government, NGOs, the private sector and community leaders to understand the basic concepts of the Principles and the national responsibility framework:

- identifying protection issues related to return, resettlement and reintegration
- developing an action plan to address IDP issues in Albay
- distributing copies of the Principles in Tagalog, the national language, and the local language, Bicolano
- convening whole-community orientation sessions on the Principles and IDPs' rights.

Partnership with SAC Legazpi led IDPs to organise themselves into 300 Core Groups to represent those living in evacuation centres, transitional sites and within the ‘unsafe’ zone. Forty per cent of them have continued to function following closure of the project. Core Groups have:

- improved distribution of goods/services and ensured they are based on community-identified need
- improved information flow by establishing direct lines of communication with government officials and NGOs
- established regulations within evacuation centres
- changed government policies – ensuring that vulnerable people living outside evacuation centres are also eligible for assistance
- assisted with assessments, targeting, encouragement of volunteerism and distribution of assistance
- launched a grass-roots IDP advocacy newsletter to promote flow of information
- worked with government officials to organise a General Assembly for all IDPs, establishing a common focal point for liaison with Ayuda Albay.

Impact of raising awareness

When the project was first discussed, the government was apprehensive, fearing that providing communities with information about Sphere and the Principles would incite them to make unmeetable demands at a sensitive time in the Philippine electoral cycle. Oxfam built confidence by underscoring that community participation, regular flow of information and dialogue would lead to a more effective response and allow all those concerned space for discussion, compromise and mutual understanding.

Government authorities have acknowledged that without the training and the improvements in standards of response they would have been faced with significant unrest amongst evacuees. A key contributor to the success of this project was the eventual commitment and buy-in of the government.

Training community leaders has given them the tools to articulate their needs and to use an internationally recognised framework to hold state and non-state actors to account. Whether displaced by violence, development or natural disaster, communities are protected both by international law and national obligations. The Typhoon Durian response has demonstrated that a key factor contributing to the application of these laws and principles is that government, NGOs and communities must be aware of their obligations and rights. This can create a dialogue that is ultimately beneficial for all.

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Internal displacement in the Central African Republic

Laura Perez

In the Central African Republic (CAR), where most displaced people are unaware of their rights, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is seeking to promote wider awareness of, and respect for, the Guiding Principles.

Since 2005, 197,000 people have been internally displaced due to armed conflict between the government of François Bozizé and various rebel groups, and because of attacks by bandits known as coupeurs de route who take advantage of the government’s inability to guarantee security. Although all rebel groups have signed ceasefire agreements and a peace process is underway, the security of most people in northern CAR has hardly improved because banditry has replaced political conflict as the main source of violence. Displaced people in CAR have depended almost entirely on help from host communities, and only those who are living in relatively accessible areas have received assistance from international relief organisations.

In response to the displacement crisis in CAR, NRC has been working in emergency education in the northern province of Ouham since April 2007. Home to about 12% of the country’s IDPs, Ouham is one of CAR’s most conflict-affected regions. NRC’s project supports approximately 14,200 children in 57 primary schools through teacher training, provision
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of school materials, training of parent-teacher associations and building capacity of the education ministry.

NRC also undertakes protection and advocacy by reporting on the situation of IDPs in the villages where it works and supporting joint initiatives such as a nationwide IDP advocacy campaign. The continuous presence of NRC and other humanitarian organisations in areas of displacement helps deter would-be aggressors (protection by presence).

**Using the Guiding Principles**

NRC has conducted protection training workshops on the Guiding Principles for local authorities, the army and the police, to support security sector reform. The government has neither adopted the Principles as a policy framework nor incorporated them into national law. However, UN agencies and international NGOs use them regularly to promote the rights of IDPs. They are a standard component of protection workshops, and have been used to train humanitarian observers, local authorities, government forces, international peacekeeping troops and rebel groups such as the Popular Army for the Restoration of the Republic and Democracy (APRD) which controls areas in the north of the country bordering Chad and Cameroon.

The Principles were prominent in a September 2008 training session for the Mission de consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique (MICOPAX)\(^1\) – a regional peacekeeping force with about 300 troops from Gabon, Chad, Congo and Cameroon. Over 30 officers and troops from the Chadian contingent were trained in the Principles and on child protection in emergencies. The training sessions are an integral part of the troops’ preparation for field operations.

In 2007, UNHCR translated the Guiding Principles into Sango, the national language, and illustrated some of the principles in order to make them as accessible as possible to non-literate communities. The Sango version of the Guiding Principles has been distributed to government ministries, local human rights NGOs and civil society organisations. They now need to be distributed more widely to displaced communities to raise their awareness about their rights.

**The plight of displaced children**

NRC’s Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) visited CAR in July and August 2008 to research and report on the protection and assistance needs of internally displaced children. IDMC found that displaced children face severe protection problems from violence and insecurity.

Unlike other children, displaced children have suffered trauma after witnessing extreme levels of violence such as the killing of family members when their villages were attacked by road bandits. During these attacks, some displaced children, including girls, have been abducted to work as porters of stolen property or kidnapped for ransom. Many others have been recruited into armed forces or groups.

The nutrition, water and sanitation, health and shelter needs of CAR’s displaced children remain largely unmet. Many are in urgent need of adequate shelter, having been forced to sleep outdoors during the rainy season, exposed to higher risks of contracting malaria or upper respiratory infections. Displaced children face economic exploitation as they are forced to work in fields belonging to host communities in exchange for food or meagre pay. These children’s education is being interrupted and their long-term development jeopardised.
Displaced children from minority groups such as the Peuhl face ethnic discrimination, not least because many host communities, and even other IDPs, have the mistaken perception that all Peuhl are road bandits. Due to the destruction of their migration routes and loss of their animals from violence and armed conflict, many Peuhl communities have been forced to settle among subsistence farmers and are struggling to adapt to a new way of life. The protection needs of displaced children have not been adequately addressed by the Government of CAR nor by the international community in general.

Legal framework for response
CAR has ratified the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in Africa’s Great Lakes Region,\(^1\) which entered into force in June 2008. The Pact’s Protocol on Protection and Assistance to IDPs commits member states not only to enact national legislation to implement the Guiding Principles into domestic law but also to create a practical implementation framework. States have different ways of introducing international law into their national legal systems. Under CAR’s constitution, the provisions of any international instrument ratified by CAR become binding and have precedence over national laws.\(^2\) One gap that remains, however, is the lack of a specific legal framework to protect IDPs in general and displaced children in particular. The current laws do not provide a sufficiently detailed basis for addressing and responding to the needs of IDPs.

UNHCR today works with governments and other humanitarian actors in 28 countries to protect nearly 14 million IDPs.

UNHCR has worked to protect and assist IDPs since the mid 1970s. Initially, the UN system divided responsibility for protecting and assisting IDPs on an ad hoc basis. In 2003, it sought to improve its response through an inter-agency ‘collaborative approach’, which allocated responsibilities informally. In 2005, this approach was refined in an effort to increase predictability and accountability, particularly in responding to internal displacement. Agencies were assigned leadership responsibilities under the ‘cluster approach’. UNHCR formally assumed leadership responsibilities for three clusters: protection, camp coordination and camp management, and emergency shelter.

UNHCR views the Guiding Principles as more than a simple compilation and restatement of legal rules. UNHCR’s 2007 IDP Policy Framework and Implementation Strategy\(^1\) affirms their relevance, stating that they will be incorporated into the Office’s protection and human rights activities for IDPs. The provisional edition of the inter-agency Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons,\(^2\) issued in December 2007, proposes several protection activities supported by the Principles, including strategic development, protection monitoring, and assessing IDPs’ enjoyment of rights. The Handbook also shows how the Principles can help foster an inter-agency understanding of what protection means in an operational context.

The Principles have played a significant role in shaping UNHCR’s operational responses for IDPs. Their use in programming and advocacy has arguably helped bolster their credibility and influence as a relevant international legal instrument. This article highlights examples of this symbiotic relationship between UNHCR and the Principles and how this has generated concrete benefits to IDPs over the past decade. As the international humanitarian and legal environment evolves to recognise the persuasiveness of the Principles, they are increasingly becoming an operational protection tool for UNHCR, governments and IDPs themselves.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNHCR has emphasised the particular importance of education about the Principles when working with survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, thus supporting them to assert their rights for compensation and justice. In the Central African Republic, Timor-Leste and Sudan, UNHCR operations have stressed the importance of the Principles as a tool to explain to national and local authorities their responsibilities towards IDPs.

Elements from the Principles have also been incorporated into national and state level frameworks. One example, deriving directly from Principle 6 on protection from arbitrary displacement, is the Khartoum State Principles on Relocation, signed by the state authorities and the UN in April 2007.\(^3\) UNHCR offices have likewise supported efforts to incorporate the Principles into regional documents and legal instruments, such as the draft African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.

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\(^{1}\) http://www.internal-displacement.org

\(^{2}\) http://www.internal-displacement.org