

IDP Newsletter

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Addressing Internal Displacement in Peace Processes, Peace Agreements, and Peacebuilding

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Introduction

A new report published by the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement argues that resolving displacement is inextricably linked with achieving lasting peace. This brief article summarises the main arguments in the report and its principal recommendations. The full text of the report is available at www.brookings.edu/idp

Why it matters...

One reason displacement matters in achieving peace is that in some countries the sheer scale of displacement is so significant, and accounts for such a large proportion of the national or regional population, that it is simply unrealistic to plan for a peaceful future without incorporating the needs of the displaced and ensuring their active participation.

Additionally, helping displaced populations to return and reintegrate can simultaneously address the root causes of a conflict and help prevent further displacement. Specifically, the return of displaced populations can be an important signifier of the end of conflict, repatriation can play a part in validating the post-conflict political order, the return of the displaced can be a pre-condition for peace if they are politically active, and the return of displaced populations can also make an important contribution to the recovery of local economies.

The reason why it is important to focus on the specific category of IDPs in the context of peace is that they often have needs that are different from both refugees and other war affected civilian populations. More often than refugees, IDPs remain close to the zone of conflict and are thus more vulnerable to violence; the provision of humanitarian assistance to IDPs is often more difficult than for refugees; and unlike refugees, IDPs do not have specific protection in in-



ternational law. Similarly, IDPs often have particular vulnerabilities not encountered by other civilians in armed conflict; they need shelter, they may be unable to replace or receive official documents, and often encounter problems regaining land and property left behind.

More widely, broad-based participation in political processes (including peace) is increasingly seen as good practice. A variety of UN and other international conventions and agreements, for example, recognises the rights of children, youth, and women to participate in political decision-making processes that affect their lives.

A final reason that highlights the importance of focusing on addressing internal displacement in peace is growing momentum within the UN system and new institutional opportunities. One is the new Peacebuilding Commission, which has a mandate to marshal resources for, advice on, support and coordinate the development of integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery.

Including Internal Displacement in Peace Processes

Examples of direct IDP participation in 'track-one' Government-

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level peace processes are rare and there are three main obstacles. Firstly, the exclusive and high-level structure of most 'track-one' processes. Secondly, displaced populations often have specific disadvantages – they may lack resources, education, political skills, and influence. Thirdly, IDPs specifically have additional disadvantages – they are often scattered and may be more vulnerable to reprisals from their Government where they do mobilise.

Equally there may be times when the participation of IDPs in formal peace negotiations is not desirable, as it can entail risks for the displaced. Alternatively, displaced populations can be associated with, or fuel through their presence, 'spoiling' tactics that can hinder, delay, or undermine peace processes.

An alternative is to participate in 'track-two', or civil peace processes, especially through forming coalitions with other groups excluded from formal negotiations, for example women's groups. NGOs have an important role to play in supporting coalitions for peace. A danger is that the specific concerns of IDPs can be subsumed within the wider agenda of a coalition, and it may also be easier for formal parties to exclude coalitions than have to deal with different specific lobbies.

Especially where IDP participation is not possible, effective, or desirable, it is important to develop complementary strategies for representing their interests in peace processes. One is for international mediators to prompt political leaders to incorporate displacement issues in peace negotiations, but importantly in consultation with IDPs. A second complementary strategy is to focus on legal rights of IDPs through international, regional, and national mechanisms.

A third is to encourage the participation of IDPs in 'track-three', or grass root peace processes, although these rarely have a significant impact at the national level.

Good Practice for Addressing Internal Displacement in Peace Agreements

It is important that peace agreements contain specific provisions for displaced populations. The report reviews how displacement has been addressed in recent agreements in Bosnia, Burundi, Cambodia, Georgia, Guatemala, Kosovo, Liberia, Macedonia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Sudan, and identifies good practice. Four areas in particular need specific attention within the text of agreements:

- Clear definitions that distinguish refugees and IDPs, refer to standard international definitions, clarify locally used terms and are inclusive in coverage;
- Guarantees of the parties' cooperation in the resettlement process, including a commitment to guaranteeing safety and security both during and after return, specific language on how security will be provided, and sanctions against people who violate the rights of the displaced;
- A specific enumeration of the rights of displaced persons, including the right to voluntary return; the right to citizenship, identity, and participation; the right to property; and general human rights; and
- The definition of an implementation process, including the establishment of a responsible body, the definition of a funding mechanism, and procedures for cooperating with the international community.

Despite positive efforts to address internal displacement in recent peace agreements, commitments are often not fulfilled for reasons such as poor drafting, insufficient implementation mechanisms and funding, a lack of political will, more pressing priorities like demobilisation, and specific obstacles like landmines. Compliance

on commitments to IDPs in peace agreements requires systematic monitoring and their priorities need to be mainstreamed in the peacebuilding phase.

Mainstreaming Internal Displacement in Peacebuilding

Finding durable solutions for the displaced is a necessary element of effective peacebuilding. The following issues are particularly relevant for displaced persons and returnees:

- Providing security through demobilisation, de-mining, re-establishing the rule of law, and combating impunity;
- Solving property related problems including reconstruction and restitution of property and resolution of property related disputes;
- Furthering reconciliation between local communities and returnees;
- Undertaking post-conflict reconstruction i.e. re-establishing basic infrastructure and services as well as ensuring access to services, resources and livelihoods; and
- Ensuring the political transition to, and the establishment of, an effective and legitimate Government in which the various sectors of society, including IDPs and returnees can become stakeholders.

The new UN Peacebuilding Commission represents a unique institutional opportunity to mainstream IDPs and their priorities in peacebuilding efforts worldwide. As implementing durable solutions for IDPs is an integral component of peacebuilding, the Peacebuilding Commission should seek ways of ensuring governments and the international community address concerns of the displaced in their peacebuilding activities.

