

The displacement-peace nexus

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Resolving internal displacement is inextricably linked with achieving lasting peace.

In some countries the sheer scale of displacement is so significant that it is unrealistic to plan for a peaceful future without incorporating IDPs' needs and ensuring their active participation. Unfortunately, however, IDPs are often ignored in peace processes.

Helping displaced populations to return and reintegrate can both address the root causes of a conflict and help prevent further displacement. The return of displaced populations can be an important signifier of peace and help validate the post-conflict order. IDPs can be active in local politics and can also make an important contribution to the recovery of local economies. In some countries the displaced have become parties to the conflict, and their inclusion is therefore necessary for conflict resolution.

All this is also true of refugees but IDPs often have additional needs that require specific attention during peace processes. IDPs often remain close to the zone of conflict and more vulnerable to violence. Provision of humanitarian assistance to IDPs is often more difficult. Unlike refugees, they are not singled out for specific protection in international law. Furthermore, IDPs need shelter, may be unable to replace official documents and often encounter problems recovering land and property.

As the previous article by David Lanz noted, there are significant obstacles to ensuring IDPs' participation in high-level Track One negotiations. They often lack sufficient education, political skills and legitimate leaders. There can be reprisals when IDPs organise themselves. To work round such constraints Track Two peace negotiations have gained legitimacy. Track One often relies on Track Two to provide local insights and a less formal forum for problem solving. Track Three – grassroots initiatives – provides the greatest scope for IDP participation but its impacts on national-level negotiations are usually limited and by itself cannot guarantee effective representation of IDPs' concerns.

Where the direct participation of IDPs in peace negotiations is not possible, desirable or effective, an alternative is for international mediators to prompt political leaders to incorporate displacement issues in peace negotiations. This worked in Mozambique and Bosnia. It requires mediators who understand the specific concerns of IDPs and have time to consult with them. A complementary strategy is to focus on the legal rights of IDPs using international, regional and national mechanisms. UN agencies and other international and national actors can provide information on displacement issues to Track One actors.

Engaging with the concerns of the displaced in peace negotiations – whether directly or indirectly – is only the first step in ensuring that peace processes address them. It is critical that peace agreements clarify the political, legal and humanitarian obligations of governments towards IDPs and clarify roles and responsibilities in relation to durable solutions. Displacement issues also need mainstreaming in the peace-building phase, when it is especially important to provide security; solve property-related problems; encourage reconciliation; undertake post-conflict reconstruction; and ensure a political transition to an effective and legitimate government.

IDPs have formed effective coalitions with other groups in Track Two/Three negotiations in several countries:

- In Colombia, many IDPs feel the peace process is not real as violence is ongoing and IDP leaders still being assassinated. They have no trust in formal state mechanisms. Recently some IDP organisations have joined with non-IDPs to press for truth, justice and reparations. There are new initiatives to ensure displaced women get a seat at the negotiating table.
- In Georgia, self-organising IDP groups are engaging in the search for durable solutions after years of displacement. Despite hostility from hardline politicians, they have forged Track Two diplomacy with civil society leaders in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and Ossetia and are pushing for greater civic rights.
- In Sri Lanka, Track One has failed. Numerous grassroots peace initiatives have not formally included IDPs, and women and children are particularly excluded. Tracks Two and Three offer potential to ensure greater IDP representation.
- In South Sudan, people-to-people Track Three initiatives launched by civil society and displaced people helped show that negotiations can work and paved the way for eventual Track One success – the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement which ended Sudan's protracted North-South conflict.

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