

Conceptual challenges and practical solutions in situations of internal displacement

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In situations of internal displacement, a variety of political, operational, ethical and practical challenges complicate our understanding and response, and the adequate implementation of durable solutions.

As of January 2016 there were an estimated 40.8 million persons internally displaced by conflict and another 19.2 million displaced by disasters in 2015 alone.¹ The parameters of internal displacement – from its causes to its solutions – are broadly clear at the conceptual level and well documented in the legal and policy spheres. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement² and subsequent regional and national legal frameworks provide clarity on the causes and rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs) before, during and after displacement. The 2010 Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s Framework for Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons (the IASC Framework) has complemented this by defining and describing what constitute durable solutions for IDPs.³ However, on the ground one of the challenges is determining the end of displacement and therefore appropriate support for the search for durable solutions.

The IASC Framework – widely recognised as the internationally agreed benchmark for work towards solutions for IDPs – says that “a durable solution is achieved when IDPs no longer have specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and such persons can enjoy their human rights without discrimination resulting from their displacement”. It further outlines three routes to durable solutions – sustainable reintegration, local integration or integration in another part of the country – through which this can be realised and thereby provides a clear starting point for comprehensive analysis, advocacy and programming.

The Framework goes on to outline eight criteria that can be used to determine the extent to which a durable solution

has been achieved: safety and security; an adequate standard of living; access to livelihoods; restoration of housing, land and property; access to documentation; family reunification; participation in public affairs; and access to effective remedies and justice.

This highlights the fact that the search for durable solutions is a complex process that requires the timely and coordinated intervention of humanitarian, development and peace-building actors. That is, solutions-oriented responses to displacement require a wide variety of stakeholders (with their different areas of expertise), potentially significant resources and a comprehensive analysis of the situation on the ground in order to most effectively target interventions and ensure complementarity between actors.

A solutions-oriented analysis of any displacement situation should be broad in order to take into account the different facets of the eight criteria outlined, rather than narrowly looking at a few in separation from the rest. The need to strengthen efforts to pursue such a shared and comprehensive analysis is becoming more widely recognised and advocated for at a high level but it is not yet common practice and pursuing this goal is more easily said than done.

Not only return and reintegration

Governments and other actors are sometimes eager to promote return as the preferred (and in some cases only) solution, and are often pressurised to accept something that is less than ideal by reducing a ‘solution’ to the mere physical movement of return or resettlement, bringing down the IDP population figures accordingly. However, durable solutions strategies must consider IDPs’ preferences and should take into account whether

conditions are conducive to return and what possible obstacles may persist; they should also keep open other appropriate channels for seeking solutions such as local integration and integration elsewhere in the country. Comprehensive analysis of the preferences, opportunities and obstacles to pursuing durable solutions through processes such as profiling can help in advocacy for more appropriate strategies and approaches.

For example, a profiling exercise carried out in Yemen in 2010 helped to inform the government's durable solutions strategy. Undertaken by the Government of Yemen, UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) and the Danish Refugee Council, the exercise provided the evidence required for the strategy to promote alternative solutions instead of focusing only on return, as the policy had previously done. A crucial finding of the profiling in Yemen concerned IDPs' intentions to return to their pre-displacement place of residence and compared this with the conditions upon which possible return was based. Results showed that around 25% of respondents were at risk of protracted displacement, should a narrow focus on return alone remain.

Another common challenge is the increasing urbanisation of displacement coupled with limited availability of relevant information about displaced people in urban areas. Often the urbanisation of households and communities can render returns to rural areas less feasible and, especially in protracted urban displacement situations, displaced and non-displaced persons can face similar living conditions but distinct protection challenges, while the paucity of disaggregated information can leave the differences unnoticed.

A comparative analysis between displaced and non-displaced (or other relevant groups, such as economic migrants or returning refugees) can be a game-changer. Such an analysis often informs a more targeted response by building on a more nuanced analysis of the skills and capacities as well as the needs and protection concerns of the different groups. With this comes a better understanding of development issues faced



Home destroyed by airstrikes in the Nahdah neighbourhood, Sana'a, Yemen, January 2016.

by displacement-affected communities in common with their non-displaced neighbours, and identification of specific vulnerabilities displaced persons may have.

A recent example comes from two urban profiling exercises in Mogadishu and Hargeisa in Somalia that focused on populations living in informal settlements across the two cities. Undertaken in collaboration with central and local authorities, both exercises have provided a clearer picture of the scale of displacement in the two cities and solid evidence for development actors and urban planners to pursue a more displacement-sensitive approach to their planned programmes. The findings from Hargeisa show very small differences in the living conditions of economic migrants, IDPs, host communities and refugee returnees in the settlement. The implication is for longer-term solutions for the displaced to be pursued as part of urban poverty reduction strategies and for inclusion of the settlements in city-wide urban planning.⁴ However, findings from the same exercise also highlight that IDPs from south-central Somalia are more vulnerable, which means that continued protection monitoring and advocacy interventions are required,

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particularly regarding their access to public services.

Displacement data for development actors

There is widespread agreement within the international community on the need for greater involvement of development actors in displacement response, the importance of considering forcibly displaced persons not only as recipients of assistance but as active economic agents, and the value of supporting their self-reliance and resilience in pursuit of sustainable solutions.

These discussions have been present both in the lead-up to the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Central to this debate is the need for more 'development-relevant' data and analysis on displacement to help justify or trigger a more 'displacement-sensitive' development approach in affected countries. Discrete efforts are underway in different contexts to address this gap including large-scale studies undertaken by the World Bank in the Great Lakes⁵, the Middle East and elsewhere, increased support for academic research that focuses on the economic impact of displacement⁶ and multiple household survey exercises that aim to compare the living conditions of displaced and non-displaced people residing in similar areas. In addition to these country- and region-specific initiatives, there are also early stages of work at the global level going on.⁷

However, truly common analysis between humanitarian, development and peace-building actors generated through genuine collaboration during the research, design and implementation process remains rare. Due to the different 'logic' of each discipline (including differences related to planning cycles, mandates, priorities, terminology,

resources, government relations, and approaches to partnership), it is difficult to generate an analysis that serves all actors' information needs and to reach agreement on evidence-based priorities for response. When this does happen, more often than not it relies on personality-driven rather than institutionally supported momentum. Even so, the trust and ownership generated through the collaborative process can pave the way for hugely increased impact and use of results.

Although this very practical challenge is difficult to overcome, there are a growing number of cases of significant positive impact. In order to develop the Durable Solutions Strategy in Côte d'Ivoire, for example, UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported the government and worked closely with the National Statistics Office to conduct a profiling exercise in Abidjan and displacement-affected areas in the west of the country during 2014-15. Although the process faced considerable delays, particularly because of the outbreak of Ebola and planned national census activities, it used a list of indicators based on the IASC Framework developed jointly by humanitarian and development actors (a detailed methodology shaped for both urban and rural displacement-affected areas) and ultimately produced analysis of the displacement situation that fed directly into the national development plan for the coming years.

In other examples, similar profiling processes, jointly shaped and implemented by humanitarian and development actors (often alongside relevant government ministries and national statistical offices), have enabled results to feed into the development of policies and joint durable solutions programming. Importantly, these processes have also provided crucial baseline data for monitoring progress of solutions-oriented action in displacement contexts. This has happened (or is happening) in contexts as varied as Colombia, Kosovo, Iraq and Somalia.⁸

Limited guidance

Despite broad conceptual clarity around durable solutions for IDPs through the

IASC Framework's definition, principles and criteria, there are a number of obstacles to overcome when trying to apply this analytical framework in real-life displacement situations. A non-exhaustive selection of these includes: political challenges such as the common prioritisation of return and the tendency to count physical movements of return or relocation as a durable solution; operational challenges that often peak in busy urban areas, alongside ethical challenges related to invisible populations and the protection concerns of urban IDPs; and practical challenges associated with enabling humanitarian, development and peace-building actors to genuinely collaborate and 'read off the same page'.

Profiling, as a context-specific information-gathering process that prioritises collaboration, transparency and joint decision making at every stage, is a useful tool to overcome (or at least minimise) some of these challenges. Done well, it can provide a common evidence-base to be used for advocacy, strategy development and programmatic decision making in response to IDP situations.

A frequent request from government, and humanitarian and development partners directed to the Special Rapporteur's Office is for help to 'operationalise' the text of the IASC Framework, in particular for help to use the eight criteria it lays out, in order to better analyse the displacement situation on the ground. In response, the Special Rapporteur's Office and the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) have teamed up to try to fill this gap by combining the IASC Framework's definition, principles and criteria for durable solutions with JIPS experience in facilitating collaborative profiling processes. The aim is to develop a global toolkit for analysing durable solutions and developing a strong baseline against which to monitor progress over time.



IRIN/ Mohamed Amin Jibriil

IDPs in Mogadishu, Somalia, 2011.

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1. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (May 2016) *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2016* www.internal-displacement.org
2. <http://tinyurl.com/GPSInternalDisplacement>
3. <http://tinyurl.com/IASC-IDP-Framework>
4. www.jips.org/files/1076
5. See article by Joanna de Berry, pp17-19.
6. This topic has been prioritised by the Solutions Alliance's Thematic Working Group on Data, Research and Performance Management: <http://bit.ly/1VY6FLy>
7. See for example the 2015 workshop <http://bit.ly/236hFWf> and a forthcoming report by World Bank's Global Programme on Forced Displacement and the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP).
8. For more details of different examples see www.jips.org