



IDP protection in Angola: has momentum been lost?

by Kamia Carvalho

The most overused word to describe Angola is 'potential'.

Blessed with petroleum, diamonds, gold and fertile land, this former Portuguese colony has the potential to be one of the richest countries in Africa. And yet, after four decades of war marked by terror tactics and scorched earth policies, the countryside is extensively mined and forced displacement has become part of 'normal' life for a sizeable proportion of the Angolan population. The shocking contradiction between its natural wealth and its actual poverty is highlighted by the fact that no fewer than 4.1m people – a third of the population – are officially recognised as IDPs.

The death of the UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi in February 2002 quickly led to an agreement between the Angolan government and the rebel group to end one of the world's longest running civil wars. Far from reducing the humanitarian problems faced by IDPs in Angola, the end of the war has brought out the stark reality of their plight. Of the many challenges facing Angola none is greater than that of reintegration and resettlement of IDPs.

Angola was one of the first states to use the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement¹ as a basis for national IDP legislation. Examining the legal framework and the institutional structures being established for the resettlement of IDPs in Angola, this article explores whether the Principles are set to provide an effective means to improve conditions for Angola's internally displaced.

IDP legislation

Since 2000 the Angolan government has sought to provide better legal protection for IDPs. A workshop in Luanda – jointly convened by the Global IDP Project, the Ministry of Social Assistance and Reintegration (MINARS) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) – developed a draft set of Minimum Standards for Return and Resettlement (MINOPS) as a first step towards bringing national IDP policy into compliance with the Guiding Principles.

In January 2001 a government decree clarified the state's responsibilities

towards the displaced population and established the *Normas sobre o reassentamento das populacoes deslocadas* (Norms for Resettlement of Displaced Populations). The Normas are significant in that they recognise that the Guiding Principles establish the general principles governing the treatment of IDPs, highlight that resettlement of IDPs must be voluntary and acknowledge that IDPs must be informed and involved in procedures for permanent relocation, land identification and distribution.

MPLA government troops, Luena, Angola.

Angola has the potential to become the leading global exemplar of how to use the Guiding Principles as a tool for better protection of IDPs. The reality, however, has been different as lack of effective implementation and new government preoccupations have impeded progress.

There has been considerable delay in preparing draft regulations to ensure application of the Normas. These regulations set out the role and the functions of the provincial authorities in relation to IDP resettlement and rules for identifying land issues.

The 2002 UN Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal to donors² noted that

there was initial evidence that half the country's resettlement programmes were being implemented in accordance with the Normas. However, the end of the war in April saw a fundamental shift of policy focus as the demobilisation and resettlement of UNITA troops and their families were prioritised. National and international responses to the needs of ex-UNITA combatants and IDPs have been thrown into confusion. Initial estimates that there were some 40-50,000 UNITA soldiers to be assisted were shown to be inaccurate, as over 80,000 soldiers and 300,000 of their dependents flooded into the 42 reception centres.

Compounding the problem of lack of resources to provide food, water and sanitation for these unexpected numbers has been the tension between the Angolan authorities and international agencies seeking access to camps. The Angolan army initially undertook the demobilisation and it is currently the responsibility of the provincial authorities to carry out the resettlement programmes with support from the international community. There has been new emphasis on establishing sustainable peace with only minimal international 'interference'. The authorities imposed a deadline of 15 October 2002 for the end of the demobilisation process and the beginning of resettlement. Though the government has responded to concerns over the lack of assistance being provided by extending the deadline to December, the UN and NGOs are still sceptical.

As politics has become dominated by the cease-fire and the demobilisation

programme, it is clear that the Angolan authorities are prioritising assistance to ex-combatants rather than adequately addressing the urgent humanitarian needs of IDPs. The establishment by presidential decree in June 2002 of 'A National Commission for the Reintegration of Demobilised Soldiers and IDPs' highlights this trend. The Commission's role *vis-à-vis* IDPs is described as that of coordinator of the resettlement programmes and supervisor of the protection sub-groups. These groups, however, ceased meeting before the Commission's role was clarified, thus leaving a gap in the protection mechanisms at a crucial time for IDPs.

Institutional protection

The institutional protection for IDPs set up by the national authorities and the international organisations is a complex web of teams and subgroups. Provincial and municipal authorities are at the forefront of providing assistance to IDPs. While the Commission appears to have established structures and to be adopting a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of IDPs, in reality the implementation of programmes is hampered by limited resources. Emphasis on the primary role of the provincial authorities as the implementers of resettlement programmes and enforcers of the Normas ignores the reality of the lack of adequate governmental capacity in some provinces.

The UN in Angola, partner of the central and provincial authorities, also has a crucial role in IDP protection issues. In July 2002 a damning report on the plight of Angola's IDPs contro-

versially stated that OCHA, designated as coordinator for humanitarian assistance and the lead agency on IDPs in Angola, did not have adequate expertise and staffing capacity to effectively respond to unfolding crises affecting IDPs.

Despite the criticisms it is important to recognise that OCHA is a crucial partner with the national authorities and NGOs in addressing the needs of IDPs. From OCHA's field advisors in the provinces (who monitor the conditions of the displaced) to their monthly reports on the humanitarian situation in all of the 18 provinces, OCHA is providing the tools for identifying what is happening and what needs to be done. A positive development has been the collaboration between the UN agencies and the government in developing provincial action plans for IDPs. These have emerged from provincial workshops attended by the military, judiciary, the Attorney General's office, the national police, MINARS, OCHA, UNHCR and community stakeholders. Benefiting from protection training, these groups have prepared tailored protection plans for the IDPs in their province which are then passed to the provincial governor for approval. In July 2002 thirteen of Angola's 18 provinces had approved plans in place. This demonstrates that there has been some attempt at improving the national response to the plight of IDPs.

The establishment of the UN Mission in Angola (UNMA) by the Security Council in August 2002 has also been a positive step, particularly with its focus on the protection and promotion of human rights. The Human Rights Division in the UN should play a pivotal role in efforts to better protect IDPs and other citizens by working with the government and local authorities to build capacity and raise awareness of human rights. This approach is often criticised for not protecting individuals in a more concerted manner but it is important to aid the development of better human rights standards in Angola as a whole. This should impact, directly or indirectly, on IDPs and thus improve the authorities' respect for the Normas.

The way ahead

The spontaneous return to their area of origin of some 750,000 IDPs has been met with both delight and concern. While this is a welcome sign that

Relief agencies are providing food to the most vulnerable people in displaced camps in Malange and Lunda Norte districts, north Angola.



freedom of movement within the country is finally being restored, there is concern over the return to areas which are heavily mined or lack infrastructure to accommodate returnees. Recent figures suggest that since the end of the war only 30% of the IDP returns have been compliant with the Normas.

Angola faces many challenges in respecting and implementing the Normas and the Guiding Principles. There is an urgent need for the donor community and the Angolan government to finance rebuilding and resettlement programmes. If peace is to be sustained it is essential that ex-UNITA soldiers receive vocational training and social assistance. Of equal importance, as quartering camps close and resettlement begins, is to ensure greater respect for the principles set out in the Normas. Shrugging off criticisms for its early closure of camps, MINARS maintains that it is on course to reintegrate soldiers and their families before commencement of the new school year in early 2003. MINARS is following a plan which focuses on emergency and rehabilitation work until 2005 when reconstruction is set to become the policy priority. However, the fluid political situation makes it impossible to predict when the humanitarian crises faced by IDPs and ex-UNITA soldiers will be adequately addressed and resolved.

Compliance with the Normas should remain the barometer for measuring the success of resettlement programmes. Despite a good start, Angola still has a long way to go. Ensuring respect for the Normas requires strengthening of effective institutional structures. Above all else, there must be political will to ensure respect for the law.

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The most comprehensive source of information on IDP issues is provided by the Global IDP project at: www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/idpSurvey.nsf/wCountries/Angola

1. The Guiding Principles are online at: www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/7/b/principles.htm.
2. See www.reliefweb.int/appeals/2002/presskit/angola/angola-cap2002-summary.pdf.
3. 'United Nations: Protect the Displaced in Angola', Human Rights Watch, Tuesday 5 March 2002.