

# Sustainable settlement rehabilitation for IDPs

by Chantal Laurent

Settlement Rehabilitation Programmes (SRPs) are found in a wide variety of field settings but require the same basic criteria and methodology of approach to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability. Our case studies of SRPs cover three countries. In Azerbaijan, with 800,000 to 1 million IDPs out of a total population of 7.5 million, ECHO rehabilitated in the Fizuli region 550 houses, 12 schools and 3 health centres. In Rwanda, with some 1.5 million returnees and 750,000 IDPs (total population 8 million), UNHCR resettlement programme created 200 villages, with 96,000 shelters built. Finally, in northern Iraq, with some 750,000 IDPs and returnees (total population 3.5 million), UN-HABITAT built over 25,000 houses and a number of social and physical infrastructure buildings.

In all three cases a number of houses built remain empty. Major reasons include erroneous selection of beneficiaries, lack of services and infrastructure, lack of security, unclear land and housing ownership, insufficient farming land, lack of other income-generating activities, absence of community participation in decision making and lack of funds for operation and maintenance. In all three countries, the authorities' hidden agendas in their resettlement policies contributed to the unsustainability of SRPs.

Substantial humanitarian assistance had been provided by the international community to cope with the immediate needs of refugees and nationals in the various emergency situations - but these programmes were established on an emergency basis with insufficient thought for sustainability. Those implementing such programmes were under pressure to deliver the highest number of shelters in the shortest time possible. Yet the more unsettled the institutional environment and the more uncertain the prospects that project benefits will be sustainable, the more flexibility needs to be built into project design. The following

are some of the key conditions for sustainable interventions:

- **Fair selection of beneficiaries:** Survey criteria need to take into account both vulnerability and willingness to return. In all three countries, the surveys and identification of beneficiaries were partially manipulated by the local authorities - and the needs of the most vulnerable were not necessarily addressed. Corrective measures were taken during programme implementation, either by further surveys as in Iraq, or in Azerbaijan through constant monitoring in the field, and - in both countries - by cross-checking with data from other aid agencies. Selection of beneficiaries should also focus on social cohesion and diversity to create viable communities. Both in Rwanda and Iraq, widow-headed families were targeted for specific resettlement projects, concentrating vulnerability in unviable communities. Social problems and tension can be created by providing good quality housing to resettlers while local poor families continue to live in sub-standard houses in the same settlement areas.
- **Integrated multisectoral approach:** In all three countries, programmes essentially addressed rural and semi-urban populations in isolation. There was no consideration of the rural-urban linkage critical for sustainability of any settlement. SRPs with a vision and strategy can make effective contributions toward linking urban and rural communities to create opportunities and strengthen communities and regions.
- **Minimum standards and appropriate interventions:** There needs to be adherence to adequate minimum standards for housing, basic services and infrastructure, transportation, employment/income opportunities, and sufficient security and justice to ensure the long-term well-being of the community as a whole. All

interventions should be appropriate. Reconstructing better quality housing with techniques and materials that are beyond local skill levels will discourage improvements or replication as families expand a core unit and construct new units. In Rwanda, UNHCR had issued a construction manual but the implementing partners paid little heed to it - because of time constraints and delivery demands.

- **Community participation:** This promotes beneficiaries' sense of ownership and ensures project sustainability. In Iraq, consultation of the communities and their participation were initially weak as time constraints forced implementers to focus on technical aspects to the detriment of community involvement. In Azerbaijan, by contrast, the community was involved in correcting beneficiary lists and assessing needs not previously considered in the original project.
- **Gender equality:** Gender perspectives in human settlement should be automatically integrated into legislation, policies, programmes and projects. Post-conflict female-headed households should be a priority. Regular monitoring is necessary to ensure that women are effectively involved in decision making and in receiving assistance - and aid agencies should set an example by hiring both local and international female staff.
- **Capacity building:** International experts will not stay forever. Any SRP must therefore include institutional capacity building of local authorities, training of local staff, university-level courses, vocational training of beneficiaries and school education.

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