

National response to inte

In many cases the international community acts to protect and assist the world's internally displaced people in the absence of responsible and effective national action.

This is, at least partly, because countries experiencing crises of internal displacement are unlikely to possess national institutions capable of effectively providing their displaced citizens with the necessary support. Strengthening national capacity for response is essential in order that governments themselves can assume immediate responsibility in humanitarian emergencies without having to depend on external aid. In countries experiencing political and economic upheaval, the very act of establishing an institution is significant, as it constitutes government acknowledgment of the problem of internal displacement. The efficacy of a nation's response can be influenced by several factors:

Ethnicity of the displaced people

In cases where government actions have caused the displacement of particular ethnic groups (such as in Sudan, Burma and Turkey) reliance upon these same governments to help those displaced becomes questionable. Authorities may be more easily motivated to assist people who belong to the same ethnic group as the state's majority: in Cyprus, for example, Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot authorities created assistance programmes for displaced members of their respective ethnic groups on the island [1].

Political considerations and biases

By contrast, political considerations have precluded the Azerbaijani government from taking an active role in

assisting its displaced citizens, although they are ethnic Azerbaijanis. While local people have received those displaced with hospitality, the Government of Azerbaijan has not taken steps to further local integration, and seems to prefer that these people remain displaced until settlement of the dispute with Armenia allows their return to Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas [2].

In Colombia, many in the government view internally displaced people with suspicion, and some officials even consider those displaced to be subversives [see Seán Loughna's article on pp 15-16]. Despite the creation of a plethora of agencies to address human rights and displacement issues, political attitudes have contributed to a "conspicuous gap between intentions and performance" [3].

In Peru the state is preoccupied with curbing urbanisation. Consequently, the government's single agency designated to assist internally displaced people, the Project of Support to the Repopulation (PAR), assists returnees and internally displaced people who agree to return to rural areas, but not those who choose to resettle in other areas. It has even pressured some communities to return home despite precarious conditions [4].

Coordination and liaison efforts

The creation of 'focal points' within governments to deal with displacement promotes coordination and facilitates UNHCR's ability to communicate effectively with governments,

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by Jennifer McLean

rather than having to face a confusing and time-wasting array of bureaucracies [5]. In Tajikistan, the existence of the Tajik Central Refugee Department made it easier for UNHCR, together with government officials, to undertake operations to provide assistance to the nation's internally displaced people.

In Sri Lanka, the focal point is the Ministry of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Social Welfare (the MRR&SW). One MRR&SW programme coordinates the relief effort by the government and international community and maintains hundreds of camps and welfare centres which serve over 250,000 internally displaced people. Bureaucratic obstacles and aid diversions have sometimes undermined the effectiveness of the MRR&SW, and the government has been known to restrict assistance to displaced Tamils [6]. Nevertheless, Sri Lanka on the whole provides a good example of a government which has assumed responsibility for its displaced people and returnees, and established effective national institutions to address their needs.

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International community involvement

The international community can, in most cases, provide support by encouraging governments to develop and strengthen national institutions and, where possible, by monitoring the activities of these institutions. Georgia's Coordination Bureau for

International Humanitarian Aid (CBIHA) was established in 1995, with funding from international organisations, to assist all categories of needy people in Georgia. The agency is mandated to coordinate all international organisation and NGO programmes, and with the support of the International Organisation for Migration, the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Norwegian Government, publishes a monthly report which reviews aid programmes in Georgia and includes useful commentary on current assistance [2].

The Programme of Action produced at the May 1996 CIS regional conference on displacement discusses the importance of establishing high-level migration agencies to "develop policy and coordinate all relevant governmental bodies" [7]. It emphasises that such bodies could be of great help in targeting humanitarian assistance and facilitating the work of international organisations and NGOs. International organisations are invited to develop technical cooperation programmes to assist CIS governments in strengthening their management capacities and developing their information systems.

The situation of internally displaced people will obviously be affected by a government's motivation in creating national institutions, and the political will for implementing the mandates of these institutions. The international community has a clear stake in persuading nations to improve their response to crises of internal displacement and also to assume greater



IDPs from Lachin, Nagorno-Karabakh, at Adghebedi, Azerbaijan

photograph: UNHCR/M. Alford

responsibility for their own IDPs. Stronger national institutions would reduce the risk of dependence on external assistance and ease coordination difficulties between governments and international agencies. Above all, more responsible institutions would help ensure that internally displaced people are not overlooked.

Jennifer McLean is a Research Assistant working on the Brookings Institution Project on Internal Displacement. She accompanied the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for IDPs on his mission to Tajikistan in 1996.

References

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- [3] UN Commission on Human Rights, Report of the Secretary-General on Internal Displacement, *Profiles in displacement: Colombia*, E/CN.4/1995/50/Add.1, UN, 3 October 1994, p36
- [4] Stavropoulou M 'Will Peru's displaced return?' in Cohen & Deng (eds) *The forsaken people...*
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- [6] Seneviratne HL & Stavropoulou M 'Sri Lanka's 'vicious circle' of displacement' in *The forsaken people...*
- [7] *CIS Conference Programme of Action*, CISCONF/1996/5, paragraphs 50, 52, 126