

# Peace in Angola: IDPs on the way home?

by Nina M Birkeland

*Angolans have now lived in peace for a whole year. The official number of IDPs declined from 4.1 to 2.8 million in 2002. Has the crisis of displacement in Angola finally come to an end?*

The causes of displacement in Angola are multi-complex. War may have been the most prominent cause of flight in recent decades but IDPs also cite environmental degradation and lack of access to schools, health posts, transport facilities and markets as reasons for leaving home. This interweaving of the causes of displacement must be understood. In order to minimise future internal displacement both national and international actors need to realise that the formula for causes of forced displacement is more complicated than *war = IDPs : no war = no IDPs*

Many IDPs are going home. They require not only political and military security but help with resuming livelihoods. Though the state has re-established itself in all communes and municipalities, these tiers of government are minimally resourced to initiate and assist local development. Peace has led to an increase in the rate of return. Most returnees arrive without food, seeds, agricultural tools or house-building materials. Demining is also urgently needed in many locations.

Focus on local and regional development to secure rural livelihood opportunities is essential to promote viable return for Angola's many IDPs. In recent months there has been an encouraging, albeit modest, increase in agricultural production. To maintain momentum, small farmers need access to credit to buy seed, fertilisers and draught animals. Surpluses will not be able to reach markets on any scale without rapid reconstruction of infrastructure.

Spontaneous return movements have taken place alongside new displacements. As some areas have become relatively safe once again, many of those living under horrendous conditions in regional towns have started returning home. Many families have split up, with some household

members remaining close to places where international agencies and NGOs provide assistance and others returning to hamlets to rebuild houses and resume agriculture.

## Peace dividend?

Peace has opened up the prospect for large-scale return of IDPs and comprehensive national development of all economic sectors - not simply oil and diamonds. Investments and access to credit are needed in all regions. However, although humanitarian and development needs have become more apparent since April 2002, funding has slowed down. As a result of the peace there has been a reduction in international assistance. The Angolan government appears indifferent to the need to increase national funding for education, health services, infrastructure and reestablishment of rural livelihoods.

Angola is a rich country. The \$900m that the International Monetary Fund has identified as 'missing' from the Angolan government finances in 2000 is about three times the value of humanitarian aid received by the country in the same year.

While international donors are now rightly demanding that the Angolan government must take responsibility for humanitarian and development needs, external funding is being reduced. While the pace of change has been dramatic in the last year, the mindset of the élite has remained unchanged. They must acknowledge their obligations towards the civilian population.

Just because they travel round by air, they must not forget that their compatriots need roads, railways and bridges if they are to escape hunger and economic deprivation.

The Angolan authorities can no longer pay only lip service to the situation of the displaced and expect the international community to pick up the bill. At the same time the UN and other international actors cannot walk away from populations in need just because the government is not taking responsibility. The transition from war to post-conflict is challenging for all.

The crisis of displacement has not come to an end in Angola. Peace will lead to a dramatic reduction in the number of new IDPs. But until there is improved recognition of the multi-complex nature of forced migration in Angola and until this new thinking is reflected in the design of emergency and development programmes, the risk of future displacements hangs over Angola.

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