



Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement



Towards a research agenda on internal displacement

by Elizabeth Ferris

The Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, together with the Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown University, convened a meeting of academic researchers working on issues related to IDPs in Cairo, Egypt, from 8-9 March 2007. The meeting, hosted by the American University in Cairo, was called to take stock of current and planned research in the field, to identify gaps and overlaps and to brainstorm about a future research agenda on internal displacement. The 20 participants, from all regions and many academic disciplines, discussed methodological issues, possibilities for strengthening institutional partnerships, funding possibilities and issues where further research is needed.

Participants identified methodological problems in both data collection and field research and raised questions such as:

- Why and how can data be collected on IDPs who are not in camps, who are not registered and who have good reasons for not wanting to identify themselves?
- What are alternative methodologies for collecting information on IDPs and what mixture of methodologies is most effective in particular cultural situations?
- Can a common operational definition of IDPs be developed to facilitate comparative work?
- Recognising the importance of longitudinal studies and their high cost, can cross-sectional data be a substitute for longitudinal work?
- Do methods for studying IDPs differ from those used for studying refugees, other conflict-affected or undocumented migrants? What

can be learned from methodologies employed in studying those groups?

- How can the risk to people being interviewed be minimised and how can confidentiality in the data be assured?
- How can academic researchers develop better linkages with policy makers?

In discussing a future research agenda for internal displacement, participants identified the following priority issues for future work:

1. Strengthening the conceptual understanding of internal displacement

- The context in which displacement is taking place, particularly the way in which understandings of sovereignty and globalisation affect internal displacement.
- Causes of displacement and particularly the relationship between different causes of displacement – for example, between conflict- and development-induced displacement.
- IDP frames of reference, including the IDP category itself and questions about the value added of expanding the definition to include all those who are forced to move; the relationship between internal and external displacement; the relationship between IDPs and economic migrants; and the points of comparison between people displaced by conflict and those who remained behind.
- Protection, including questions about mainstreaming protection, protection at the field level, the relationship between assistance and protection, and the particular protection needs of women, children, indigenous, the elderly and other groups.

2. Strengthening systems to respond to IDPs

- Institutional responses to IDPs, including the relationship of national and international responsibility for IDPs, the impact of humanitarian reforms on IDP protection and assistance, and the responsibility to protect.

3. Specific IDP groups or situations

- Urban displacement, including the need for basic information on urban IDPs or, more generally, IDPs who do not live in camps or who are 'out of view' and the relationship between urban displacement and urbanisation.
- IDPs as agents, including the role that IDPs exercise in finding their own solutions and serving as change agents in their communities.
- Protracted IDP situations, including the factors that create long-term IDP situations and conditions which lead to their solution.
- Non conflict-displaced, including development-induced displacement, environmental/ecological displacement and trafficking.

The meeting was productive and challenging – although it raised more questions than answers – and the group agreed to meet again, with other interested scholars, during the annual meeting of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration to be held in January 2008 in Cairo. The full report of the meeting is available at http://www3.brookings.edu/fp/projects/idp/conferences/2007_Cairorpt.pdf

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