

# Transformations in local organisations, institutions and leadership

*The Response Strategies project has broken new ground in identifying IDP response strategies.*

From this study and other ongoing research projects emerge a number of other themes which are important in the process from conflict to peace and about which we still have very little knowledge and understanding. One that I will be working on in the coming years is the role of local organisations and institutions in helping communities or households to cope with conflict-induced problems and to grasp new opportunities which present themselves.

Armed conflicts can affect local organisations in numerous ways. Some cease to exist as a result of displacement or lack of resources or because they are no longer relevant to people's lives. Others continue to exist but adjust activities and responsibilities to suit the new circumstances. Some find that their role and influence are enhanced. War, displacement and new economic forces may give rise to new local organisations and institutions.

Humanitarian agencies have long been interested in building on, supporting and working through local organisations. Arguments in support of this strategy variously point to notions of 'ownership', 'partnership', 'sustainability' or 'accountability'. In practice, humanitarian agencies usually either support and reinforce some existing organisations (while marginalising others) or they create new organisations or institutions after judging that existing local NGOs do not have the capacity or commitment to match the agencies' expectations.

Such changes in the organisational and institutional landscape naturally affect what kinds of leadership emerges and how leaders relate to the population at large. Seen from a wider perspective, these processes enable us to get a glimpse of the kinds of future societies and political cultures that are emerging. For practitioners, the main concerns remain how to develop and implement sustainable projects and to identify suitable partners. For researchers the task is to understand societal development in its totality or at least from a broader and longer perspective.

Research into processes of social and political change in local organisations and institutions involves seeking answers to a variety of questions. What are their 'ground rules'? Are they working toward unity or fragmentation? Are claims to authority made through means of force or distribution? Who do their leaders take as their role models - kings, rebels, entrepreneurs or administrators? Are they perceived and judged by the public in terms of charisma, insight, their ability to access and share resources or by their capacity to bring justice? Do organisations and leaders eventually work toward peace or new social and political conflicts?

We need to identify traditional and new organisations and institutions in different localities and document what kind of activities they assume responsibility for. We need to explore how different organisations create and define their constituencies and the kinds of relationship or exchange

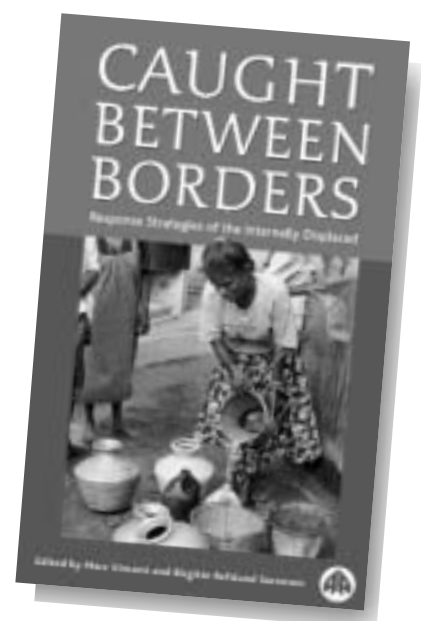
by Birgitte Refslund Sørensen

between them. How are their presence and influence negotiated and legitimised? How do traditional and more recent forms of leadership and organisations relate to each other? Does one form marginalise the other? Do they agree upon a division of labour or are they forever locked in conflict?

On a more theoretical level the answers which will hopefully emerge may shed new light on the meaning of terms like 'civil society', 'community' and 'politics' in societies emerging from conflict.

*Birgitte Sørensen is Associate Professor, Institute of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen. She is co-editor of Caught Between Borders: Response Strategies of the Internally Displaced. Email: birgitte.soerensen@anthro.ku.dk*

*See p 47 for details of Caught Between Borders.*





# The response strategies of IDPs: questions to be asked

by Cathrine Brun

*Despite what we think there are huge gaps in our understanding and knowledge of the response strategies of IDPs.*



**W**hat are the gaps? What are the priorities? Where do we go next? How should we do research with IDPs?

Empirical experience from Sri Lanka's protracted crisis of internal displacement

ment provides some answers. My PhD project is about the Muslim IDPs who were expelled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 1990. After 11 years as IDPs they have slim prospects of return in the near future. I have been analysing how those involved with and affected by displacement are creating and recreating social organisation and relationships, livelihood strategies and sense of place.

In Sri Lanka and elsewhere there is little knowledge of either why internal displacement is often so protracted or how hosts are involved in and affected by internal displacement. How does the meaning of the IDP category change for the people involved with displacement? What are the needs and rights of IDPs that should be acknowl-

edged at different stages of their displacement? Now that researchers understand that people who are forced to move do not necessarily become powerless and lose their identities, why do we still know so little about how power relations and identities change, or do not change, due to displacement?

*IDPs in Sri Lanka.*

As time goes on it is not necessarily the case that IDPs and hosts become more and more integrated. Evidence from Sri Lanka, where the IDP concept is well known, shows that perpetuating the categories of IDP and non-IDP (in order to access resources from different external actors) results in a static dichotomy which restricts local integration and normalisation of social relations. In some long-term cases of displacement, the length of the displacement may cause further tensions and the integration process may be reversed. There should be more research on the whole history of integration processes. We also need to

know more about what happens in an area when humanitarian agencies withdraw but IDPs remain.

Since Chambers wrote in 1986 that the poor are the 'hidden losers' in crises of displacement there has been a rhetorical commitment to including the hosts in academic, policy and practical work. However, very little systematic research has been undertaken that actively studies and analyses the situation of the hosts other than as complementary background actors. More knowledge is needed on the role of the hosts in protracted cases of displacement. A

more active and systematic involvement of the hosts and a realisation that actors involved in displacement include both the people who flee, the people who stay behind and the hosts are needed to get a more holistic understanding of crises of internal displacement.

Studies of the crises of internal displacement often tend to emphasise the civil war or other type of conflict causing the displacement but pay insufficient attention to social conflicts among IDPs or between IDPs and their hosts. How to make sense of such social conflicts in times of civil

war is a challenge that requires closer connection with all parties to a conflict. We need to ask how well we as researchers and aid workers make sense of people's explanations and rationale on both the causes of conflicts and of their involvement in them.

*Cathrine Brun is completing a PhD at the Department of Geography, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU).*

*Email: cathrine.brun@svt.ntnu.no*

# Some problems with conducting research on IDP livelihood strategies

by Karen Jacobsen

*Compared with studying refugees or other research populations, the task of defining what we mean by 'IDP' and counting their numbers is fraught with difficulty.*



**W**hen does a displaced person cease to be considered displaced? If someone was displaced ten years ago but is now integrated into the local community, should they still be considered an IDP? Should there be a cut-off point?

In Angola, government policy is to classify people as 'displaced' for the first six months after which they are judged to be 'integrated' even if there has been no change in their circumstances. What criteria should we use to differentiate IDPs from other war-affected populations such as demobilised soldiers, their dependants and camp followers, returning refugees and street children? Is it possible to, and should we, differentiate IDPs from the urban poor?

Amid these uncertainties, it is hard to reach agreement on a realistic estimate of IDP numbers. The kind of quantifiable data required by donors to formulate budgets, policy and programmes is lacking.

Compounding these difficulties are political and security-related constraints on reaching and talking to

IDP communities. IDPs are often a sensitive issue for governments who may be unwilling to cooperate with information gathering. The Sudanese government has in the past prevented or frustrated efforts to collect data on displaced populations because the displaced are perceived as a political and security threat to the authorities. This attitude has made it difficult to obtain information about places of origin, location, numbers, nutritional status and duration of displacement. The government's position has also created difficulties for local research organisations working on IDP issues. Some of the data in our chapter on Sudan in *Caught Between Borders* was gathered by a local Sudanese research organisation working in collaboration with the Feinstein International Famine Center at Tufts University. For security reasons, the name of this organisation could not be mentioned in the publication.

Governmental sensitivities about IDPs can also lead to disputed information on such issues as the number of displaced persons and their regional distribution. In Sudan there is a long-standing disagreement between the

government and the UN and international NGOs over when displacement occurred, relief strategies and definitions of categories. These problems are exacerbated by weaknesses in national census data.

As researchers, advocates and policy makers, we need the following kinds of information in order to support IDP livelihoods:

- better data on how many (and who) we are dealing with
- improved understanding of patterns of movement, and progressive impoverishment (A widespread pattern is for rural people to move to local towns in search of security or food and then, when towns become unsafe, to migrate further afield, perhaps towards the capital, the numbers of those on the move growing as residents of small towns join the flow. In Sudan, Angola and many other war-affected countries we

see a trend for people to move to already overcrowded government-controlled urban areas.)

- the extent of social and economic interaction with local communities (What factors enable or obstruct the pursuit of livelihoods in the context of displacement?)
- the priorities of IDPs and whether assistance strategies in official and unofficial settlement areas address them. (What other priorities can be identified beyond the need for health care, shelter, food, water and cash? In many poor and marginalised communities education for their children is often stated as the biggest need, one for which many people are prepared to make significant sacrifices.)
- the impact of humanitarian assistance on patterns of displacement, including return movements (What are the primary factors affecting the ability of IDPs to move? Is it fear of

recurring conflict, landmines, insurgency movements, policies of governments and/or the prospects of maintaining existing livelihood and survival strategies?)

Finally, we need to ask what kinds of livelihood interventions can realistically be aimed at IDPs. In many conflict-affected countries, IDPs are predominantly rural subsistence farmers forced off their land into nearby government-controlled towns and cities. How can the livelihoods of subsistence farmers or pastoralists be supported in urban areas?

*Karen Jacobsen is Visiting Associate Professor at the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy at Tufts University and Director of the Refugees and Forced Migration Program. Email: karen.jacobsen@tufts.edu*

## Working group I: research

### Additional issues raised

The group noted that their group had the smallest number of participants. Does this reflect the apparent lack of interest on the part of practitioners/donors in research? Are researchers and practitioners not talking the same language?

Definitional problems continue to bedevil research. Is the ICRC's 'war-affected population' a more accurate term than 'IDP'? What do we call returned refugees who subsequently become displaced? What is the cut-off point for being an IDP? Is it helpful to maintain this identity long after displacement? Do IDP and non-IDP categories restrict integration?

Are the large numbers of people displaced by development projects and environmental change to be thought of as IDPs? In places such as India and Sri Lanka, where civil society is active and the Guiding Principles becoming increasingly well known, what is the role of researchers in highlighting the aspirations of people displaced by dams, mines, forestry projects or other development pro-

jects who might like the protection and publicity accorded by being recognised as IDPs?

When IDPs become mixed with the urban poor (as in Khartoum), can or should they be distinguished from the rest of the population who are perhaps just as much at risk? In an urban environment, can a rights-based approach identify and target those most in need?

Is the standard assumption that IDPs are conceptually linked with refugees necessarily helpful? Does it obscure the connections between IDPs and migrants?

Exact numbers of IDPs rarely seem to be of concern to researchers or practitioners. Researchers need to tackle the persistent tendency to bandy around spuriously-rounded up numbers of IDPs which are never verified. Thus the 1.4 million IDPs in Khartoum have assumed an iconic significance despite the lack of proof. Researchers must help get a better handle on numbers.

Researchers face serious practical problems in doing research. Those IDPs to whom researchers are allowed (by state and non-state actors) to talk are not likely to be the most representative. Researchers need to be more explicit about how reaching agreements with governments and non-state actors can seriously compromise research findings.

The group identified gaps in current knowledge, indicating the need for more empirical research. These include:

- What are the pre-flight strategies – commonly from village to town to city – used by those fearing displacement?
- Local community-IDP interactions: more needs to be learned about larger-scale ripple effects and tensions over land and other resources. Getting information about hosts is much harder than about the displaced but researchers can do more.

- The impact of humanitarian assistance: in many contexts we do not know whether humanitarian assistance encourages or discourages the prospects of return. What is the impact on existing and new livelihood strategies?
- What happens to displaced and local populations when external food assistance is suddenly curtailed by WFP or other agencies?
- Are the common, invariably top-down, income-generation and micro-credit schemes for IDPs really practical? Do they reflect the reality that most IDPs are displaced farmers struggling to find livelihoods in urban environments? Are the needs of displaced pastoralists being met?
- What is meant by self-reliance? What do the variety of agency definitions and concepts of self-reliance indicate about the sustainability of interventions?
- Gender implications of displacement and return: what happens when women have been empowered and/or undertaken new responsibilities during displacement and have this threatened by the prospect or reality of return?

- The geographical spread of IDP family/kin links, both nationally and transnationally, is rarely explored.
- The consequences of international NGOs establishing local organisations in their own images: what is the effect of creating a new NGO class skilled in English, use of computers and writing proposals? How they do (co)exist with traditional leadership elites?

### Recommendations for the IDP research community:

- Encourage greater employment of local researchers.
- Examine, where feasible, the scope for the use of the Internet to maintain cyber contact with local researchers when access is restricted by security concerns. Can discussion and protection be promoted via the Internet?
- Researchers working as consultants for agencies should not necessarily be constrained by the terms of reference often prepared by HQ-based managers. If they want to effectively inform programme interventions, researchers must ask what agencies really need to know, not just what they think they need to know. Researchers must challenge assumptions inherent in bureaucratic agendas.
- Undertake better mapping of the research environment, putting agencies and researchers into more regular contact, thus ending the all-too-common practice of agencies employing consultants who know little or nothing about the country to which they are sent.
- Ensure that the Guiding Principles are incorporated into all funding proposals.
- Promote greater inter-disciplinary cooperation, particularly with political scientists and economists - both of whom are usually absent when IDP programmes are planned, managed or evaluated.
- Take a sectoral approach to IDP programmes, not just considering individual interventions in isolation but also identifying common variables.
- Researchers must learn to be more concise when presenting reports and recommendations.



# IDP response strategies and the humanitarian system

by Nina M Birkeland

*Within each IDP community there is a diverse set of actors and survival and response strategies.*



We need to further develop data collection methodology to learn about them. Among the many questions to consider are:

- Is it possible to count IDPs? Who can and/or should be assisted? Just IDPs? What about the host population? What about those who have stayed behind? What issues are sensitive for the community? Why did they flee? Where did they come from?
- How can we listen to IDPs? RRA (rapid rural appraisal) is one method but not always the best. Will researchers hear different responses than humanitarian agencies?
- How do we gather and act on local knowledge?
- Are we aware of the short and long-term social impact of our actions as external actors?
- What is the role of local NGOs in enabling access to IDPs?
- Are we aware of security issues at different levels?

In researching the case study of Huambo in Angola presented in *Caught Between Borders* we asked such questions in order to better understand the experiences of the

displaced. Though them we gained insight into the causes of their displacement, the strategies they choose and apply during flight and settlement and how they experience their identity as displaced.

Angola is ranked 160th out of 174 countries in the UN Human Development Index. Every third child dies before the age of five. Civil war has tormented the country for more than 25 years. Four million out of a population of approximately 12 million are internally displaced.

The 'IDP' identity is a social identity. It is important to note that those whom we label as displaced in Huambo have multiple axes of identities, such as woman, the elderly, Ovimbundu (ethnic group), Sambo (a tribe), peasant, head of family, Catholic and supporter of the MPLA (Angola's ruling party). These axes have different importance at different times and 'displaced' forms only one axis of identity for those interviewed.

Although many IDPs have experienced several displacements they still regard their 'displaced' identity as a temporary one. For rural populations identity is often deeply embedded in land and agricultural practices. Even though the displaced in Huambo have not fled great distances, they rarely have the opportunity to use their former agricultural practices in their new location. As a result, they have little opportunity to practise their normal cultural activities.

When asked to identify the cause(s) of their displacement two explanations were given by IDPs: either *guerra* (war) or *confusão* (trouble). The interweaving of causes - multiple and interlinked - is evident. Even though forced displacement has been a central part of their daily lives it is not considered normal to flee. There is a

clear local understanding that there is a significant difference in meaning between forced migration and other forms of voluntary relocation. The Huambo case illustrates that it is not the causes of the forced migration which give the displaced their identity but rather the situation in which forcibly displaced people find themselves. When we talk of 'development-induced displacement' or of 'political', 'economic' or 'environmental' refugees, we impose a kind of differentiation that the displaced in Huambo do not themselves use or recognise. Both recent and long-term displaced identify themselves as temporarily displaced. Most have plans to return home as soon as possible. Further research is needed to find out more about the relevance of using the categories of 'new' and 'old' displaced.

Experiences of displacement are different from place to place. Clearly, being marginalised in Georgia is different than in Angola. We need to consider what are the social, cultural and economic changes that IDPs have to cope with. How can these differences be taken into consideration in the programming of humanitarian NGOs and agencies?

For those researching among the displaced in Huambo, it was important to note that most of the displaced in Huambo live outside camps and transit centres. The complex humanitarian emergency and forced displacement have become the norm for the population. As the state is so weak, it is the informal mechanisms among the displaced and NGOs that provide opportunities for survival both for the established and IDP populations.

The displaced are not passive victims but active agents able to formulate decisions and chose strategies. The displaced population living in camps and transit centres normally put into use both external assistance and self-help activities in their survival strategies. In most camps there is distribution of food (rarely sufficient

either in terms of calories or variety), soap, blankets, cooking utensils and some medicines. Salt and clothing are provided but in insufficient quantities. External assistance is usually supplemented by the IDPs' own produce or items bought through work and trade. In Huambo these include firewood collection, charcoal production, working for others, manufacture of natural fibre mats, trading of fruits, vegetables and staple foods, and farming of 'own' land.

The displaced employ many strategies for their protection. Individual stories of the displaced from the Sambo area now settled in the village of Vinte-e-Sete near Huambo reveal how people from the same area chose to flee at different times over a period of three to four months. Other protection decisions which the displaced had to make as actors included the direction in which to flee, the route to follow and whether to flee in groups or individually. Their decisions were based upon assessment of costs and benefits. It is, for example, faster to flee by road but this adds to the risk of rob-

bery by both UNITA and government soldiers. In the decision-making process, IDPs put to use previous personal experiences of flight and collective knowledge about forced displacement. From the interviews it is evident that different people made different choices of protection strategies when exposed to the same structural circumstances. A major problem is that many do not have the documents that would give them the opportunity to flee to the relatively safer areas along the coast or to the larger towns and cities in the region.

Since no IDP can be sure that external actors will provide assistance, self-help strategies are uppermost. Almost all assistance in the region is financed through emergency programmes lacking any long-term perspective. Other characteristics of self-help activities are that they are based on low capital investments, are easy to relocate if and when the displaced have to move on and that they provide an outcome on a daily basis. For the IDPs living outside camps the self-help activities are more or less the same, except that

their own food production plays a more important role in the daily struggle for survival.

Almost all self-help strategies developed and used by the IDPs are oriented towards the short term. People need an outcome now, not in the future, even though a long-term perspective could be more profitable. The displaced know this themselves. Until such time, however, as they can move away from the desperate struggle for survival to a situation where they can focus on developing sustainable livelihoods, short-term perspectives are likely to predominate.

*Nina M Birkeland is a research fellow at the Department of Geography, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) and assistant professor in Human Geography at Nord-Trøndelag University College. Email: nina.birkeland@hint.no*

*IDPs in Luena Transit Centre, Angola.*



# Improving the quality of humanitarian response

by Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop

*The stories in Caught between Borders perfectly illustrate how much – or, rather, how little – we actually know about how people who are forcibly displaced from their homes cope with their situation and what sort of mechanisms they develop in order to survive and rebuild their lives.*



The humanitarian community has to seriously re-think its policies and strategies in mounting a humanitarian response to the needs of IDPs and, indeed, other target populations.

I would propose the following four priority areas and initiatives as essential to improve the quality of humanitarian response.

## Access

While *Caught between Borders* highlights a number of important lessons on how IDPs develop strategies to respond to their displacement, this new awareness should not detract from the reality that humanitarian organisations do not have access in many of the country situations portrayed in the book. It must not be forgotten that in countries such as Burma, Burundi, Sri Lanka and Sudan government authorities do everything they can to obstruct international organisations from reaching IDPs. Access must be top of the agenda.

## Protection

The recent missions of the Senior Network on Internal Displacement illustrate that the biggest gap in the response to IDPs is protection. Yet there is considerable confusion over what constitutes protection and how it relates to humanitarian assistance.

Nowadays many humanitarian organisations, including NGOs, recognise protection-related activities as being a part of their work, for example in the form of advocacy. At the headquarters level, several initiatives have been taken by UNHCR, the ICRC and NGOs to discuss their respective roles in protection. At the same time, however, many field staff fear that incorporating human rights and protection elements in their work will put at risk their operational presence and will impact negatively upon negotiations for humanitarian access.

There is much that can be done. The Guiding Principles can serve as a checklist in assessing humanitarian needs. In the course of their work NGOs compile considerable practical data which can be used to formulate indicators to measure human rights violations. Another initiative which has been taken by some NGOs is to recruit specific staff to help operational colleagues to collect and analyse this information.

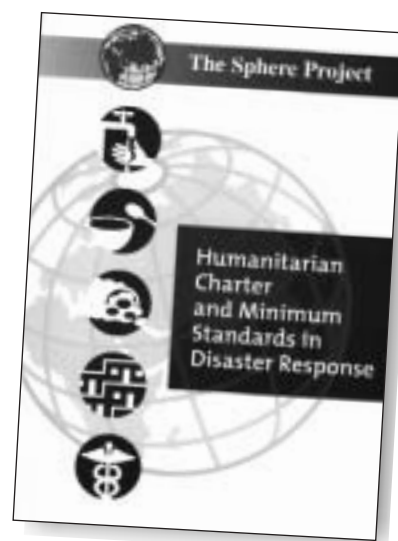
## Rights-based approach and the Sphere Project

Perhaps similar to the protection debate is the present emphasis placed on developing a rights-based

approach to responding to humanitarian needs. As Hugo Slim has observed, “rights dignify individuals, rather than patronising them, and victims of conflict become claimants of rights rather than objects of charity.” A rights-based approach grounds humanitarian action in a legal framework which sets out duties and responsibilities and which therefore also provides a framework within which actors can be held accountable.

One tool in developing a rights-based approach may be the Sphere Project.<sup>1</sup> Its Humanitarian Charter explains the basic notions and principles of humanitarian action and is followed by a set of minimum standards, indicators and guidance notes in five technical areas: food distribution, nutrition, shelter, water and sanitation, and healthcare. Sphere may be a helpful tool in assessing needs, planning, monitoring and evaluating response, advocacy and training. One standard consistently put forward by the Sphere Handbook is the involvement of the beneficiary population in programme design and operations. This principle is also crucial if humanitarian response is to build on and strengthen the capacity of the affected populations and local organisations.

Another interesting issue with regard to IDPs and Sphere is the apparent





relation between the Guiding Principles and minimum standards in humanitarian assistance. Principle 18 and section IV of the Guiding Principles provide for a right for IDPs to receive certain forms of humanitarian assistance essential for human survival. In years to come Sphere may well be recognised as having set the standards on what constitutes such assistance.

### Accountability

NGOs hold the issue of accountability to be crucial in improving the international response to IDPs. In the UN system it seems that every actor can

hide behind somebody else, thus passing the buck for failures to address the assistance and protection needs of IDPs. NGOs must continue to ensure that IDPs no longer fall through the cracks of the international system.

On another level, humanitarian organisations seem to have accepted the notion that they are not only accountable towards their donors, be it private or institutional, but also to the people they help to survive. Part of this concept of accountability is the relationship with local organisations and structures. As Mary B Anderson has observed, external aid always

leads to inequalities and dependencies. However, if humanitarian aid is to do more good than harm, international organisations and NGOs must build their responses upon the capacities of the IDPs themselves, as well as on the capacities of local organisations and structures.

*Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop is the Coordinator of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies – ICVA (www.icva.ch).  
Email: ed.schenkenberg@icva.ch*

<sup>1</sup> See [www.sphereproject.org](http://www.sphereproject.org).

## Working group II: The humanitarian response Additional issues raised

One of the main issues discussed related to the **image of IDPs as victims**. What can be done to dispel this image and change our perspective? Is this a wider problem relating to most groups of people receiving assistance? How can we support IDPs in such a way that their own self-image is restored and they regain control over their lives?

To avoid stigmatising groups of people, it is important to focus on a rights-based approach, using human rights as the basis in planning and implementing humanitarian assistance. Such an approach allows us to see IDPs as rights holders, not victims. The Sphere Project<sup>1</sup> is an important initiative because it internalises this rights-based approach. The importance of involving IDPs in the design – as well as the implementation – of projects was underlined.

Categorising of groups and categorising of situations can sometimes make things worse. We categorise our target groups into IDPs, refugees, vulnerable groups and so on; and we categorise our response in terms such as emergency situation or development phase. Sometimes this leads us to miss some important issues.

How can we **improve our response** and develop field activities based on response strategies?

Information gathering and dissemination is of key importance. IDPs depend on survival mechanisms and their ability to adapt. We need to gain a better understanding of coping strategies among IDPs. We should develop greater awareness of how different groups and individuals are able to survive and use this information when planning assistance. We need to ask what previous structures existed for decision making and what IDPs' current procedures are. What are their inputs into the economy, their host families or host communities? We need to develop a methodology for information gathering and tools for understanding the communities in which we work. Agencies could develop a 'toolbox' of data collection methods and train local staff/local NGOs how to use and develop them.

Existing and new information needs to be gathered and made accessible. This should be done in close cooperation with the research community. It is essential that we include local researchers. The need for an interdisciplinary approach is vital. It is hoped that the joint NRC-NTNU database on

completed and ongoing IDP research which is about to be established, will begin to meet these needs.<sup>2</sup>

Another priority is to find better ways of combining protection and assistance. The UN and NGOs must also focus more on gaining access to those IDP populations that are out of reach of international humanitarian organisations because of security issues.

The importance of improved coordination between different UN organisations and international NGOs was underlined. This should be the responsibility of Humanitarian/Resident Coordinators and they should be trained to do so. An overall plan for assistance should be made in each country with set standards and specific monitoring responsibilities for different agencies clearly spelled out. Better mechanisms are also needed in terms of accountability. Working towards a single inter-agency assessment in humanitarian emergencies should be a long-term goal.

<sup>1</sup> [www.sphereproject.org](http://www.sphereproject.org)

<sup>2</sup> See information box on p46.

# Addressing tensions and building appropriate support structures

by Salvator Nkurunziza

*In many cases, as outsiders, we may see the effects – though not necessarily the causes – of tensions that arise in the community.*



Tensions at both the family and the community level can manifest themselves in various ways, such as reduced participation by leaders (formal and non-formal) in meetings, increased female attendance at meetings and in aid distribution, gradual reduction in numbers of young people in the camps, conflict and harassment of women in the camps, attitude and behaviour disorders and trauma and, at the extreme end, attacks on humanitarian and relief staff.

Through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercises, the following causes of such tensions in Burundi were identified:

## **i. Disempowerment of community traditional leaders**

The existing community structure views the humanitarian assistance structure as a threat to their traditional community leaders as it reduces, or removes, their social power and status. Silent boycott at the beginning and open conflict later on are manifestations of their coping mechanism to regain power and authority.

## **ii. Role reversals (gender and generation)**

In many African communities, men and women are expected to fulfil certain roles and responsibilities. Women are responsible for domestic work and childcare whereas men are responsible for productive activities and protection of the family. In the case of relief response, it is normally the head of household (male) who has to be registered by the relief agency; therefore he will be the one to queue for food and non-food aid. In his community he is supposed to be seen as a provider but in this case he is the recipient; this is humiliating for him and the reversal of roles is socially unacceptable for both men and women.

It is the parents' responsibility to feed, clothe and protect their children. In an emergency situation, however, parents can no longer play this role fully; in some cases, it may even be reversed as children take on the parental responsibility for getting an income for the whole family. Young men and women are often sent by their parents to find paid employment in cities.

## **iii. Shelter**

Shelter provided in camps is usually too small to accommodate the whole family. Older children cannot share the small piece of sheeting with their parents and therefore either the father or the older children have to find alternative accommodation. In the process, parents lose their educational role and their control over the whole family unit.

## **iv. Traditional rituals and religious practices**

The change in family life and situation also presents cultural challenges. In the new environment, families cannot carry out their traditional and religious rituals. At worst, displaced people may not be able to conduct proper grieving and funeral ceremonies while they are in the camps. This generates great fear that the spirits of dead relatives will haunt them because they have not observed their traditions.

## **What can be done to reduce tensions?**

From the author's experience, those working to reduce tension should be aware of tensions which may arise from displacement conditions and operational approaches implemented by humanitarian and relief organisations. Management structures at community/camp level, district/provincial level and national level should be set up. Displaced people should be involved in identification of tensions and alternative solutions and, above all, in decision making on issues which affect them.

## **Management structures**

At the national level, management is primarily a question of policy, advocacy and coordination. Humanitarian assistance organisations need to set up coordination mechanisms that define roles and responsibilities, strategies and approaches, and appropriate interventions. This includes setting up structures that will enable them to listen to and involve the community.

At the district/provincial level, management is more operational, involving needs assessment, capacity building, implementation and evaluation. The operational strategy should

be a joint intervention involving all specialised humanitarian organisations to avoid duplication and conflicting approaches that might create confusion and tension at the community level.

At the affected community level, the operational team must recognise that displaced communities would already have their own organisational structures – formal and/or informal. Examples of traditional authority in Africa include the Bashingantahe in Burundi, Paramount Chiefs in West Africa and Gacaca in Rwanda. Instead of starting from scratch, therefore, the operational team should identify and build on the existing community leadership structures.

How do we set up management structures at the community level in camps for displaced people? During the assessment phase, the following questions should guide the assessment team:

- Are there any existing formal and/or informal structures?
- How have issues of gender and generation been considered vis-à-vis representation?
- Concerning geographical representation, are all communities/ areas affected represented in the committee and are they involved in decision making?
- Are the most vulnerable displaced persons represented in the existing community management committee/structure and involved in decision making?
- What resources, capacities and skills do the existing structures have and what gaps are there that need to be fulfilled?
- What will be the role and responsibilities of the management committee?

Answers to the above questions could be sought via exercises such as mapping, Venn diagrams and SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. These will help

the affected communities and the assessment team, working together, to identify the gaps, resources and capacities of the communities and what is required of the humanitarian organisations.

### Conclusion

Tensions arise from the conditions created by displacement and are reinforced by top-down interventions. Unless we make an effort to identify, work with and build on the capacities of existing structures, and thereby more effectively minimise tensions, humanitarian interventions will be less than effective in listening and responding to the needs of the displaced.

*Salvator Nkurunziza used to be Programme Manager for ActionAid in Burundi and is currently studying for an MA at University College Dublin, Ireland. Email: [salva\\_nkuru@hotmail.com](mailto:salva_nkuru@hotmail.com)*

# Listening to the displaced: a trainer's experience

by Suzana Paklar

*Several factors need to be taken into consideration when planning and implementing a training programme.*



Firstly, and most importantly, the element of **change** is crucial to understand if we are to implement effective strategies to address displaced people's needs. Change may relate, for example, to people's health

status. Some people are traumatised by the events that caused them to flee; some have been abused and exploited during flight. They may be ill or exhausted. Or changes may have occurred in their social status, such as when professionals can no longer practise their profession. Moreover, traditional networks of support, such as family and community, have been destroyed, leaving some members (women, children, disabled) especially vulnerable. In general, changed circumstances often mean that people cannot do what they are used to or would want to. Sometimes these changes may affect what for us seem insignificant issues, such as food; for them, however, that can be of great importance.

Secondly, people react to events/experiences in accordance with what it means to them. In other words, reactions are result of **cultural context**, which may transform individual experience; the same signs and symptoms, for example, may mean different things in different social settings.

Thirdly, in times of disaster, the **focus is on rapid delivery** of goods and services. Important though this is, however, it is often undertaken with little or no reference to the capacity of the population to help itself and with no participation by the affected populations. Moreover, there is a lack of coordination, further diminishing the capacity of the displaced population as well as the possibility for host communities to contribute and benefit. This can ultimately undermine the coping mechanisms of the affected populations, denying them the dignity of self-reliance and creating long-term dependency.

Bearing the above in mind, as trainers we first try to identify both observable change and people's perception of the change. At the level of needs, we try to include what people need as well as how they want it. In defining the overall approach, we start with what resources exist within the population and build on those.

In short, our approach to training is value-driven and based on participants' analysis of what is most relevant and manageable in the light

of their current capacities and resources. We recognise that training is a continual process and not something learned as the result of attending one or two workshops. Training needs to fit into a larger picture and process. We work with people to define that larger picture in order to determine how a training course can contribute to it.

Participation is a major factor in determining whether or not the project will be successful. Failure to

involve people will ultimately lead to growing lethargy on the part of the population, increase in cost and decrease in communication.

*Suzana Paklar works as a trainer in South East Asia and Europe for ICMC (International Catholic Migration Commission – [www.icmc.net/docs/en](http://www.icmc.net/docs/en)). Email: [paklar@icmc.net](mailto:paklar@icmc.net)*

## Working group III: Setting up structures that listen to the needs of the displaced

### Additional issues raised

The sources of tensions inside and outside IDP camps may stem from the disempowerment of traditional leadership, a reversal of pre-displacement gender and generational roles, the exodus of young people or behavioural problems and violence. Agencies need not only to listen to how IDPs identify sources of tension but also to reflect that awareness in the structures established to address and prevent them. Different management structures are needed at different levels. While they should try to build wherever possible on existing mechanisms, it should be remembered that some traditional structures do not necessarily address the needs of the most vulnerable.

Policies that effectively listen to and respond to IDPs' needs must look at their real needs and real capacities. Agencies need to understand firstly that all displacement involves change, both physical and psychological; accurate information about the nature of these changes is essential prior to formulating interventions. Secondly, agencies need to understand the cultural context in which these changes are taking place in order for interventions to be culturally appropriate and to accord with IDPs' wishes and priorities. Thirdly, they should identify IDP

capacities and involve them in interventions. In all these areas, the gathering of accurate information plays a crucial role; misinformation or wrong information can have dire consequences.

There is need for a note of caution regarding the empowerment of women.

As women are increasingly recognised as resilient actors, often taking on both livelihood and additional family/child care roles in displacement, the tendency – and fashion – is for agencies to focus on projects to 'empower' women via education, training or income-generation initiatives. Women could spend all their time on such activities, forever enhancing their empowerment. International organisations tend to find it easier to fund and implement projects involving women with the result that there are hardly any projects targeting men. This contributes to an increase in inactivity, drinking, violence and other antisocial behaviour.

Gender is not only about women's roles but also about male/female relations. Agencies need to be more aware of the related needs and possible areas of tension arising from displace-

ment. They should consider developing complementary projects, learning from examples such as the case in Bosnia where a weaving scheme was set up for women while men being contracted to make the looms.

The increase in reconciliation projects reflects another fashion in interventions. Millions of dollars have been poured into reconciliation projects without, perhaps, sufficient awareness of whether the timing has been appropriate. Again, agencies need to understand a situation and develop appropriate interventions, rather than simply following fashions.

# IDPs, mobile livelihoods and armed conflict

by Finn Stepputat

*I am currently undertaking a research project at the Centre for Development Research (CDR) on 'migration, conflict and state formation in the Peruvian Andes'.*



I would like to discuss the livelihood of IDPs against a background of how conditions of mobility and livelihoods in general change in situations of armed conflict. During armed conflict, mobility and control of mobility are of primary strategic importance for everybody involved. The changing patterns of mobility during and after conflict should be seen in this context. Displacement of large parts of the population is a common feature of armed conflict. Sometimes parties to the conflict use displacement as a military strategy for territorial or population control; at other times displacement is an outcome of widespread conditions of insecurity and impoverishment. In the Peruvian Andes, as in many places, mobility is an essential aspect of livelihoods. Difficulty in travelling can therefore cause impoverishment, as access to markets, education and migrant work is limited.

Many people fleeing regions of armed conflict live in precarious conditions and are often viewed with much suspicion or even hostility by both their new neighbours and the authorities. Although the framework for the protection of IDPs is still much weaker than the refugee framework, the

appointment of the Representative of the UN Secretary General for IDPs and the publication of the Guiding Principles have served to increase international attention on the subject.

In order to probe possible effects and implications of such attention, the CDR project has explored how the IDP concept was introduced in Peru in the early 1990s and appropriated by local NGOs, people affected by violent conflict and displacement, and by a governmental organisation, Programa de Apoyo al Repoblamiento (PAR). PAR was set up to facilitate return and repopulation at the end of armed conflict. Learning about the IDP concept has encouraged and enabled local and national IDP organisations to speak out about their needs and rights, and to receive different forms of assistance, including support for return.

Our research indicates that those agencies and programmes that have been working in support of IDPs have tended to disregard the mobile livelihood practices of both IDPs and returnees. These groups of people frequently engage in seasonal migration or seek to re-establish rural-urban linkages by living in both city and village, building up dual residence whenever possible after 'returning' to the villages. The agencies and programmes, however, have seen this mobility as an impediment to advocacy and longer-term development strategies. IDPs and returnees are expected to stay in one place. Our research suggests that, rather than considering displacement (and return) as an absolute break with the past, a focus on networks and mobile livelihoods may be a better way to help people affected by violent conflict to move beyond emergency relief.



UNHCR/R. Wilkinson

*Finn Stepputat is Senior Researcher at the Centre for Development Research in Copenhagen ([www.cdr.dk](http://www.cdr.dk)). Email: [fst@cdr.dk](mailto:fst@cdr.dk)*



# Living in conflict in Colombia

by Ana Rosa Diaz Diaz

*I am a widow with two daughters and have worked for the Communities of Peace (Comunidades de Paz) organisation since its creation<sup>1</sup>.*

I belong to the Community of Peace of Are Francisco de Asís in the community of Chicao but I live in the community of Domingodó.

I have been involved in the Organization of Women of the Communities of Peace since 2000. The main objective of this organisation is

to strengthen the ability of women to organise themselves independently. Within the process of the Communities of Peace, women have played a significant role. As part of this, I have coordinated a number of general assemblies and community meetings, and have participated in various workshops on gender and training.

In the beginning of the emergency we received assistance from national and international NGOs. But we ourselves identified what we needed and gradually took over the mobilisation, logistics and production of all we needed in terms of food and construction materials. Today we produce everything ourselves and need no assistance. We still need more recognition but we are working on that.

I have been a member of the Humanitarian and Negotiating Commission of the Communities of Peace since mid-2000 until the most recent general assembly in October 2001. This Commission represents the Communities of Peace in negotiations with the government and in dialogue with embassies, national and international NGOs, and armed actors. The Commission also provides information and support to, and works with, the 57 communities.

I have travelled on various occasions to Bogotá, Quibdo, Bermeja Ravine and Apartadó, where I have had meetings with embassies and state institutions such as the Vice-presidency, Ministry of Defence, Network of Social Solidarity, the army and the police.

**Ana Rosa Diaz Diaz is a Community of Peace leader.**

1. For further information about Comunidades de Paz see: [www.paxchristi.nl/colpeacecom.html](http://www.paxchristi.nl/colpeacecom.html)

# Creating livelihoods for IDPs: some conceptual and practical considerations

by Ragnhild Lund

*The focus on livelihoods derives from the debate on 'from relief to development' and the distinction which it makes between what is short-term/immediate and long-term/sustainable.*



However, the distinctions between the two are blurred: conflicts tend to be prolonged and the aid system is not always particularly sensitive to when and why one type of support – relief – ends and another – development – begins. Agencies need to address simultaneously both the immediate needs and the longer-term requirements of displaced communities.

A new proposal for the Norwegian aid budget proposes support that may overcome traditional distinctions between relief and development, and between lateral and multilateral aid, namely 'transitional aid' (*overgangs-bistand*). NGOs and voluntary agencies should explore the potential of this type of support.

What does the concept of 'livelihood' mean and what does it imply in terms of assistance? Generally, we refer to livelihoods as a means of living, an income. In development studies, the concept normally goes beyond the economic and denotes a wide range of means and ways to survive and to sustain people's existence at a given place. Richard Black<sup>1</sup> writes about the need to protect 'livelihood environment'.

The failure to protect the physical environment will make it more difficult for refugees to find essential commodities, especially if they are in exile for a long period, and may contribute to malnutrition, disease and enhanced poverty. 'Livelihood environment' refers both to people's immediate surroundings – their need for basic items such as wood, grazing land and water – and to infrastructure needs such as roads, schools and clinics. Finn Stepputat and Birgitte Sørensen write of 'mobile livelihoods', referring to the existing levels of mobility between sites of production, sites of wage labour and temporary migration.<sup>2</sup>

There is need for clarification and nuancing of the concept of livelihood strategies. Livelihood systems are culturally and socially unique. When developing support policies, donors should acknowledge people's traditional strategies and should serve as facilitators.

## Historical and new livelihood strategies

Traditionally, poor people's strategies reflected their desire to spread risk rather than increase their output from one source only. In times of conflict, such reasoning and resulting strategies may provide the most appropriate knowledge base for survival for IDPs. Knowledge of the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of IDPs is essential for long-term capacity building and social reconstruction.

Against this background, Stepputat and Sørensen's suggestion that programmes should focus on people's networks and mobile strategies, building on what is 'at hand', may be an

appropriate way to help people affected by violent conflict and to move beyond emergency relief. However, such a strategy may also sustain the differences between different types of IDPs, as some may have better access to supporting networks and resources than others.

It is vital to ensure that the needs of the host populations are also addressed. Programmes could, for example, promote legal rights to develop business and work for both groups, ensure everybody's mobility, clarify use rights to resources, identify the priorities of both groups and try to avoid conflicting agendas.

## Practical needs versus strategic interests

In our research on IDPs at NTNU we have decided to pursue an actor-oriented approach. This means emphasising the enabling capacity of the individual, indicating that IDPs may influence their own situation even at times of extreme deprivation.

However, such emphasis on agency should not ignore the structural aspects of flight and deprivation. Rather, it should concentrate on identifying the **enabling** structures rather than the **constraining** ones. This is a major challenge: how to assist IDPs as individuals and as a group by service provision, and at the same time provide changes in the support structures that in the long run may engender changes in the system.

This brings us to the discussion of how IDPs may be empowered to improve their situation and to change it in the long run. The terms 'practical needs' and 'strategic interests' are normally associated with the discourse on empowerment of gender. Both are needed to create sustainable livelihoods. By practical needs we mean shelter, food and service provision. By strategic needs we mean how we may sensitise people and mobilise them collectively in order for them to identify how they can change their

situation. The latter takes time, and again marks the difference between relief (service provision and immediate needs) and development (how to create positive structural and individual change, meet longer-term needs and encourage sustainability). Both practical needs and strategic interests need to be seen as complementary, whereby meeting practical needs may result in creating preconditions for strategic moves and empowerment.

Agencies need to be active in creating tools for identification of practical needs and strategic interests and in formulating measures to achieve a broader approach to livelihood creation which uses participatory methodology to identify changes in the support structure through participatory methodology and improves access to natural resources, food production and economic resources.

### New and old conflicts

IDPs currently number 20-25 million. In 1992 the figure was 24 million. Numbers are not increasing but are not dropping significantly either. When conflict erupts and people have to flee their homes and ancestral

places, some are identified as IDPs and are entitled to support, while others have to fend for themselves outside the migration mainstream. The present classification of IDPs does not cover all affected groups. For many, the status of IDP is a transitional situation: when does it start and when does it end? Furthermore, how should early warning systems be formulated to be effective in pre-war situations? The challenges relating to our thinking on livelihoods and aid are multi-faceted and relate to several stages of displacement; as Deng emphasises, the Guiding Principles should be used as a basis for dialogue on these issues with governments and other actors. We all need to develop a longer-term perspective.

### From these last points, several further recommendations emerge:

- Registration and classification of IDPs must be improved and tailored to specific geographical and cultural contexts.
- The Guiding Principles need to be reformulated and contextualised prior to implementation.

- Programmes and aid activities should not be isolated from official development policies.
- Stronger links with governments should be developed.
- NGOs (local and international) must be strengthened to work in a complementary manner and facilitate measurement of impacts.
- Inter-agency coordination needs to be made more effective, allowing flexible strategic planning.
- Finally, there is the challenge of 'keeping in touch' with IDPs and host communities, and the need to create channels for effective long-distance communication.

*Ragnhild Lund is Professor of Geography at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU).*

*Email: Ragnhild.lund@svt.ntnu.no*

1 Richard Black *Refugees, Environment and Development*, 1998, Longman, London.

2 Finn Stepputat & B M Sørensen 'The Rise and Fall of 'Internally Displaced People' in the Central Peruvian Andes' in *Development and Change* Vol 32, pp769-791, 2001.

*Rapid destruction of natural vegetation, especially trees, in the vicinity of camps.*





## Working group IV: Forced migration and livelihoods: creating livelihoods in conflict situations

### Additional issues raised

Divergent presentations to the group brought out different points of departure in how we conceptualise IDPs. One showed the insider's reality of what it is like to belong to an IDP community; the other two looked at how we interpret, or attempt to interpret, what it is to be an IDP.

All situations of IDPs are different. It is important to contextualise and identify the social and cultural structures among IDP and host communities and how they interact. When looking at the difference between IDPs and refugees, it became apparent that often IDPs might be better equipped to work on reconstructing social and cultural structures than refugees who find themselves in foreign lands without knowledge of social and political structures.

When we talk of IDPs there are prevailing general assumptions of immobility and discontinuity. Our conceptions of discontinuity have had repercussions for the ways in which development-oriented assistance for refugee and IDPs has been conceived. Our responses fall into three categories. Either IDPs are assisted at

the site of refuge with the intention that this is where they will permanently settle; or they are kept in limbo, forever receiving relief until such time as conditions are ripe for return or resettlement; or, thirdly, they are assisted in ways which prepare for their future by providing them with transportable assets, education, training or organisational skills.

There is a challenge in the fact that although the state of discontinuity is often real it is at the same time a reduction of reality which has implications for assistance and relations forged between IDPs, returnees and those who stay. The importance of mobility for commercial relations, education and migrant labour implies the need to capture how mobility is embedded in livelihood practices. Conventional thinking often sees refugees and IDPs in terms of security. Spatially restrictive regimes of humanitarian assistance may deny recipients the right to move around and disqualify them from making claims to special victim status. Livelihoods may be disrupted in many ways. There are risks that:

- markets become inaccessible
- labour opportunities are restricted
- long distance control of assets becomes difficult
- rural-urban exchanges of food, building materials and information are blocked
- leaders cannot represent their people as they cannot reach urban centres of power
- secondary and higher education opportunities in urban centres are denied to IDPs

We need to do much more to learn about displaced livelihoods and how to improve freedom of movement and prospects for their normalisation.

We must not forget that IDPs are a symptom of profound problems that need to be addressed. We have to proactively tackle the causes of displacement. Power struggles, fragile and undemocratic states and lack of transparency and equality in systems and structures of distribution are root causes of poverty. Conflict, globalisation and environmental degradation will continue to increase the numbers of IDPs unless we take action.

*IDPs in internment camp in Gihogozi area, Burundi*



# Strengthening of response strategies to improve protection for IDPs: lessons from Colombia

by Turid Læg Reid

*How should international actors, humanitarian development agencies and human rights organisations take up the challenge of ensuring that protection is a priority concern in both humanitarian and development activities?*



## Support for Peace Communities

The best known organised self-protection movements in Colombia are the 'peace communities' (*Comunidades de Paz*) and Communities in Resistance (*Comunidades en Resistencia*) in Urabá. These emerged after intense fighting between government forces and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 1997 led to the first massive displacement and subsequent threats and massacres by paramilitary groups.

The initial objective of the movement was to keep the civilian population out of the armed conflict by declaring civilian autonomy vis-à-vis armed groups. That autonomy involved organising the community democratically and formulating and adhering to self-imposed restrictions on carrying arms, passing information to armed factions or in any other way supporting the armed groups. It was hoped that, by doing so, those displaced and living in camps in Pavarandó and Turbo would be able to return to their homes and future displacement would be prevented.

The peace communities negotiated with paramilitaries and guerrillas through third parties, mainly the church. The armed groups agreed not to attack the communities. Similar agreements made with government troops were formalised. The community in Cacarica emphasised the government's responsibility for providing protection and security and

negotiated an unarmed state presence (the 'house of justice', which includes an ombudsman and a finance office).

The peace communities designed symbols to designate the member villages and individuals. Signs were erected outside villages and 'camps'. Members carry ID cards affirming that they belong to the community and that they do not carry arms and do not participate in the armed conflict. The ID cards have proven to be important assets for travel through the region as holders of those cards pass easily through the numerous checkpoints set up by each faction.

As another way of protecting themselves and their right to freedom of movement, members of the peace communities travel in groups and work collectively on such tasks as planting, road repair and fruit harvesting. Teams of missionaries and NGO staff often accompany peace community members in their tasks, providing another level of protection.

Most of these communities are Afro-Colombian and, as recognised minorities, enjoy particular rights, the most important of which are collective land rights, including the right to use surrounding natural resources. *Titulación*, or the legal registration of collective property, is crucial for reclaiming their land once the displaced return. The communities were in the process of acquiring these rights at the time of their displacement. Negotiations with INCORA, the state entity that handles land reform, were conducted with the legal assistance of national NGOs.

## The role of international organisations in supporting the peace communities

Over the last five years the international presence in Colombia has been

**H**ow can international protection strategies build on and strengthen IDPs' own protection strategies?

The international presence in Colombia has been oriented towards protection and rights, perhaps more so than in many other so-called complex emergencies. This is mainly due to a strong national human rights movement of NGOs, grassroots organisations and other social movements that existed prior to the increase in international presence around 1996-97.

There has been some innovative cooperation between international NGOs and intergovernmental organisations to meet the protection needs of IDPs and the civilian population. Supporting and monitoring of negotiation, support of local early warning systems and setting up common protection agendas have been some of the ways in which these protection needs have been addressed.

steadily increasing but is still very limited compared to the scope and magnitude of the humanitarian crisis.

When asked what they most need, IDP communities (despite the fact that they have many material needs) most often request presence and accompaniment. Peace Brigades International<sup>1</sup> have had the most direct accompaniment role, as they have been continuously with some communities during and after return. Other organisations (UN and international NGOs) have attended larger meetings between the communities in order to give visibility, prestige and some security. These meetings have allowed dialogue between the displaced communities and representatives of the international community.

The Cacarica Community and the government created a joint commission to negotiate conditions for return and to undertake the planning and monitoring of the actual return process. The community invited national and international organisations to serve as observers. National NGOs have had the most proactive role in supporting the community in negotiating an agreement. The international presence has offered legitimacy to the community and their claims and at times functioned as a buffer between the community and the government. Protection issues have been a priority, for the community, the NGOs and the international agencies. Direct involvement was complemented by funding of the whole negotiation process. International NGOs supported the organising of the community, as well as financing the costs of negotiation.

Return to the places of origin took place amid escalating conflict in the region, thus increasing protection needs. Return was relatively success-

ful; thousands of people were able to go home and large communities gained formal ownership of the land. However, the return process has had its costs. The communities have suffered attacks and harassment. Advocacy and international support have been crucial in preventing further escalations and new large-scale displacement.

The peace communities' developed organisation and own capacity to analyse security risks and define advocacy agendas have always been the basis for advocacy.

### The protection challenge of individually displaced people

While the peace communities in Urabá were organised communities with defined collective protection agendas and good negotiation skills, most displaced persons in Colombia seek refuge individually or in small groups. The pattern of displacement is complex. In one town some families can be arriving, seeking protection and security, while at the same time several other families are fleeing.

Most displaced persons in Colombia face a high degree of insecurity even after displacement. In towns and cities like Cúcuta and Barrancabermeja, the risk of being persecuted and even killed is so high that many of the displaced choose to hide their identity as IDPs. Silence and anonymity are often necessary and perceived as the only way to survive. This strategy will most often result in lack of access to public services and humanitarian attention, and no responsibility taken by the authorities to protect the IDPs. External humanitarian actors, including international and national NGOs, have difficulty

reaching a population that will not identify itself as displaced.

Even when silence and anonymity are most common self-protection strategies, IDP families will look for trustworthy structures for support and guidance. At its most basic, such structures are relatives or friends in poor neighbourhoods. More important for protection and assistance are local parishes, women's organisations, neighbourhood committees and other grassroots organisations.

For international organisations, alliances and support for these organisations and structures will often be the only way to support displaced populations. The need for financial and institutional strengthening of the organisations is often overlooked when both protection and humanitarian assistance are discussed. When needed, visible international support should be provided but always after discussion with local partners and the displaced communities. Visibility and presence can often function as deterrents but in certain situations such visibility can be counterproductive and actually trigger persecution or attacks. It is obvious that the only way to ensure that a certain intervention will have protection impact, and not constitute potential harm to the community, is through acquiring knowledge and information about self-protection mechanisms. For this, continuous dialogue is needed with the displaced persons themselves, their organisations and other local actors. Most important are awareness of and interest in detecting protection needs and self-protection strategies.

Humanitarian responses should be adapted to self-protection mechanisms. In situations of individual

*Village destroyed by paramilitaries, Colombia.*



displacement and where anonymity is used in self-protection, one response is to increase local actors' capacity to assist in a low-key manner. In some pilot projects, NRC and Project Counselling Services (PCS) have defined local 'protection agents' and provided them with small protection funds to be used flexibly according to each family's needs.

In some areas, like Urabá, Magdalena Medio and the North East, some international actors have managed to define common protection agendas through establishment of informal roundtables. International NGOs and UN agencies undertake common mis-

sions to areas with difficult access, with the main objective of meeting with local organisations, churches and displaced communities to discuss protection problems and challenges. The definition of common advocacy agendas and protection activities among local actors and international networks has proven much more effective, particularly in giving legitimacy to the local actors.

International agencies will often have easier access to regional and national military and civil authorities and the roundtables have used this access to voice general and specific protection concerns. International early warning

systems will always be most timely and effective when based on the IDPs' own analysis and warnings. When doing advocacy work, we as international organisations are all too often self-proclaimed advocates or spokespersons. We have an ethical obligation to engage in dialogue and consultation with those whom we claim to represent.

**Turid Lægveid is an Advisor to the Norwegian Refugee Council. Email: turid.lagveid@nrc.no**

<sup>1</sup> See [www.peacebrigades.org/colombia.html](http://www.peacebrigades.org/colombia.html)

# Improving protection for IDPs: lessons from Angola

by Andrea Lari

*We cannot hope to strengthen the response strategies of IDPs and their capacity to secure protection without first asking ourselves:*



- What is the context in which IDPs are establishing response strategies?
- What response strategies are employed by IDPs?
- What do we really mean by 'protection'?
- What action should be taken to increase the level of IDP security?

Angola has been at war since the start of the independence struggle against the Portuguese 40 years ago. Multiple

displacements have led to rural depopulation and the concentration of people in provincial capitals, coastal areas and Luanda. The conflict has acquired a nature and a level of intensity and violence never reached before. Since mid-1998 both warring parties have deliberately used IDPs for their own military purposes. As a result, the total number of IDPs in Angola has now reached 4 million. OCHA reports an increase of 384,000 people in the first nine months of 2001.

UNITA forces use brutal measures to prevent people leaving areas under their control. Entire groups are forced to accompany UNITA soldiers on hit-and-run attacks. Systematic physical abuse, mutilation of limbs and murder are the fate of those suspected of being informers. For its part, the government displaces people in order to deprive UNITA of food, labour, fighters and sex slaves. Families are intentionally separated, forcing men and male adolescents to remain and serve in the pro-government civilian militia. When new territory is captured from UNITA, IDPs are prevented from leaving and are forced to remain

while their living conditions progressively deteriorate. IDPs are often taken along during foraging expeditions and exposed to risk of UNITA ambushes and landmines. Indiscriminate beating, harassment and rape are frequent.

The near impossibility of securing access to the estimated half-million IDPs in rebel-controlled areas imposes a serious obstacle for any protection efforts. Here there is no official humanitarian assistance or presence, only some church workers facing great risks and intimidation when they try to help. Discussions about the possibility of opening humanitarian corridors have led nowhere. Reaching IDPs in areas recently reclaimed by the government is also fraught with difficulty as humanitarian workers are offered no security by the authorities.

Those IDPs who have managed to settle in camps enjoy a higher level of protection but still suffer abuses at the hands of the security forces. Camps are often situated in insecure areas outside the security perimeters of urban areas, close to minefields or alongside roads and barracks subject to UNITA attack. In official transit centres or camps there is scope both to deliver protection-oriented humanitarian assistance and to develop

protection projects. It is mainly in this setting that local responses and subsistence strategies can be identified, reinforced or improved.

### IDP response strategies

During their multiple displacements, Angolans have learnt how to survive and cope, how to flee and what to bring with them. Organised in small groups, they hide in the *mata* (bush), move by night and avoid main roads, minefields and routes used by UNITA. Food is carried for consumption and to exchange for agricultural and other tools needed to create a livelihood in the area of new settlement.

However, in the last few years these survival mechanisms have been breaking down with increasing frequency. Many testimonies tell of people, and especially children, dying in the bush before they are able to reach camps or settle with friends and relatives in urban areas. The same happens in government-controlled towns receiving no external assistance. Lack of food and medicine plus chronic insecurity soon take their toll.

Those IDPs who do manage to reach the relative security of camps or relatives have shown some important skills that are shifting the nature of the strategy from survival to subsistence. During their first days in a camp it is common to see already settled families providing moral and material support and informing the newly arrived how to access food. IDPs hosted by family members or friends enjoy immediate support but within a few days have to start fending for themselves. Host families rarely have enough resources to share and the presence of new guests soon becomes unbearable and gives rise to conflict. The subsistence activities of IDPs have economic and social effects on the hosting community. While IDPs often complain about the insufficient amount of food they receive from humanitarian agencies, their major grievances are to do with lack of access to good quality land, tools and seeds.

### What is 'protection'?

There should be general recognition among humanitarian actors of what is meant by protection. It should comprehend all activities oriented towards

the full respect of the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of human rights and international humanitarian and refugee laws.

Some activities are oriented towards enhancing knowledge of human rights standards through education and training. Others, focusing on enforcement, include information gathering, monitoring, investigation, advocacy, public reporting of violations, pursuing cases through the national courts or presenting complaints to international bodies when domestic remedies fail. The intent is to make the authorities account for their conduct and to take action when violations occur.

Practical protection responses need to be delivered at field level. The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement represent an important starting point but they need to be incorporated into domestic law in the form of specific legislation which actually operationalises its provisions, specifies the authorities responsible for protection and makes them accountable. A functional justice system is essential if human rights abuses suffered by IDPs are to be redressed.

Angolan IDPs say that lack of physical security and freedom of movement are their major protection concerns. Abuses take place mainly outside the





camps, in isolated areas, close to army barracks or civilian militia checkpoints and when night is falling. Collecting firewood, gathering fruit and agricultural labour all require movement over long distances and often in remote areas. Informal taxation and physical harassment take place at checkpoints. Indiscriminate beatings are common if IDPs fail to present personal documentation or are unable to pay bribes. Women face physical assaults and rape on their way to or from the fields. There is great fear of being relocated to new camps in sites where people are put at greater risk of UNITA attack. In the Quessua camp in Malanje province IDPs were happier to remain in their camp bordering a minefield than be moved.

### Increasing IDP security

We should start to find ways to improve the protection of IDPs by reducing the opportunities for the perpetrators to commit violations.

Reinforcing existing mechanisms would be the first step. IDPs have developed a great ability to organise

their own protection strategies but are vulnerable as families are separated and social structures distorted as a consequence of displacement. In camps some self-support networks are still working if the camp population is from the same area of origin or due to the homogeneity of the groups of people living there. After identifying the networks and representative leaders of the camp, community actions should be taken to strengthen their capacity to respond to community needs.

This allows IDPs themselves to take practical measures. As an example, in the Sangondo camp in Moxico province, a complaint was made to the local army commander after a community leader was beaten by an army sergeant. As a result the perpetrator was removed from the area and no new cases of abuse have since been registered in the camp.

Such an approach is more difficult in the case of IDPs living outside formal camps where the task is to identify church and civic organisations which are established and functioning within the resident community. Sounding out

the resident community remains an important resource to explore because of the multiple dynamics that link it to the displaced people.

Agencies must ensure that they do not weaken local capacity by undermining local resilience. There have been cases where aid has furthered the agenda of external actors but jeopardised the security of IDPs. This was the case in a camp in Moxico which adjoins a minefield. Two agencies continued to supply food and non-food items to the IDPs, thus weakening the effort made by other organisations to force the local authorities to move the people to a safer location. Another example was the policy to supply food assistance only to those IDPs settled outside the provincial capital of Malanje. Though designed to prevent overcrowding of the city centre and the risk of disease, the effect was to force IDPs to live in unsafe areas, vulnerable to UNITA attacks or reprisals.

Even if there is room to improve the protection of IDPs through reinforcing their own response strategies, these strategies need to be complemented with greater intervention by external actors. When planning and implementing assistance operations, humanitarian organisations should ensure that they include protection strategies. Action must be taken on behalf of the victims and practical protection responses developed. Efforts should be made to involve local and national NGOs. Close monitoring and advocacy at local level are essential. Programmes should be designed on the basis of good knowledge and detailed local analysis. Planning and implementation must be collaborative and informal and include IDPs as much as possible at all stages.

Above all else, we should focus on getting national government structures to fulfil their duties under international law to protect their own citizens.

*Andrea Lari works in the London office of Human Rights Watch. He lived in Angola from 1996 to 2000 and worked with the Jesuit Refugee Service. Email: [andrea.lari@libero.it](mailto:andrea.lari@libero.it)*

## Working group V: Protection

### Additional issues raised

The group asked how we can strengthen response strategies to improve protection for IDPs and what IDPs themselves can do to secure protection. Presentations and discussions looked particularly at experience in Angola and Colombia and brought out the many similarities between the experiences of IDPs in both countries.

#### The group agreed on nine recommendations:

- We must look more closely at the link between protection strategies and empowerment. What can international actors do to empower IDPs and enable them to protect themselves?
- Greater protection must be offered to IDP leaders. Is this a task within the mandate of the UN rapporteur on human rights? If not, it should be.
- When preparing protection strategies in the field we need to do
- more to collect better information about the situation of IDPs living in areas under the control of non-state actors.
- Continued dissemination of the Guiding Principles and their inclusion in all protection strategies.
- Greater linking of humanitarian assistance and protection work. Humanitarian assistance organisations, offering the carrot of material assistance, have an opportunity to more assertively put across the need for improved protection of IDPs.
- Greater attention must be paid to identifying differences within IDP populations when protection strategies are developed. The needs of adults, children, men, women, the young and the elderly are not the same.
- Investigate the possibility of integrating protection into the Sphere
- Project in order to increase the quality of NGO protection work, improve lesson sharing and increase accountability.
- Establish field-level protection working groups with a wide range of representatives from the local population and international organisations (but not the local authorities) in order to jointly collect and analyse human rights information and develop strategies to respond to human rights abuses. International NGOs need to adequately fund such working groups and ensure that members have commitment, adequate expertise and training.
- International organisations need to build broader alliances with local organisations especially in situations where there is only one major international NGO with a highly visible presence.

*Sharing the Sphere  
Minimum Standards  
in Sri Lanka.*



# Final plenary discussion and recommendations<sup>1</sup>

*All working groups agreed that we need:*

- *more information and better understanding of the coping mechanisms and response strategies of the internally displaced and how researchers and practitioners can work with IDPs*
- *much closer partnerships between research, humanitarian and IDP communities*
- *improved methodologies, particularly in setting standards and contextualising guidelines*

*Discussion in the final plenary focused around four main areas:*

## 1. Definition and responsibility

At the time when the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were developed, there were many definitional debates. Some wanted to limit the definition of IDPs to include those who, if they had crossed a border, would be refugees. Refugee organisations argued that IDPs are necessarily those suffering persecution. Eventually a broader definition was developed, including displacement both by man-made events and natural disasters. The argument for this was that IDP is a description of a situation which cannot be limited. You cannot tell people that they are not displaced if they are.

Despite this broad definition, it is not always easy to say who is or who is not an IDP. If people are re-settled that might be a reason for saying that they are no longer internally displaced. But what about people who may have integrated somewhere else but who, nevertheless, want to return home? How long are these people to be considered internally displaced? Cyprus presents such a dilemma. Are those Greek Cypriots who, 25 years ago, integrated into new communities but who still want to return home to their original land to be classified as IDPs? And what about those people who do return only to find their homes occupied and/or that they cannot sustain themselves?

Although the definition is a broad one, it does have limits. Coercion must be involved. Internal displacement is forced displacement. Voluntary migration does not make people IDPs.

The question of definition is something that has concerned the Global IDP Project because, when trying to count the internally displaced, it is necessary to have a specific category and grounds for inclusion or exclusion. It has become increasingly difficult for the Project to determine who should be included. There is a need for more clarity, not necessarily limiting the definition but at least making it clear about whom we are concerned and who we are going to count.

Linked to the question of definition is the question of whether the international community should be concerned with all categories of IDPs and who in the international community should shoulder responsibilities for them. There are IDPs who would be classified as refugees if they had crossed a border while others displaced by natural disasters would not be regarded as refugees if they crossed a border. In a further category are those displaced by development projects.

Though the international community becomes involved with would-be refugees and victims of natural disasters, it is not the same agencies which do so. Even more controversial, in view of the level of passion about the issue of sovereignty, is the question of people displaced by development projects. Some have argued that the mandate of the Representative of the Secretary-General on IDPs should include those displaced by development projects. Further research and discussion are underway on this issue.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Protection and accountability

Protection must be central to response strategies. Not only a few people or a few organisations should take on protection work. There should be a clear lead on developing protection strategies for each country so that all international and local actors in a particular country affected by internal displacement could benefit from lead agencies, such as UNHCR or UNHCHR (High Commissioner for Human Rights), working on a strategy for detecting protection needs and also on developing training, discussion groups and broad alliances. The new IDP Unit could take a lead in this.

Nowadays many NGOs are searching to find a role in protection. Many still see it as additional to their core work of providing health care, education and other community services. They simply do not have the time and the capacity to deal with complex human rights and political issues. However, the link between providing assistance and protection is crucial. There is much that NGOs can and should do. For a start, any information that NGOs gather due to their presence in a particular area should be automatically passed on to human rights organisations.

In the field, core groups of experienced and committed people need to be set up to focus on protection. Broadly constituted protection working groups need to bring together a range of representatives of the IDP population and the host society in order to gather and analyse information and jointly develop protection strategies.

There is a concern about the need for improved coordination of the humanitarian response. In each country, an overall plan for assistance could be made, with benchmarks, monitoring of implementation and a clear plan of the responsibilities of the different agencies involved. In addition, the question of accountability – linked to responsibility – needs to be addressed. Many recommendations were made, for example, by the missions of the office of the UN Special



Coordinator on Internal Displacement, relating to each country visited; the challenge now is to ensure effective implementation of the recommendations. The new IDP Unit will need to find mechanisms for implementation of these recommendations by the UN and by NGOs. The UN system of humanitarian coordinators should be better used to strengthen coordination and hence accountability.

Linked to this is the need for donors to be committed to evaluating how funds are spent. Colombia provides a good example in its follow-up matrix which indicated tasks and responsibilities and which the government was active in overseeing.

### 3. Working with local authorities

The humanitarian community has to grapple with the dilemma of whether to cooperate with authorities who have themselves been responsible for atrocities against IDPs. In general, we need to pursue complementary methods and keep open dialogue with the authorities.

There are different methods of doing so. At meetings when individuals who have suffered human rights violations are relating their experiences, those involved need to consider and decide whether or not the perpetrators should be allowed to be present. When we are gathering information and views from community leaders on how to develop protection strategies, government representatives and army personnel may well need to be excluded so that people can talk freely without fear of reprisals. A further possibility is to involve the government in a working group when, for example, discussing the ramifications of providing assistance in a district or province. The humanitarian community can prepare and organise protection for a group in cooperation with state actors. We can specify what specific violations must be avoided with the clear intention not to jeopardise the security of those who have previously suffered from such violations.

To address long-term objectives we need to consider working to create viable structures involving local government, civic groups or religious

organisations. By assisting and strengthening local structures and capacities we are much more likely to provide future protection from human rights violations.

### 4. Research and information

Many have pointed to the need to make available all the research and other information that exists relating to IDPs. The Global IDP Project has a widely used database with a wealth of information on displacement around the world<sup>3</sup>. There is, nevertheless, a substantial amount of knowledge in the research community, particularly within academic environments, which should be more widely shared. What is the point in gathering information which does not reach key actors or feed into policy making? Our challenge is to spread information and make it useful and valid for all concerned with IDP issues.

Humanitarian workers try to be as well prepared as they can and receive a lot of information when they are out in the field. They are never sent out with a set of preconceived answers because every displacement situation is unique and unpredictable. What is really needed is a link between research and practice, a motivation to ask and to seek answers to questions. What kind of information do we need to know? What warning signs can be anticipated? How do we know when things are going well or badly? After humanitarian workers make an assessment, are they committed to sharing it with the research community? Could an email discussion group focused solely on IDP issues improve information exchange?

In response to this information gap, NTNU and the Global IDP Database project of the Norwegian Refugee Council are planning to set up a new database and contact network between academics, practitioners and policy makers. For details, see p 46.

Another issue is information sharing within and between humanitarian agencies and IDP communities on the ground. The humanitarian community knows far too little about how and how fast information is exchanged among displaced populations. Often people do not trust international organisations when they give out

information. Frequently IDPs perceive information given to them about conditions and prospects for return as biased. They prefer to trust their own ways of obtaining information – a system that is more sophisticated than we tend to think. The humanitarian community needs to vastly improve its sharing of information about activities with displaced populations and beneficiaries.

An existing vehicle for bridging the gap between researchers and practitioners is *Forced Migration Review*, published three times a year (in English, Spanish and Arabic) by the Refugee Studies Centre in association with the Norwegian Refugee Council ([www.fmreview.org](http://www.fmreview.org)). Researchers and practitioners should be encouraged to use such vehicles.

Sharing and contextualising of international principles and standards with the internally displaced should be a key objective of the international community. The Guiding Principles have been translated into many languages (see page 46) but more translations are needed. The international community needs to emulate a recent example in Sri Lanka (see page 19) and work with local NGOs to contextualise them. Although the Sphere Minimum Standards have been published in five languages (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian), more needs to be done to get them more widely translated and shared with internally displaced communities.

1 This is a summary of views expressed by a number of participants but does not necessarily reflect the views of all who attended the conference.

2 W Courtland Robinson of the Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health is currently preparing a research paper for the Brookings-CUNY Project on the subject of development-induced displacement, in particular on the applicability of the Guiding Principles to development-induced displacement and the extent to which there should be international attention to such cases and by whom. This includes identifying the kinds of cases the international community, in particular the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, might be expected to focus upon. The Brookings-CUNY Project has been collaborating with experts from the World Bank, among others, on this; a meeting on the subject will be held once a final draft is ready for review.

3 See [www.idpproject.org](http://www.idpproject.org)