

Peacebuilding Commission –Working Group on Lessons Learned

Durable Solutions For Internally Displaced Persons: An Essential Dimension Of Peacebuilding

Briefing Paper

By

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Introduction

Resolving internal displacement – and preventing future displacement – is inextricably linked to achieving lasting peace. On one hand, unresolved problems of displacement may cause instability and thus threaten peacebuilding efforts. On the other hand, durable solutions, particularly return, cannot be achieved for internally displaced persons as long as there is a lack of security; property is not restored; and conditions for sustainable solutions are not in place.¹

At a minimum returnees must have access to mechanisms for property restitution or compensation.

- Creating an environment that sustains return, including through appropriate funding mechanisms
Returnees must have access without discrimination to basic public services, documentation and employment and income-generating opportunities.

The following short case studies, based on recent missions carried out by the Representative, illustrate these experiences.

Sudan

In Sudan, IDPs fled the conflict in Southern Sudan and numbered about four million while a further half a million people sought asylum abroad. Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005, it was widely expected that many if not most of them up would return to their communities in the South within a short period of time. In reality, return movements have been relatively slow and to date less than 1.2 million have returned, despite difficult living

In the North, the absence of jobs in urban areas, the restitution of property, the vulnerability of female headed households among the returnees, the absence of state administration and services, as well as insecurity caused by bandits, were the main challenges. At this crucial juncture, humanitarian organizations including UNHCR and IOM came close to terminating their activities for lack of funds: large humanitarian donors had declared that the humanitarian crisis in Côte d'Ivoire was over and development funds that were pledged had not yet been made available. At the present time, agencies report that in the West, returnees are starting to leave their villages and trying to come back to camps where they hope to receive assistance.⁷ Another partially unresolved problem is the issue of registration of displaced persons and returnees for the forthcoming elections and the participation of those who have not yet returned in these elections.

Lessons learned

The case of Côte d'Ivoire illustrates the importance of seeing the period immediately following the resolution of a conflict as a 'window of opportunity' to consolidate the peace. Too often, however, the international humanitarian community withdraws from post-conflict situations before conditions are right for development actors to provide assistance which is desperately needed to prevent renewed conflict. While Côte d'Ivoire is not a classic humanitarian emergency, assistance that goes beyond humanitarian support and includes elements of development is urgently needed to support the IDPs to find solutions that are durable and will allow the country as a whole to consolidate the peace. The case also illustrates the weaknesses in the present funding mechanisms that help to reinforce and perpetuate the gap between the humanitarian and recovery/development phases.

Bosnia and Herzegovina⁸

The signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in December 1995 offered hopes of resolving internal displacement in Bosnia and Herzegovina for approximately one million people and for an additional 1.2 million refugees. Since 1995, more than 566,000 IDPs have returned to their places of origin as well as more than 441,000 refugees. During the four years following the war, hardly any minority returns took place although by May 2005 UNHCR had recorded some 450,000 minority returns – comprising about half of the total returnees.

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Property and land issues: Bosnia and Herzegovina was the first example of a successfully implemented mass restitution in the wake of a full-blown conflict.⁹

Burundi

The conflict in Burundi led to an estimated 300,000 deaths and the displacement of almost 500,000 people.¹²

A Resettlement Strategy was developed which provided the framework for humanitarian assistance and resettlement for the IDPs, in which an underlying principle was that resettlement would only be facilitated in areas that “allow for the return of displaced people in safety and dignity.” Set criteria for the determination of such safety were developed to guide the government and the international community in making informed decisions on the safety of districts on a case-by-case basis. The

