



DISPLACED POPULATIONS AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

Overview

The increasing occurrence of natural and human-made disasters, including armed conflicts, is causing extensive loss of life, damage to property, and harm to the environment. Conflicts and natural disasters are resulting displacements of populations, creating a crisis which do not necessarily remain within the country's own borders, but will often spread within the a region causing refugee flows into neighbouring countries, further advancing economic and political instability.

The number and nature of armed conflicts has changed significantly in recent years. Today's conflicts are mostly fought within country's boundaries, whereas in the past wars took place across them. Wars are no longer fought only on battlefields between large armies, rather, they are often waged in cities and villages by amateur militia, driven by long-simmering ethnic and religious ideologies and fuelled by a struggle for political and economic control. As a result, more than 90 % of the victims of today's wars are civilians. 20 million refugees are in need of protection and assistance right now. An additional 20 to 25 million people are currently displaced within their own countries as a result of violence and human rights abuses.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)¹ are the single most vulnerable population in the world. During displacement, IDPs are often subject to physical violence; women and children are particularly vulnerable as they are at the highest risk of losing everything. Most importantly, IDPs are unlike refugees, in that they do not have legal status protecting their lives and rights.

A considerable portion of displaced population does return home but displacement can also last for years, even after the root cause of the displacement is resolved. The return process, if not properly addressed especially during complex emergencies, often exacerbates conflicts. On the other hand, the political and social context is critical when developing sustainable recovery processes for displaced populations that may never return².

'Meeting the long term needs of many, while supporting emergency needs of few'

Conceptual gaps between relief and development must be addressed. Any resettlement process, irrespective of its short- or long-term planning horizon, necessarily has to consider in addition to meeting urgent human needs, the physical infrastructure and human settlements problems that arise, including adequate shelter for all; one of the UN-HABITAT's twin goals of achieving adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development. UN-HABITAT experience proves that in many post-disaster scenarios it is most effective when interventions are designed to begin simultaneously; consideration of long term impacts of short term interventions

¹ There is no single universally accepted definition for an IDP, indicating the lack of status if this very vulnerable group. United Nations defines an IDP as: 'A person who has been forced to flee or leave their home as a result of or in order to avoid the effects; armed conflict; generalized violence, violation of human rights; natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border.'

² One of the standard calculations used by planners indicates that for every two years of displacement to an urban environment approximately 50% of IDPs will not return to their original rural areas. Thus displacement will inevitable have a profound impact on urbanisation in these areas.



can add value to the latter, and depth to the former. A process of long-term reconstruction and economic recovery should therefore begin while post-emergency actions aimed at restoring normality for the displaced populations returning home or settling in new places are being undertaken. In this manner, strategic investment during emergency and relief stages can contribute significantly to building foundations for development.

Being aware of the complexity of the problem itself, and of a unique and usually politically sensitive nature of displacement issue by and large, Disaster Management Programme /UN-HABITAT has elaborated a set of integrated strategies and institutional pre-conditions to facilitate sustainable resettlement/return process and to assure sound human settlements for displaced populations. UN-HABITAT, though not specifically established to implement humanitarian interventions, has through its Disaster Management Programme the capacity to support sister agencies as well as affected countries' Governments by acting as a focal point for bridging the gap between relief and development operations. The perspective of 'meeting the long term needs of many, while supporting the emergency needs of few', guides the strategy of the DMP. Hence, being involved from the earliest stages of crisis as a supporting partner in the resettlement, shelter, infrastructure, and governance sectors, places UN-HABITAT in a critical position as an institutional partner assisting relevant humanitarian agencies.

- 1. Safety, security and the reduction of disputes:** Crime and violence does not happen spontaneously, but grows out of an unequal and exclusive society and upon break-down of institutional and social control. In this context, eruption of anarchy is frequent in post-disaster situations. The first pre-condition of achieving sustainable resettlement and rehabilitation of displaced populations is the challenge of ensuring security and protection, and restoration of effective and impartial institutions, such as the police and judiciary, to promote the rule of law. UN-HABITAT has demonstrated expertise through its Safer Cities programme which works directly with communities and community leaders, and can assist with community reconstruction to support reconciliation and citizenship developments amongst returning population.
- 2. Security of land and property tenure;** the issue of land and housing rights in post-disaster situations is characterised by social, economic and institutional disruption. One of the major threats to stability in the post-disaster context is the question of housing and land property rights within the reconciliation and reconstruction process. DMP has recent experience in developing concerted actions from the ministry to the municipality level in insuring that property rights of displaced populations are respected, that stolen properties are returned to their legitimate owners, and that a sustainable legal system is set up to manage all land and housing issues in a transparent way, with special attention to the most vulnerable segments of the population.
- 3. Creation of strategic partnerships for resettlements rehabilitation and housing for displaced populations;** DMP has extensive experience in formulating and implementing resettlements programmes for displaced populations. These projects have been undertaken in close collaboration with national/local authorities and IDP/refugee representatives to provide integrated packages to promote voluntary resettlement and achieve resettlement of rural/semi-urban settlements. This includes rehabilitation of shelter, basic infrastructure and social services. Adequate shelter and infrastructure, together with good urban governance, are also crucial elements in strategies for the reduction of population's vulnerability for future disasters.
- 4. Economic recovery:** The economic fabric for providing livelihoods including industry, government, and small-medium private sector enterprises are usually damaged, or in



some cases destroyed, in post-disaster situations. The reconstruction of such local economy firmly rooted in the local resource base and sustained by the social capital of the community is the ultimate guarantee for avoiding future conflict. In transition from camp to villages and towns, the damaged infrastructure requires the mobilisation of a large work force to rebuild, and subsequently to maintain. DMP/UN-HABITAT's experience in building capacity both in the public and small scale private sector enterprises, to undertake the planning and implementation of reconstruction/rehabilitation activities in Somalia, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, and other places, provides several models for income generation provision of livelihood.

5. **Local Governance:** Population displacement also results in a commensurate loss of skill and capacity. Local government officials may have limited, or in some cases not experience, in managing their villages and towns. Capacity building of local government officials for expanded leadership roles is therefore crucial in order to create inclusive institutions that allow for greater participation of the population and promotion of accountable governance, as highlighted through UN-HABITAT's "Urban Governance" Campaign. This is particularly important as part of the trust building process among returning/resettling communities vis-à-vis nascent or custodial local governments. DMP/UN-HABITAT has extensive experience in provision of expertise and deployment of expert teams to assist in attending governance related issues in post-disaster context, in particular in building capacity among local authorities for planning and management of new settlements.
6. **Conflict mitigation and peace building;** in terms of conflict mitigation and peace building, DMP believes that there is a need to develop activities that includes IDPs and other entities previously involved in the conflict. Practical actions linked to resettlement activities will build trust and peace among people, overcome social trauma, and rehabilitate communities through developing social and economical activities, thus reinforcing their role as root for recovery.
7. **Gender and Displacement;** Gender issue impact all areas in post-disaster situations, from relief, rehabilitation, resettlement, vulnerability and development. Women are more than just a special vulnerable group among displaced populations; they constitute an important social force which often plays a major role in the resettlement process. Analyzing the gender situation will help to improve impact at all phases resettlement work, and will help to reduce vulnerability through improving inclusive governance promoting gender equality. DMP/ UN-HABITAT has extensive experience in analyzing gender situations in post-disaster scenarios.

Conclusion

In post-disaster situations, solutions to insure the restoration of normal lives of displaced populations are interwoven in such a manner that activities cannot be implemented in isolation. Multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary nature of resettlement activities requires continuous interaction, co-operation and partnership among concerned stakeholders in order to assure sound human settlements for displaced populations through promotion of peace building, poverty reduction and sustainable development. DMP is therefore actively defining formal linkages with pertinent existing global and regional humanitarian/disaster management organizations, such as ISDR/OCHA, UNHCR, UNDMT, UNDP/BCRP, and consolidate new linkages to academia, private sector and local government and relevant local governments associations.