A t the heart of the problem is the UN agencies’ and NGOs’ struggle to agree on whether Rwandans relocated into new villages should be considered permanently resettled or still displaced.

Over the last decade, Rwandans experienced repeated waves of displacement, the latest in 1998 when several hundred thousand people in the northwest were moved into supervised camps. The government justified this action as a protection measure against insurgent actions but many observers saw it primarily as a way to deprive opponents of support. At the end of that year, the government ordered these camps to be dismantled and the displaced to be relocated to new villages.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UNHCR, the UN Special Coordinator on Internal Displacement and the US Committee for Refugees (USCR) used different criteria to decide when displacement ends. Differences centered on whether resettlement was permanent, if basic humanitarian needs were met and how voluntary and durable the solutions were.

**Changing criteria**

Some agencies, by changing their criteria, appeared to write off thousands of IDPs. In mid-1999, OCHA counted some 500,000 IDPs previously displaced in northwestern camps and then resettled in villages. That year, OCHA narrowed its criteria and counted only 150,000 people who received direct humanitarian assistance in the resettlement villages. In mid-2000, OCHA adopted an even more restrictive approach, excluding the newly relocated people on the grounds that they had all been moved to their final location: either to former homes or new villages. OCHA then used the term ‘newly relocated’ instead of ‘resettled’, noting that ‘a number of sites are lacking basic infrastructure and a large number of families are under plastic sheeting.’

At the end of 1999, UNHCR talked about an intermediate category - some 625,000 returned IDPs – calling them ‘people of concern’ to the agency. In fact, rather than having ‘returned’, the majority of Rwandan IDPs had been resettled. The following year, IDPs in Rwanda ceased to appear as a category of concern to UNHCR. Thus in UNHCR’s eyes resettlement seemed to have ended displacement.

By 2001, OCHA announced that there were no more displaced people in Rwanda. OCHA’s Senior Adviser on IDPs, in December 2000, undertook a mission to Rwanda at the request of the UN Special Coordinator on Internal Displacement. He estimated that the resettlement was permanent and that durable solutions had been found for the IDPs. “While conditions of return and resettlement are often yet inadequate, governmental and international efforts to stabilise the situation through durable solutions have advanced beyond the threshold of what still could be called internal displacement,” he concluded. The Adviser also looked at whether the process of resettlement was voluntary, deciding “there is no evidence today that the resettlement policy is implemented with a degree of compulsion which would warrant the label of ‘forced displacement.’” His criteria for ending displacement seem to be permanent resettlement, a durable solution and a reasonable degree of voluntariness.

**Resettlement should be voluntary and durable**

Permanent resettlement was the only criterion that all actors viewed as necessary to end displacement. Some organisations considered other criteria as necessary but came to different conclusions on whether they had been fulfilled. It was only in 1999 for OCHA and end of 2000 for USCR that fulfilling basic needs became an explicit criterion to end displacement.

The forced nature of resettlement, however, was widely overlooked. Despite numerous UN and NGO reports of coercion during the resettlement process, none of the relevant organisations viewed the forced aspect of resettlement as serious enough to continue to consider the resettled people as displaced people.

The case of Rwanda demonstrates significant differences among leading agencies and policy makers working with displaced people in their understanding of displacement and resettlement concepts.
Also, the durability of solutions was generally not seen as a decisive factor in ending displacement. The need for durable solutions is derived from the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement 28 and 29, which state that competent authorities shall endeavour to facilitate the reintegration of resettled IDPs and assist them to recover their property or appropriate compensation. But only OCHA’s Senior Adviser on IDPs stated that efforts to stabilise the situation through durable solutions had advanced beyond what could still be called internal displacement. Complicating matters, durability is highly debatable in a country where close to one million people still live in inadequate shelters lacking basic services, three-quarters of them in the northwest.\footnote{UNHCR, June 2000, World Refugee Survey 2000, p.99; June 2001, World Refugee Survey 2001, p.90}

The case of Rwanda shows the importance of agreeing on when displacement ends, and to consider how voluntary and durable resettlement has been. Narrowing definitions is no way to make the problems of displaced persons disappear.

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1. OCHA 19 August 1999, and 24 December 1999. Affected populations in the Great Lakes region (displaced - refugees); August 2000, Update on IDPs in Rwanda
5. Brookings Initiative in Rwanda, November 2001, Land and Human Settlements, 2.3.1

### Sierra Leone: resettlement doesn’t always end displacement

by Claudia McGoldrick

Almost one quarter of a million displaced Sierra Leoneans were resettled in their areas of origin by the end of 2002, officially ending the internal displacement crisis in the country and further consolidating recovery after more than a decade of devastating civil war.

A success story, in which the wishes of internally displaced people themselves prevailed, said some observers. Not so, insisted others, pointing to numerous flaws and problems along the way.

So was the resettlement process really the final chapter in Sierra Leone’s displacement story? Arguably not, at least with respect to durability of return and resettlement as required by the UN Guiding Principles.

**From relief to recovery**

Since April 2001 there has been a concerted effort to resettle large numbers of Sierra Leonean IDPs - as well as returning refugees - and to phase out IDP camps. At that time, the UN shifted its IDP assistance efforts from protracted provision of humanitarian relief to support of resettlement and recovery efforts, confident of advances being made in the peace process and increasing stability throughout the country. This confidence appeared well-founded: by the end of 2001 the world’s largest UN peacekeeping mission was deployed across the country and a disarmament programme was completed. In January 2002, President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah declared an official end to the 11-year civil war, which had killed an estimated 50,000 people and displaced up to half of the country’s 4.5 million population.

Displaced Sierra Leoneans were resettled in accordance with the national government’s Resettlement Strategy, which applies to IDPs as well as refugees and ex-combatants with their dependants, and states that it will “only facilitate resettlement into an area when it is deemed that the area in question is sufficiently safe to allow for the return of displaced persons.”

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1. OCHA 19 August 1999, and 24 December 1999. Affected populations in the Great Lakes region (displaced - refugees); August 2000, Update on IDPs in Rwanda
5. Brookings Initiative in Rwanda, November 2001, Land and Human Settlements, 2.3.1