



The Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement



A recipe to end internal displacement

by Roberta Cohen



As the international community mulls over the criteria for ending internal displacement¹, a leading NGO in Sri Lanka has come up with a 45-page guide on how to do just that in its own country. *The Practitioner's Kit for Return, Resettlement, Rehabilitation and Development* of the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) outlines the steps for ending Sri Lanka's massive internal displacement and calls on the government and other major actors to reach that goal by 2006.

First, it urges a full and final peace process to pave the way for the returns of IDPs and refugees. Second, it warns that the mere act of return will not guarantee the end to displacement. Successful reintegration requires well-conceived and well-funded rehabilitation plans in which returnees receive adequate help upon finding their homes destroyed or occupied by others and their community's schools, roads and health systems heavily damaged. Third, relief and development aid must be closely integrated with mechanisms set up for the prevention of further displacement, the protection of the human rights and safety of the displaced, political reconciliation and the creation of

jobs. "Return," the *Practitioner's Kit* underscores, "can be as traumatic as displacement." The remedies should seek to prevent the conditions that caused the conflict and displacement in the first place.

The *Practitioner's Kit* draws from standards contained in the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which it adapts to the Sri Lankan experience. Returns, it emphasises, must be voluntary, based on informed decisions about conditions in return and resettlement areas. They must take place in safety and dignity with the displaced given the opportunity to participate in their planning and management. IDPs must enjoy full access to public services, equality before the law and not be considered "enemies". They should have the right to recover their property and possessions or receive compensation, and should be assisted in transporting to their areas of origin assets required for their livelihood.

An end to displacement will also require:

- access to land, especially agricultural land, so that returning IDPs and refugees can sustain themselves, and a government mechanism set up to resolve land and property disputes
- replacement of lost documents, especially birth certificates and property titles
- help to displaced children to go back to school, providing them with books, supplies, uniforms and transportation
- accelerated de-mining efforts with all mined areas marked and greater awareness raised among returning populations to land-mines and unexploded ordnance
- minority protection, including the monitoring of their treatment and interceding with authorities when protective action is required

- non-discrimination in assistance provided so that no displaced person is marginalised
- inclusion of IDP women in decision making, providing them with social and economic opportunities, protecting them from sexual exploitation and violence and introducing programmes to integrate widows and female-headed households in areas of return
- establishment of a coordinating body to be accountable for return, resettlement and rehabilitation, including mediation and reconciliation between returning displaced persons and local residents, and skills development to make returnees self-reliant.

Making the reintegration of displaced populations a national priority will mean the strengthening of partnerships between national authorities, local government officials, the non-governmental sector, displaced communities, the media and the international community. It will also include holding insurgent groups accountable for standards of treatment of displaced populations.

Although light enough to carry around, the *Practitioner's Kit* bears a heavy message. It should help not only the Government of Sri Lanka but all governments and major actors to find the right solutions to ending mass displacement.

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The Practitioner's Kit is available online at www.humanitarian-srilanka.org and from Brookings-SAIS at www.brookings.edu/fp/projects/idp/idp.htm. Hard copies can be obtained from cdriest@brookings.edu: Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement, The Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036, USA.

¹ See FMR 17 www.fmreview.org/mags1.htm