



INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN ARMED CONFLICT FACING UP TO THE CHALLENGES



ICRC



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**INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT
IN ARMED CONFLICT
FACING UP TO THE CHALLENGES**

No one knows for sure how many there are, for many stay unseen, uncared for, uncounted. Some governments deny their very existence. But one estimate suggests that around the world there are about 26 million people internally displaced, many of them by armed conflict.

In countries like Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Kenya, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia and Sudan, IDPs – as they are labelled – have been driven from their homes and deprived of security, shelter, food, water, livelihood and the support of their communities. The hardship they endure is often so extreme it threatens their survival.

In armed conflict, displacement is frequently caused by violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) or fundamental human rights. Indeed, where existing laws were adhered to most people displaced by violence would be able to remain at home. But they are not, and with the military, armed groups and authorities failing to fulfil their obligations many flee several times.

Much of what IHL prohibits is commonplace: attacks on civilians and civilian property, the starving of civilians as a method of warfare, reprisals, the use of civilians as human shields, the destruction of objects essential to their survival, and the obstruction of relief supplies and assistance necessary for the survival of the civilian population. But despite the fact that IHL is legally binding on both State and non-State actors, many of its rules are disregarded. And although most States have recognized the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement – which are based on humanitarian and human rights rules – a strong commitment is needed to address the challenges resulting from the growing problem of displacement.



Franco Pagetti/ICRC VII

Lebanon: 40,000 people were forced to leave their homes, which were destroyed during the fighting in 2007.

As displacement continues, often unabated for extended periods, the humanitarian challenges it brings are immense, not least for a coherent, well-coordinated and comprehensive response from the international community.

This special report examines key issues of protection and assistance affecting displaced people, from prevention of displacement in the first place through the phases that follow when it cannot be averted.

When the ICRC steps in to help IDPs, it considers the total context in which displacement occurs. It finds that those who stay or host the displaced can be as vulnerable as those who flee, or even more so, as can be those who return. Some who flee may not run directly from fighting or attacks, but from the economic consequences and disrupted access to essential goods and services.

The greatest need exists among people, displaced or not, who too often are out of sight of the world at large and, for most international organizations, unreachable.



Philippines: An elderly woman being taken by her grandson to visit their abandoned village; she is too frightened to return home.

Mariam had no idea where she was going. She just took her four children and ran.

It was a mass exodus, sudden and chaotic. Caught up in the conflict of Darfur, Sudan's long-suffering westernmost region, her Fellata tribe's settlement north of Gereida town had withstood a number of attacks. But this time the raid had overwhelmed them. People lay dead and her village had begun to burn.

The Fellata, semi-nomadic agro-pastoralists who crop the land as well as raise and herd animals, had little option. Although they had lived here peacefully for many generations – alongside the majority Masalit farmers – ethnic factors used in the ever more complex conflict had placed a divide between neighbours: a mutual fear and suspicion.

First had come the rumours. Farmers were conspiring to push all the nomads from the region, it was whispered one side of the market-place. Nomads wanted to displace the farmers, it was murmured the other, so their farmlands could be given to herders.

For a while, the old Masalit king of Gereida had kept violence and lawlessness at bay. He held sway within a 30-kilometre radius of town, and through a gentleman's agreement with the tribes, and the parties to the conflict, he had governed Gereida as a neutral sector. But the king was now dead. Gereida was controlled by a

rebel group fighting central government, and with pro-government militias roaming the rural areas everyone was running from something. The countryside was deserted.

Displaced Masalit farmers and others chased from their lands by armed groups fled into Gereida town, over 100,000 of them now, outnumbering the residents by more than five to one. Mariam's people ran in the opposite direction. Perceived to be pro-government – some Fellata had joined the militias – they were chased away from Gereida, going north, west, east, anywhere they thought they would not be bothered further.

Mariam's group of maybe 300 families headed southwest, and then it vanished. What happened in the weeks, the months and the years ahead, the young woman's grief at the loss of a child on the run, her struggle to survive, her total isolation from an enormous humanitarian operation, is a disturbing story. More disturbing is the fact that what she endured has echoes around the world, among millions of IDPs.

At the end of 2008, the Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimated there were 11.6 million in Africa, 4.5 million in the Americas, 3.9 million in the Middle East, 3.5 million in South and South-East Asia, and 2.5 million in Europe and Central Asia.

GROWING CONCERN ON EVERY CONTINENT

The displacement of people within their own countries owing to war is a matter of growing concern on every continent. Or as Jakob Kellenberger, president of the ICRC, puts it, "Internal displacement poses one of the most daunting humanitarian challenges of today. The impact not only on many millions of IDPs but also on countless host families and resident communities is hard if not impossible to measure."

Direct attacks and ill-treatment, loss of property, the increased danger of families being torn apart and of children being separated from other family members, a greater risk of sexual violence against women and girls, more exposure to health hazards, and restricted access to health care and other essential services are among the common threats to IDPs. As they struggle to meet essential needs they are placed in further jeopardy, by tension between them and host communities, forced recruitment, settlement in unsafe or unfit locations, and forced return to unsafe areas.

Sometimes, no challenge is greater than simply reaching the displaced. Official camps containing huge populations are only the tip of the iceberg. The needs are frequently greatest outside them, especially in host communities where residents, often struggling themselves, provide most IDPs with food and shelter. Beyond the camps with their health care and medical services, beyond their food distributions, their water supplies, their security and their shelter, beyond the reach of most humanitarians, the most vulnerable fend for themselves. Among them are those who have chosen to stay, caring for scant but precious resources, or for the ill, handicapped, and elderly who are physically

"All I thought of was saving my children, saving our lives, not where we were going or what we would need to take with us," Mariam remembers. "All anyone thought of was saving themselves."

unable to escape. And when access to them is restricted, as frequently happens in conflict, crises go unseen and unassisted.

Mariam's plight went unseen. No one in Gereida knew where her people had gone and, other than the odd humanitarian, no one cared particularly. There were other preoccupations. One of the biggest displaced camps in the world now overshadowed the town, and one that was still growing. Unceasing militia attacks on villages, Fellata and Masalit tensions, and heavy fighting between armed forces in the vicinity of Gereida ensured the human stream continued.

Mariam had fled the village on foot in 2005, carrying her youngest child, a little boy called Hamad, part of a column moving so fast her other children struggled to keep up. Most people were on foot, a few rode on donkeys, and few had brought any belongings.



Sudan: After four years of displacement, Mariam and her tribe returned to Gereida in 2009 to rebuild their lives.

“All I thought of was saving my children, saving our lives, not where we were going or what we would need to take with us,” Mariam remembers. “All anyone thought of was saving themselves.”

Saving Hamad, however, was beyond her. By the first day’s end he was poorly, she says. He had diarrhoea and began to vomit. “No one wanted to stop, and there was no one to help. All I could do was keep walking. Two days after we left he died.”

As Mariam tells it, the journey came to an end when they reached an unknown place in the tribe’s traditional homeland. Beneath some trees near a village of four or five dwellings they sat down and rested. They were in the middle of nowhere but when they spotted a shallow well they decided to settle. Here they would stay hidden for more than four years, off the map, off the radar, beyond the help or protection of anyone.

They survived on casual farm labour. The nearest they could find was a two-hour walk away and exhaustion and illness were common. There were days when people were unable to work, days when some went hungry, and most illness came and went without treatment. The most basic health care was far away and mostly they could not afford it. Among those who died Mariam remembers the babies.

Not until government forces took control of Gereida did the Fellata try to return. When the ICRC found them in 2009, the first of Mariam’s people were camped under a tree again, looking out to the void where their village had been, planning to start all over. All that was missing was the means. The rains were coming. If they could plough and plant, get one good harvest, they could start to rebuild their community.

WHAT IS AN IDP?

“... persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.”

If Mariam’s story shows anything it is that displaced people have short-term, medium and long-term needs: from food, water, shelter and safety to health care, education, economic and social rehabilitation. It shows that for humanitarian action to be effective the needs of IDPs must be considered at every stage of their displacement, and protection must sit alongside assistance.

The definition of IDPs most commonly used comes from the UN’s Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement: *“... persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.”*

Displacement can have a series of causes. IDPs may be running from more than armed conflict or a major disaster. “Sometimes conflict can be a tipping point,” says Angela Gussing, the ICRC’s deputy director of operations. “It can come on top of everything else, on top of drought, for example, loss of livelihood, a series of failed harvests. Violence, or the fear of it, can be the thing that provides the final push. It isn’t always just the gun.”

Legal frameworks including national law, human rights law and, in armed conflict, international humanitarian law aim to protect IDPs and others affected. Under IHL

forced displacement of civilians by parties to a conflict is prohibited unless it is justified by imperative military reasons for the security of the civilians themselves. But should it occur IDPs are entitled to the same protection as any other civilian.

What the law makes abundantly clear is that the primary responsibility for protecting IDPs, as well as meeting their basic needs, lies with the State or, in an armed conflict, the authorities that control the territory where the IDPs are located. They are often unable or unwilling to live up to their responsibilities, a huge challenge for the ICRC in the dialogue it conducts with armed parties as IHL’s mandated custodian.

As civilians, IDPs have rights that are easier to specify than their needs. Some humanitarians argue, in fact, that the label ‘IDP’ is less than useful. One senior manager with field experience in Asia and Africa says, “From the operational management perspective it is very frustrating. It is potentially very misleading. An IDP can be better off than a non-IDP who suffers in the same situation. The label doesn’t tell us anything.”

In Khartoum, Jordi Raich, the ICRC’s head of delegation, laughs at what he sees as obsessive labelling and obsessive criteria to accompany it. “Excuse me, are you an IDP, a refugee or a migrant? Are you a victim of conflict or another situation of violence? Oh, you are a nomad. Are you migrating because of conflict or because it is your way of life?”





Pakistan:
In 2009,
some 2.5 million
people fled
the fighting.

Jeroen Oerlemans/ICRC

People considered to be “economic migrants” are among those penalized by labels, falling outside the criteria of some humanitarian agencies. Unless they have fled conflict or the threat of it directly they can fail to qualify for assistance, suspected of taking advantage of aid rather than being in need of it. Although misusers exist, conflict commonly disrupts markets, cuts people off from essential services and forces them to move in search of them. Assistance may fail to reach certain communities to prevent displacement in the first place, and then the same communities can face humanitarians who discriminate because of a label.

Mr Curco’s point is that humanitarian assistance should be based on need, not on any category. IDPs, he says, are rarely homogeneous anyway. The label is there but within it diverse people are vulnerable in diverse ways. Their requirements are diverse and specific.

The special needs of women, children and the elderly are recognized within existing legal standards and are reiterated in the Guiding Principles although the rights spelled out are routinely contravened in conflict.

Ask Mama Louise (not her real name), raped along with her daughters and her 81-year-old mother in South Kivu province, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

What happened was not unusual. Unremitting sexual and gender-based violence looms large in the abuse of civilians in the DRC, particularly in North and South Kivu.



Fred Clarke/CRC

Colombia: Between 1.8 and 3 million Colombians have been displaced since 1985; most of them now live in poverty in urban areas.

Displacement undoubtedly increases danger. During flight, and also around and inside camps, IDPs are especially vulnerable. But no group escapes. Louise was caught going home.

When attacks by armed men began around the town of Minova her family fled to the bush, slipping back to their village when they thought the violence was over. "This was how they found us," she says. "They started by asking for money and threatened to burn us. After looting the house, three stayed behind ... they forced me to keep quiet and close the door. Then they raped us."

For women and children, sexual violence and exploitation is unrelenting in many countries. Women face domestic violence as well, poor access to reproductive health services, and often carry the burden of being the head of their household. The death toll among men has caused most of Somalia's displaced families to be headed by women, as are more than 90 per cent of displaced single-headed households in Colombia's major cities.

Displaced children continue to fall prey to armed groups who use them as soldiers, servants and sex slaves. During the upheaval of conflict, separation from their families poses particular dangers and in 2008 forced labour and economic exploitation were reported to be frequent in at least 20 countries. Access to education, meanwhile, tumbled.

Numbers alone are cause for concern. Children make up more than half of Colombia's displaced population, and a mortality survey carried out in conflict zones of the DRC found that children accounted for nearly 50 per cent of recorded deaths, although they were only 19 per cent of the population. Most of them had died from easily preventable and curable illness, the International Rescue Committee reported.

The elderly are at risk of being abandoned. Unable, or unwilling, to uproot themselves quickly in conflict, they are left to face the consequences. When Georgian troops and Russian forces clashed in South Ossetia in 2008 younger residents fled their villages. As winter approached older people who had stayed had trouble on their own acquiring food and adequate health care. Medical facilities were falling apart, a delayed harvest had brought higher prices on local markets, and poor roads isolated the more remote communities. Anxiety increased in villages like Avnevi. There, 68-year-old Tamara said, "So many people left. It is extremely important for my sister and me to know we have not been forgotten."

The location of displacement can affect needs dramatically as well. The necessities of life in the countryside differ hugely from those in urban settings.

Most of Colombia's displaced can be found in the poverty zones around major cities and towns. Forty years



Fred Clarke/ICRC

A number of dangers threaten IDPs, especially the elderly.

of conflict have probably uprooted 10 per cent of the population and figures grow year by year.

Rural people struggle to adapt to the urban environment. With no land to grow food, farmers have to buy what they eat, from low and insecure incomes. Jobs are hard to come by, their country skills are of little use, and crime, overcrowding, poor and unsanitary housing compound their problems. Sometimes they forgo health care and education because the money those require is used for basic survival.

Just not knowing the way in the urban jungle, ignorance of procedures and who is responsible for what, can deepen the IDP's plight, as shown by an ICRC/World Food Programme survey. A quarter of people questioned had not even registered their displacement with the appropriate authority, and had deprived themselves of State assistance.

As the Fellata vanished in the rural wilderness, so Colombians can vanish in the urban one. Tribal minorities and Afro-Colombians driven from their lands by armed groups are most prone to get lost in the urban setting. "Contact with conflict and then with the modern world is all too much," says the ICRC's Christophe Vogt, deputy head of operations for Latin America. "Some cannot even speak the language."

"So many people left. It is extremely important for my sister and me to know we have not been forgotten."

PROTECTION AND PREVENTING DISPLACEMENT

The ICRC's main priority is the prevention of displacement but the chaos and anarchy of internal conflict present formidable challenges.

What would persuade Maria Elena to stay in the village of Las Cruces in the south-western Colombian state of Nariño? Since a stray bullet passed through the walls of her modest wooden house one night, wounding her but miraculously missing the baby she was breastfeeding, she and her family have considered getting out as others have done before them.

Life in this village of 40 families is calm much of the time. No one passing through would guess that Las Cruces is a dangerous place to live. Villagers are constantly prepared for an unannounced visit by one of several armed groups in the surrounding area. When opposing groups meet, or one of them clashes with an army patrol near the village, they run to their homes, lie on the floor and pray they will not be caught in the crossfire.

Maria Elena would lose her left arm – amputated in the hospital she reached after a dangerous night-time journey – but what she remembers most is how her baby's legs kicked and she thought she'd been wounded as well. What if the man with the machine-gun returns to the hill on the edge of village, and next time her daughter isn't lucky? What if the ambulance driver refuses again to drive at night on unpaved roads with potholes the size of craters and militias manning checkpoints? What if next time there is no passing trucker to help out?

For now she is staying. Her husband continues to work on the family farm, and she has opened a tiny grocery shop on the ground floor of their house. They don't have much but they do have more than they would as IDPs in the city.

They are trying. They are brave, but one more burst from someone's machine-gun and another Colombian family will be displaced.

Respect for civilians would go far to reduce such dangers. Reminding parties to conflict of IHL, ensuring armed forces and groups are aware of the rules of war, monitoring compliance and making representations as appropriate, are priorities that constantly occupy

the ICRC and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Wherever there is access, even in the most protracted conflict, they promote IHL.

After two decades of war in Somalia, the Somali Red Crescent continues to talk to armed forces and militias of their obligations. They should protect and respect civilians, wounded or captured fighters, medical and humanitarian personnel and infrastructure.

No one can be sure of the number of Somalia's displaced. The already displaced are displaced again and again, and few in the country are unaffected. The Red Crescent president, Dr Ahmed Mohamed Hassan, says soberly, "It is a challenging environment. But dissemination of IHL is vital. We link it to the Koran, Islamic teaching and Somali customary law."

Vital indeed. Attacks on aid organizations and aid workers in 2009 showed little respect for humanitarians, who are often a lifeline for people caught up in conflict, and the disruption caused threatened the well-being of the displaced as well.

IHL also obliges people with guns to allow humanitarians safe access to those who need assistance, but all too often they hinder them. In the Middle East, Lebanese Red Cross and Palestine Red Crescent ambulances have been shot at as they sought to reach victims of conflict. Volunteers have been killed and injured. Youssef, a 40-year-old volunteer, helped evacuate wounded people from the Nahr el Bared refugee camp in northern Lebanon. Fighting there in 2007 between the Lebanese army and Fatah al Islam displaced 28,000 Palestinians. "During the night, we used to turn off the ambulance lights for fear of being shot at," he says.

Preventing displacement is a matter of addressing the reasons for moving away. In Kenya that may mean easing tensions around scarce resources. Besides the country's better-known post-election violence, thousands of people can be displaced by tribal clashes over land, pasture, cattle, water.

Solutions may lie in livelihood development and in taking actions that have multiple benefits. "If the Kenya Red Cross tells us two boreholes have broken down in a place where water shortage can lead to tension we

will send some technicians,” says Christophe Luedi, head of the ICRC’s Nairobi delegation. “I am not sure that the primary aim will be to prevent displacement, but ...”

Climatic extremes overlap in Kenya and clearly contribute to displacement, whether or not it involves ethnic tension. In conflict-prone areas particularly, economic security is critical.

The main objective of economic security programmes is to preserve or restore the ability of households or communities to meet their essential needs. In Sudan, the bulk of the ICRC’s economic security effort goes towards preventing displacement, including from the Jebel Marra massif, the country’s highest mountain range. Largely controlled by rebel forces and surrounded by the Sudanese army, its population of more than 300,000 people had to accommodate a growing number of IDPs.

Jebel Marra lies in Darfur’s highly fertile centre and was once part of the region’s breadbasket. The homeland of the Fur, mainly peasant farmers who still crop the valleys and high plateaus, it has seen its markets disrupted and its agricultural production plummet. Along with depleted resources has come a huge influx of people fleeing conflict in the foothills and on the surrounding plains. Where a family once farmed four or five hectares, it is lucky to crop more than one.

The displaced have sought shelter in the higher villages, mostly among relatives or friends. There they have built shelters and looked for land, or for work on someone else’s. But since most of the newcomers left all they possessed behind them, the burden of support has fallen on host communities.

The ICRC has helped both, providing tools and seed, and food that allows the farmers to work their land uninterrupted and pre-empts the consumption of seed. How much it has done to prevent a Jebel Marra exodus is impossible to tell but, says Peter Schamberger, economic security coordinator, it has contributed greatly to “keeping living conditions bearable.”



Franco Pagetti/ICRC/VII

Colombia: Mary Elena and her family have decided to stay in their house despite the risks (2009).

CAMPS: A SOLUTION OR PART OF THE PROBLEM?

If the Fur had fled Jebel Marra they would have gone to camps, the one secure option they had. But are IDP camps an answer to the challenge of internal displacement or have they become part of the problem? Do camps and the “pull” of their services in fact increase the displacement, prolong it, and undermine traditional methods of coping? The argument for that is strong and UN agencies agree with the ICRC that camps are a last resort, an option to use when no other option is appropriate.

The camp in Gereida is a case in point, if it can be described as a camp. Where the town – once of 20,000 inhabitants – ends and the camp of approximately 148,000 begins isn’t immediately obvious. Gereida could be a boom town, the shelters and compounds of the IDPs forming its newer districts.

The camp is an urban agglomeration but its neighbourhoods are transplanted villages. Whole communities ran and settled down in town together. They kept their village names, their identities and structures.

Still, there are differences. Droughts and crop infestations no longer have an impact on their food supply. The World Food Programme meets their needs with distributions. Every child can go to school, which wasn’t the case in the villages.

Once they had shallow wells but now they have potable water, cleaner than anything that flows from a Khartoum tap, piped from boreholes to tanks and into neighbourhood tapstands. If villages once thought themselves blessed if they possessed a health post, now they have access to three primary health-care centres, one of them run by the ICRC, that sets standards the town’s own hospital can only ever aspire to. And it is free, which the town hospital isn’t. As no one

is turned away – and non-IDPs have needs – Gereida residents visit the centre and some patients travel from Buram, the chief town of the district, to use it. What began as an emergency operation is now providing regular services.

Although these are often life-saving factors, are such things healthy in the structural sense? It bothers the ICRC and other humanitarians who worry that the “pull” of camp services only adds to the “push” of conflict. Fear and insecurity drive people from their homes but, the argument goes, the lure of social services way beyond anything they have ever experienced may encourage the flight, or even advance it. Sometimes the “pull” might be the decisive factor.

Clearly, there is a dilemma. Having sought for years to establish minimum standards to improve the quality of assistance in calamity and conflict, humanitarians now wonder about the maximum.

President Kellenberger provides perspective. “It may be much easier to provide services in camps, but in conflict areas the authorities and humanitarian organizations should do as much as they can to provide a decent level for everybody affected.”

“You really have to think: Do I want these people to retain an incentive to go home? You can create an environment that is so much better than where people came from that they just will not return.”

How many IDPs will return from Gereida is guesswork. Services will downsize as stability grows and emergency turns into recovery. The new Masalit King will be surprised if less than a third remain, doubling the size of his town.

Camps have other complications. In Darfur, as is common elsewhere, they were organized according to



Jeroen Oerlemans/ICRC



Boris Heger/ICRC



Rudy Tolentino/ICRC



Olga Miltcheva/ICRC

ethnicity, and influenced by political leadership. Some groups could not enter some places, and accused their opponents of using camps as safe havens after raids. Tribal tensions increased, violence occurred as a consequence.

Armed opposition groups were present in some, recruiting IDPs, moving weapons through them, and resorting to extortion and harassment. In others, vulnerable people were forced to pay taxes, even a share of their food rations, to nominal leaders.

The ICRC established the Gereida camp at a time when conflict prevented other organizations from working in the area. It alone had access.

Where there are no serious security problems, however, camps are usually well served by UN agencies and NGOs. In such cases, the ICRC can focus on the great mass of vulnerable people outside camps, the other displaced and the affected communities many other agencies cannot reach.

Access is key. The ICRC's neutral and independent humanitarian action, and the dialogue the organization has with all parties to a conflict, allows it unique access. On the ground, working directly with communities, it can help them cope, strengthen their existing methods of managing, prevent displacement from occurring and support people hosting IDPs in the places they turn to first.

Not all IDPs flee to or stay in camps. Camps deflect the world's attention from the harsh truth of internal displacement. They may be a last resort but more often than not they are in accessible places, away from frontlines, near towns, perhaps, or at least a short drive from an airstrip. Donors and media are flown in and out and what they find becomes high profile. The consequence



Andrew McConnell/Panos

DRC: A family displaced by the ongoing conflict builds a shelter in a camp that houses over 10,000 people (2008).

is that for far too long the debate on IDPs has focused on those who are in camps to the detriment of those who are not.

The Kivus, the war-ravaged eastern provinces of the DRC bordering Uganda and Rwanda, illustrate this. Millions have died there since conflict erupted in the 1990s, and in mid-2009 the DRC was thought to have around 1.4 million IDPs, concentrated mainly in North and South Kivu and neighbouring Orientale province. Most of them live with host families in overburdened places like Chebumba, a township 50 kilometres north of Bukavu, the South Kivu capital. It has three times more displaced than permanent residents, and there have been times when it has been saturated. Wave after wave of IDPs has passed through and the local population has no longer been able to accommodate newcomers.

The strain placed upon such communities is enormous. Typically, the communities receiving IDPs are also affected by the conflict, so even before the arrivals, resources are likely to be limited. Food supplies are marginal, and arable land, water, sanitation and public services such as schools and health centres are fully stretched. A prolonged presence of IDPs means those resources inevitably diminish further, and as they do tensions sometimes rise between hosts and hosted. For the ICRC it is an all too familiar picture, with parallels

seen around the world. In Central Mindanao in the southern Philippines, huge displacement caused by fighting placed unbearable burdens on vulnerable residents. Despite being impoverished themselves, families were found to be hosting as many as 20 displaced people.

Everybody suffers. Having fled their homes in a rush, escaping fresh clashes, people have arrived in Chebumba with only the clothes on their back. With no room in the township, they have sometimes sheltered in the open air, enduring appalling conditions. Young children, pregnant women, the sick and the abused have been among them.

Ruboneza, 32, fled his home in North Kivu after armed men arrived and started forcefully recruiting villagers. He took his wife, his mother, and two children with him, but his younger brothers and neighbours were shot down in front of his eyes. Then his mother was killed when they fled a place in which they thought they had found refuge.

By the time he reached Chebumba, the little band had grown again. On the way he had found two more children. Their mother had been killed and they did not know where their father was. "So I brought them with me," Ruboneza said. "They are my burden and I must look after them. If I find food for us all we will be happy. If I don't we will starve together."

*“Camps deflect
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IDPs in the DRC have traditionally stayed with host families and the estimate is that around 70 per cent still do. But the percentage living in formal camps has increased significantly of late. In 2007, North Kivu had only one camp. By mid-2009 there were 11.

Claudia McGoldrick, an adviser to the ICRC's president, sees a number of reasons for this worrying development. Undoubtedly, the unceasing flow of IDPs increasingly saturates poor communities, worsening economic depredation and even causing tensions. The periods of displacement are longer. And international NGOs, coordinated by the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, channel more and more resources into camps, rather than into communities who are in desperate need of help. Support for IDPs in host families, and for the hosts themselves, is scarce.

Besides access, the agencies mention funding among the constraints. Many donors, it seems, are sceptical of need that is not immediately visible.

Visibility, or the lack of it, has long been an issue in Kenya. IDPs there can be traced back to Kenyan independence from the British, and tribal clashes, post-election violence and unresolved land issues have been among the main causes of displacement ever since. The widespread violence that followed the presidential election of December 2007 displaced half a million people but, humanitarian agencies say, there were 350,000 IDPs already.

It took the violence of early 2008 to bring the issue to prominence, says Bill Omamo, the ICRC's head of protocol in Nairobi. The notion of a Kenyan IDP came only with the sudden post-election appearance of camps.

“The magnitude and nature of the violence reflected there brought the message home,” Mr Omamo says.

And, as elsewhere, most of the focus remained on camps because the media had access to them. The plight of host communities received less attention, and it was unknown how many displaced people were living with hosts.

Dr James Kisia, deputy secretary-general of the Kenya Red Cross says host communities were struggling already owing to some very poor harvests. “It was a tough time. They were poor and it was difficult for them to help. But they did.”

It has gone largely unnoticed that the flight of urban slum dwellers has had an impact upon the rural poor. Whole neighbourhoods burned in the sprawling slums common to Kenyan cities, and among the people who fled were many who supported poorer relations in the countryside. Now the tables were turned. Not only was a source of money lost but those who normally sent it turned up on their relatives' doorsteps. Those who provided support now needed support themselves.

For many it was unsustainable. There are reports of IDPs running up debt to meet their basic needs and, being out of sight, many did not get humanitarian assistance.

GOING HOME

“We are not sure when we are returning. I am worried about my house and my animals, but what can I do? It is not safe yet.”

The rains have come and a desert landscape has been turning green. Outside Gereida, people are tilling the soil and planting in what for years had been no-man’s land. Security would seem to be taking hold. There is hope at last of a harvest.

Donkeys trot between town and the fields, carrying farmers, and strain before their ploughs when they get there. One pulls a well-laden cart, a family on board and goats tethered behind it. They are returning to the village of Um Karfa, an hour or two further by donkey.

Before “the problems,” as Darfuris call them, Um Karfa was the main village of 15 in a spread-out Masalit community. Nomads lived around them. When violence came to the area, and some outlying villages were attacked, the Masalit made for Gereida. The nomads stayed. Desperate to resume their normal lives and livelihoods, the Masalit have begun a cautious return, a handful of the hundreds of thousands of people trying to go home around the world.

Nothing remains of the old village. The homes of the people burned, and what has replaced them – for now – resemble the dwellings of a displaced camp: shelters of tarpaulin and what could be cut from the bush. It rained heavily last night and many of them leak. Women are complaining bitterly. “A mother doesn’t sleep in a place like this. You are too afraid for your children. See?” asks a mother of five, presenting a handful of sodden sand scooped from the floor of her shelter. “Wet. Wet, wet, wet.”

Like many others who have come here she is not yet convinced a return to Um Karfa is wise. She still has family in Gereida camp and is maintaining a foot in both, just in case she needs to change her mind. Quietly, too, food from camp distributions is smuggled to them, and they can openly receive health care. The assurance of that helped some of these women decide they would come back.

The rain, though, is a blessing as well as a curse and freshly ploughed land provides hope. With security, a sustainable water supply and enough seed and tools to give them a decent start, people say Um Karfa can prosper again.

Right now seed and tools are a problem. Some people have them, some do not. Hawa Issa Mahady, a widowed mother of six in her early 50s, has no seed. She spends her mornings clearing a piece of land, preparing a field for planting. Her afternoons are spent selling tea and coffee, near the butcher and the baker and the other few traders looking to revive the market-place.

“What I earn I save and when I have enough I’ll buy the seed,” she says. “I will plant as soon as I have it.”

It may take her some time. A cup of tea is cheap, seed is expensive, and her only customer today is the writer of this story.

The tea-seller persists regardless. Day after day she sits there, on her little stool before the little fire on which a black kettle is boiling. A great deal rests upon her shoulders, for as well as her children she cares for an elderly mother and an aged aunt who is blind. Um Karfa, moreover, is not the end of their journey, more a halfway house, as far as they can go for the present. They are from the outlying village of Gortobok, the first one hit by the raiders who shot down Hawa’s husband and neighbours. No one has dared to go that far yet, to see what is left and what security is like there.

Seed and agricultural tools are the means by which a willing population with access to land can re-engage in their former livelihood, find what the aid world terms a “durable solution.” But many in Darfur must do without, be they resident farmers, IDPs in camps or in host communities, or potential returnees like Hawa Issa Mahady. Either the means are not at hand or the cost is too much for overstretched household economies.

Some people missed out because of inflexible agency systems. Around the world, assistance packages for returnees are often linked to, or distributed from, IDP camps. The idea is that when people who have been in the camps depart they are clearly eligible to receive benefits intended for returnees. But many IDPs who are not in camps, do not pass through one, or may return home directly from an unknown place elude the safety nets.

That does not mean they can be written off, and leads to an often vexed question. How long can someone be an IDP, and who decides that? A common view among humanitarians is that displacement persists as long as the underlying causes are present.

Law meanwhile tells us that displacement must last only as long as the reasons justifying displacement – imperative military reasons or the security of civilians themselves – require.

It comes down to this. The authorities are responsible for restoring the conditions that allow displaced people to see opportunity for durable solutions to their plight. And the authorities should provide the means to help them develop them. Options should include a return to and reintegration in the place they came from, integration in the place to which they were displaced, or relocation and integration somewhere else. Whatever the displaced decide should be voluntary, pursued in safety and with dignity, and lead to the restoration of livelihood and access to essential services.

Frequently, this is interpreted differently. States may consider resettlement or reintegration to have occurred long before humanitarians see any sign of durable solutions. Authorities are often eager for displacement to disappear because it indicates strife, and they force processes along. Others turn their backs or place their heads in the sand, all of which can sow the seeds of yet more conflict and population movement.



Pedram Yazdi/ICRC



Virginie Louis/ICRC



Christoph Von Toggenburg/ICRC



Boris Hegel/ICRC

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

“Listening to conflict-affected people in eight countries, a 2009 ICRC survey delivers a sobering and challenging perspective.”

One thing often missing in what the Guiding Principles describe as the planning and management of return or resettlement and reintegration is the participation of IDPs. Whose return is it anyway, and whom should it suit?

IDPs need dialogue through every stage of their displacement. From the start they need information: what assistance is where, what are their options. Sometimes people travel far, and at considerable risk, on the strength of a rumour that help is available somewhere. When they get there they discover it isn't. They have choices to make and they should be informed ones. What they have to say, on the other hand, is important to humanitarians whose responses should likewise be informed.

Listening to conflict-affected people in eight countries, a 2009 ICRC survey delivers a sobering and challenging perspective. Entitled *Our world. Views from the field*, it examines personal experiences, needs, worries, expectations and frustrations in Afghanistan, Colombia, the DRC, Georgia, Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia and the Philippines, and among other things it reveals the staggering scale of displacement.

More than half of all people affected by hostilities had had to leave their homes, it found, and while the average figure was 56 per cent, it was dramatically higher in some countries. In Afghanistan 76 per cent said they had been displaced and in Liberia almost nine in ten had fled. Lebanon followed with 61 per cent and overall the findings equated to several millions of people. Displacement, too, was one of their greatest fears.

In addition to being displaced, many had had their homes looted and property damaged, and economic hardship was a day-to-day reality, they said. One in five had lost their means of income. Besides a widespread shortage of such essentials as food, water and electricity, access to health care was limited. In Afghanistan and Haiti most people suffered from both.

Of two things above all there can be no doubt. The survey underlines how imperative it is for IHL to be better adhered to by parties to conflict, and it points firmly to the need to strengthen the capacity of communities to cope, as a matter of priority.



Jason Tanner/CRC

Philippines: A displaced woman who has found shelter in an empty warehouse in Cotabato province (2008).

FACING THE CHALLENGES

A president's perspective

Jakob Kellenberger ponders a common question. One of the challenges facing the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement is that they ultimately remain non-binding and many States still see them as interference in sovereign issues. Some people are saying there should be a binding convention.

The ICRC's president almost contains his irritation. "I tend to think," he says, "that it always makes sense to realize what you have already. If governments and non-State armed actors were to comply with the rules on the conduct of hostilities there would be far fewer displaced people. If you are talking in terms of binding rules I would point to the existing ones in international humanitarian law and human rights law."

There's a pause and then he illustrates his point. "Imagine, for once, a world in which no one would attack civilians. Imagine a world in which no one would carry out indiscriminate attacks. Imagine a world in which civilians and their property would be spared at all times. Imagine."

With millions of displaced people out there it is difficult. Ensuring that the rights of people caught up in conflict are upheld is central to the ICRC mission, but amid the turmoil of internal hostility it can assume the proportions of mission impossible.

Mr Kellenberger concedes, "Nobody would claim you could do much to protect people or prevent their displacement in, say, Darfur in 2003. You are often in that situation but that is not a reason to believe you can do nothing. You strengthen your operation over time until you *can* have an influence on warring parties. You fight as hard as you can to gain respect for the rules of war." Gaining greater respect for the law and providing assistance are core components of the ICRC's strategy to help civilians in conflict. The aim of the strategy, Mr Kellenberger says, is to restore acceptable

"Imagine, for once, a world in which no one would attack civilians. Imagine a world in which no one would carry out indiscriminate attacks. Imagine a world in which civilians and their property would be spared at all times."

conditions, strengthen existing coping mechanisms and, until the civilians can manage on their own again, support an environment that is as close as possible to the usual one. Efforts to restore family links, the distribution of relief material, the restoration of water supplies, first aid and surgery, hygiene and health-care programmes, and livelihood support are all among the elements, as are mine-action programmes and the provision of artificial limbs.

What distinguishes ICRC thinking and action from that of some other organizations is that it takes into consideration all the conflict-affected, not only IDPs. While it agrees that displacement adds to vulnerability, the ICRC does not believe that someone displaced is automatically more vulnerable than someone who is not. "Many of those who stay behind, the elderly, the sick perhaps, or some overburdened host family which has taken in IDPs from elsewhere and is sharing its meagre resources with them, may be extremely vulnerable and in need of our help," Mr Kellenberger says.

So the ICRC's approach is to help not only those who flee, but also those who cannot although they may want to, those who stay for other reasons, and those who return. Moreover, the organization is greatly



Rwanda: Millions of displaced Rwandans returning home after the civil war (1996).

concerned by the increasing tendency within the humanitarian and donor communities to consider the needs of IDPs as separate and distinct from those of resident populations.

Mr Kellenberger warns that “labelling” people and compartmentalizing humanitarian aid has introduced the danger that some groups – even those who are in the greatest need – may be neglected, as they have been in the DRC, where camps soak up precious resources that are often all too scarce and are sometimes more urgently needed elsewhere.

The IDP label has distorted the discussion on displacement, he believes, particularly since the most visible IDPs are those who shelter in camps. “For too long the whole debate has focused far too unilaterally on IDPs in camps. The IDP notion and the fate of IDPs have been identified with life in camps.”

“When you think of all those people displaced in North-West Frontier Province in Pakistan, in the Swat and Dir and Buner districts... what was it, 360,000 people in May? It was a massive and unprecedented displacement and the majority of them turned to host families. It is Pashtun tradition that you take in relatives in need, no matter how weak and precarious your own

situation. We could see then that over the medium and long term the presence of those displaced people would impose a very significant burden on the host families. So this labelling, limiting things to IDPs in camps, is dangerous.”

Political aspects should not be overlooked either, he says. “If you do neglect to assist those who stay at home you are, in a way, promoting displacement.”

The ICRC is concerned, too, at the continuing gap between relief and recovery. Knowing at what point a conflict is really over, and at what point the emergency phase leads into the development one, is the subject of much academic debate, the president says, but on the ground “transition” is often complex and multi-faceted. “I have heard people say, ‘We need an exit strategy for humanitarian organizations.’ I have always replied, ‘Yes, that is perfect but at the same time we need an entry strategy for development agencies and if possible with no gap in between.’” As one prepares to pull out the other is often not in sight.

Gaps, and duplications, can be avoided by better coordination and dialogue between organizations and, Mr Kellenberger says, the ICRC is committed to that. A comprehensive response to a problem on the scale

Georgia: A man who has been living in a collective centre for displaced people in Abkhazia since 1993.

DRC: A boy waits for news of his parents.

Until the rules of IHL are applied around the world displacement will continue unabated, along with humanitarian challenges.

of internal displacement is beyond the capacity of any single organization.

In spite of some progress, there is still a long way to go on coordination, he says. "For it to be more effective and meaningful, it must be based more on existing capacities in the field and genuine respect for certain basic principles than on ever more refined mechanisms and procedures."

Humanitarian organizations involved in coordination should be present and active on the ground themselves as well as transparent about resources, capacities and access.

Operational partnerships within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement are a priority for the ICRC. National Societies are well placed to help IDPs, Mr Kellenberger argues, because they have their roots in communities, mostly cover an entire national territory, and have privileged access to authorities. A common identity through the emblems used and the principles applied, rules on roles and responsibilities, and a common policy on internal displacement are other strengths enjoyed by all Movement partners.

Movement policy on internal displacement aims to maximize Red Cross and Red Crescent coherence and impact. It does address coordination with other organizations on the basis of their presence and capacities

on the ground but insists the Movement network will adhere to its Fundamental Principles. It also complements the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' 2009 migration policy, for the National Societies' work with migrants.

Mr Kellenberger holds up Somalia as a model of an operational partnership. Nowhere else is Movement action seen better. With ICRC support, the Somali Red Crescent can operate in areas other agencies cannot reach. After nearly two decades of conflict and widespread lawlessness the Somali Red Crescent continues to operate through a network of 19 branches and 114 sub-branches scattered throughout the country.

Mr Kellenberger points out that in addition to providing treatment for war-wounded patients, primary health care, water and livelihood projects, relief and emergency assistance, family reunifications and essential community services, Movement partners continue to raise awareness within Somali society of the basic rules of IHL.

Until those rules are applied around the world, he says, displacement will continue unabated, along with humanitarian challenges. Only through pooled efforts can the international community produce the comprehensive response demanded. But that, he insists, requires facing up to fundamental issues, especially beyond the camps.



Antonin Kratochvíl/ICRC



Ron Haviv/ICRC/VII

MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.



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