing transformed individuals and communities living a life that is full (John 10:10), anticipating the coming of Jesus, and the final establishment of his kingdom.

**Compassion for the People**

ADRA, as a relief and development agency, believes that Christ died for all, that his death is for all with no regard to gender, ethnicity, political ties, economic status, or religious affiliation. Compassion and love for people should inspire all ADRA workers to imitate Christ in their holistic relief and development activities, in their mission of healing, educating, comforting, curing, feeding, redeeming, and saving. This compassion and love will develop in each ADRA employee a greater desire to communicate Christ’s holistic gospel cross-culturally and among the people they serve.

If ADRA wants, like the Apostle Paul, to serve and witness where Christ is not known, to heal the sick where there is no doctor, to feed the hungry where there is no food, to clothe the naked where there are no clothes, and to love where there is no love, it certainly needs to have a clear vision for the future that includes compassion and love for vulnerable people whose hearts are aching for the healing touch of Jesus.
Appropriate Contextualization

In order to understand the holistic nature of God’s message in the Old Testament (see Kuhn 2010) and his holistic gospel as demonstrated in the life of Christ in the New Testament, ADRA must constantly contextualize its ministry (see Kuhn 2007). Through appropriate contextualization ADRA’s holistic ministry can become an instrument through which the image of God can be brought back to the human race, for the image of God can only be seen in people when people are wholesome. This image of God has best been captured in the language of redemption and reconciliation that God desires for all of us. Dean S. Gilliland aptly states the following:

The word “creation” itself leads us back to that greatest first event when God made man and woman. It was a whole and entire being that God made. Nothing less than the remaking of the entire person is what salvation in Christ provides. The re-creation of persons on this order touches the ethical, the moral, the aesthetic, the physical, and the social. These redeemed people are in a real world; they have bodies that need to be healed, minds that must be taught, spirits that long for encouragement; they have worries about families and security. This complete being lives in a complex world, each part of which is destined to be touched by the recreating gospel. And the good news is that we have a Bible that has touched people in every known human situation. . . . Jesus’ own ministry corresponds in deed to what the psalmist declared concerning God, that along with other graces he “lifts up those who are bowed down, . . . watches over the sojourners, he upholds the widow and the fatherless” (Ps. 146:8-9). . . . Wholeness characterized the ministry of Paul. Perhaps no word describes his theology better than the term reconciliation. . . . Reconciliation brings us back again to that which God intended for his creation before the fall. (1989:21-22)

It is important to note that although the fall corrupted the image of God in humanity, it is through redemption in Christ that human beings are brought back into wholeness of life—into reconciliation with God and with each other. It is in regard to this spiritual aspect that ADRA must also contextualize the holistic relief and development programs it implements so as to reflect not only the Christian values it espouses but also to take into consideration the values and principles of the people with whom it serves and partners.
Conclusion

Individual or community holistic development in all its perspectives and forms is a radical concept. It involves all aspects of life: physical, mental, social, and spiritual. It also has to do with the redemption and transformation of the structures and powers that hinder and obstruct people from living the abundant life Christ wants everyone to enjoy.

Personally, and as an ADRA worker, I have come to the firm conclusion that development as understood and practiced from a holistic Christian perspective offers much more hope and has a better chance to succeed than does secular development that dichotomizes between body and soul, between the physical/material and spiritual realities of life.

A holistic approach to relief and development seeks to be inclusive and integrative, aiming at addressing the person in his or her wholesomeness. In this sense, it is in Christ that we have the one best example. Therefore, any theology and practice of holistic ministries, especially for ADRA, should always carry the principles of Christ’s holistic gospel which aims to transform the whole human being—body, mind, and spirit (see Sterns 2009 for a broad perspective on this topic). Consequently, anyone who desires to be involved in welfare relief and/or transformational development programs along with being a Christian witness must be careful to follow the principles and concepts presented in the Bible. They must study the life of Christ to see how he imparted life and salvation as he ministered to all—healing, teaching, and preaching the good news. In the end, everyone needs to understand that preaching the good news and healing the human body is one and the same activity, an activity that is carried forward by individuals through the Spirit.

A holistic and integrative approach to God’s mission understands that relief, development, and Christian witness are the hands and feet of one Body—the Body of Christ. Thus, holistic ministries must be carried out together and in an integrated manner as God’s people endeavor to live the good news of God in the wisdom and strength of the Spirit and in the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

Works Cited


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