

Looking to the future

by Elizabeth Ferris

It is a daunting task to follow in the footsteps of Roberta Cohen as the new co-director of the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement

I remember working with Roberta in the late 1980s – long before the term ‘IDP’ became commonplace in the humanitarian community. Many NGOs were concerned about the lack of protection of uprooted people who had not crossed a national border but were uncertain about how to take the issue forward. Roberta Cohen’s pioneering work provided clear directions and guidance to NGO advocates. The subsequent appointment of Francis Deng as the Representative of the UN Secretary-General (RSG), the development of the Guiding Principles and the policy research carried out by the Project proved invaluable in mobilising support for work to protect IDPs.

I am looking forward to building on the solid policy research work Roberta has inspired. This Project has been a unique collaborative

undertaking between the UN’s RSG and a policy research institution. The Project has directly supported the mandate of the RSG, making it possible for him to be more effective in his advocacy to promote the human rights of IDPs. At the same time, the Project complements the work of the RSG – and others working with IDPs – by carrying out cutting-edge research on issues of internal displacement.

Four strategic directions will guide the future work of the Project:

Strengthening the normative framework. At the global level, the Guiding Principles have been recognised as providing the normative framework for IDPs but more work is needed to translate this recognition into concrete policies. The Project will continue to support

efforts by the RSG to encourage governments to develop laws and policies which incorporate the Guiding Principles and to work with regional intergovernmental bodies to support them. In this respect, we will continue to promote and disseminate the Guiding Principles and their accompanying Annotations; we will publish a Legislators’ Manual to provide concrete support to law-makers; and we will provide legal expertise to governments in need of technical assistance. We will also encourage civil society actors to play a role in advocating with their governments for the incorporation of the Guiding Principles into legislation and in monitoring the implementation of such laws. In the past year, the Project has developed guidelines on the human rights of IDPs in situations of natural disasters and in the coming years we will promote their implementation. Research and policy papers in areas such as ‘when displacement ends’ and ‘displaced migrants’ will be

carried out to further strengthen the normative framework.

Enhancing the will to protect. As there is often a gap between policies developed at the global level and field practice, the Project will encourage the implementation of the Guiding Principles. With the support of the Project, the RSG will continue to dialogue with governments through missions, working visits and correspondence, encouraging them to incorporate the Guiding Principles into national legislation. We will also work with civil society and national human rights institutions to raise awareness of both the needs of IDPs and the human rights to which they are entitled. In this regard, national and regional seminars and courses will be organised. There is growing recognition of the need to mainstream the issue of IDPs within the UN system and substantial progress has been made in the past year to clarify the respective responsibilities of various UN agencies working with IDPs. The Project will monitor these developments and provide support to UN agencies to translate the Guiding Principles into practice. Work to enhance the will to protect will be supported by research on particular national situations and on specific issues, such as property restitution, IDP women, elderly IDPs and participation in decision making. These research reports will be widely disseminated to policy makers at all levels, to civil society groups and to IDPs themselves.

Strengthening the capacity to protect. Even when there are clear normative guidelines and a genuine will to protect IDPs, sometimes governments and civil society lack the capacity to carry out measures to ensure their protection. With the support of the Project, the RSG will continue to work with governments to build their capacity to protect IDPs. An annual course on IDPs will be organised in conjunction with the International Institute of Humanitarian Law¹ for government officials from countries with significant IDP populations. Training courses for civil society will be carried out and academic institutions will be encouraged to develop research and training programmes on issues related to IDPs. In the next year, we will devote particular emphasis to seminars

and courses on implementation of the guidelines for IDPs in natural disasters. Research will be carried out on the role of civil society in working with IDPs and on effective ways of ensuring IDP participation in the decisions which affect their lives.

Responding to new challenges. The Project will continue to carry out research on cutting-edge issues in internal displacement. Research projects on IDPs and peace will be completed in 2007 and results presented to the UN's Peacebuilding Commission.² As IDP issues must be seen in the broader humanitarian and human rights context, the Project's future research agenda will be shaped by the needs of policy makers and global developments. Given the rapidly changing nature of the field, it is risky to predict which issues will require substantive research in the future but likely candidates include development-induced displacement, non-state actors, the Responsibility to Protect, and accountability to beneficiaries.

Now that the issue of internal displacement is firmly on the international agenda – thanks in large measure to the work of Roberta Cohen and the two RSGs – attention must turn to ensuring that the Guiding Principles are fully implemented and that protection of IDPs on the ground increases. When the Project was established it was virtually the only organisation focusing exclusively on IDP issues but today other organisations are making significant contributions. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre of the Norwegian Refugee Council³ provides an excellent database and useful analyses of specific IDP situations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has staff working to ensure IDP protection in the field. As a result of the humanitarian reform efforts, UNHCR is increasing its capacity to work with IDPs. *Forced Migration Review* will continue to draw wider attention to the Guiding Principles.

It will be important for the Project to continue its close collaboration with these partners and to ensure that our collective efforts build on our relative strengths. As mentioned above, the Brookings-Bern Project is uniquely placed to support the work of the RSG and to carry out research which can guide policy-makers and contribute to a broader understanding of internal displacement.

I come from an NGO background and am committed to encouraging more active engagement by civil society in enhancing the protection of IDPs, in building capacity of IDP organisations, and in working with the UN to ensure that the humanitarian reform presently underway⁴ results in more effective protection of IDPs.

It is an exciting time to be joining the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement and I look forward to working with the project's wonderful staff and more closely with many of the contributors to and readers of this issue of FMR. We are all deeply indebted to Roberta for her commitment and hard work these past 14 years to make life a little safer for internally displaced people. I am personally grateful for her efforts to ensure a smooth leadership transition and look forward to continued collaboration with her in the future.

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1. <http://web.iihl.org>

2. www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding

3. www.internal-displacement.org

4. See article by Dennis McNamara on page 9-11.

IDP children forage in refuse bins for food, Luanda, Angola.



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