

## Frozen displacement: Kashmiri Pandits in India

Mahima Thussu

In the 1990s nearly 250,000 people, mostly Kashmiri Pandits, were displaced by violence in Jammu and Kashmir state in India. More than 20 years later the question for them is whether the responses to their displacement so far can form the basis for long-term solutions for their protracted displacement.

Typically, the terms 'refugee' and 'internally displaced person' (IDP) have been tacitly accepted as a kind of proxy for vulnerability. As the years of displacement have worn on, with people not willing or able to return to their homes, what is necessary is not a label of vulnerability but a situational analysis of what the displaced people actually want and who are still the vulnerable among them.

Unemployment, under-employment and deterioration of income remain problematic, long after their physical relocation. But added to this, people became alienated as they lost their cultural space along with their individual homes, and suffered psychological damage, loss of confidence and a fall in status. Informal networks of mutual help, local association and service arrangements that are important to survival are also lost when people are displaced. Very little reliable information and analysis of the situation of those who returned home after periods of displacement exist. It is important to understand whether returning home would actually represent an endpoint in displacement-induced vulnerability or whether long periods of displacement create lingering patterns of vulnerability. The government relief and rehabilitation package fails to differentiate categories of beneficiaries, nor have relief and rehabilitation been dealt with separately, despite the fact that not all those who need relief will need rehabilitation and vice versa, and there has been no impact assessment of the packages provided.

There is also an urgent need for re-profiling as some people are not registered yet may be in need of assistance. After 23 years the need to find more stable and long-term solutions leading to an eventual withdrawal of assistance is desirable, although withdrawal of assistance must not be abrupt. The national authorities have to establish

conditions conducive to safe and dignified return or to settlement elsewhere. But in order to be durable the solutions must consider long-term safety and security, compensation for lost property, resumption of normal socio-economic conditions and also a secure legal and socio-political status.

The specific impacts of displacement fall into four broad categories: destruction of assets, denial of access to assets, dislocation from a normal socio-economic environment, and the psychological and material impacts of living in limbo. What also has to be taken into account is the duration of displacement – not only chronological time but also the number of generations.

The continuing vulnerability of displaced people emerges from a specific set of factors, including the resilience of their economic and social capital to the impacts of displacement and the impact of specific policies and actions of host governments and international assistance agencies. Existing surveys and assessments are largely too general to bring out the different sub-situations with clarity. To determine whether and to what extent a durable solution has been achieved it is necessary to examine both the processes through which solutions are found and the actual conditions of the returnees and those persons who have integrated locally or settled elsewhere in the country.

The reality is that these populations have lived in an indeterminate state for a long time, and while conflicts can remain frozen, people cannot. There is a persistent assumption that investing in sustainable solutions for the self-reliance of displaced people somehow undermines national objectives of facilitating an eventual return home. But maybe eventual return home is not the final and the best solution; to force them to go back would be a clear violation of their human rights and in neither their interest nor that of the authorities.

Mahima Thussu [ar.mahima@gmail.com](mailto:ar.mahima@gmail.com) is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Architecture, Manipal University, Karnataka, India. [www.manipal.edu/mit.html](http://www.manipal.edu/mit.html)