

**The Gender Dimensions of Internal Displacement:**  
Concept Paper and Annotated Bibliography

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## The Gender Dimensions of Internal Displacement

*“Internally displaced persons have been forced from their homes by armed conflict or internal strife... they remain within the borders and under the domestic jurisdiction of their countries... they are nearly always destitute and acutely in need of international protection...without legal or institutional bases for receiving protection and assistance from the international community.”<sup>1</sup>*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) present the most compelling crises confronting the international humanitarian assistance community today. Each year the number of countries reporting internal displacement increases; the past few years have witnessed a change from large-scale refugee movements to increasing internal displacement.<sup>2</sup> The enormity of the ever-growing problem of IDPs surpasses human and financial resources available to mitigate suffering, which—as is the case with refugees—women and children bear the brunt.

This brief concept paper identifies the main issues concerning the rights of displaced women and girls. It aims to sharpen awareness of the gender dimensions to internal displacement and to provide initial guidance to UNICEF and other agencies on the appropriate gender response to the urgent and growing needs of internally displaced women. The subject clearly deserves in-depth analysis and further research, which this concept paper seeks to stimulate.

This analysis employs a gender perspective to examine several key questions: What are the major issues of concern to internally displaced women? What steps should agencies take to address and ensure the rights of displaced women? A gender perspective—the appreciation of fundamental differences between men and women’s roles in societies—is not difficult to apply if one approaches the issue from the basic principles of human rights

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<sup>1</sup> Armacost, Michael, from the Introduction of *The Forsaken People*, edited by Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng, Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Schmeidl, Susanne. Comparative trends in forced displacement: IDPs and refugees, 1964-96. In *Internally Displaced People: A Global Survey*. Norwegian Refugee Council. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd.

determined by a person's gender. The consequences of not applying a gender perspective resonate in overlooked human rights abuses against women and girls.

This paper reviews and critiques the current roles of UN agencies and other humanitarian organizations and suggests ways to promote an action plan for international agencies to more effectively respond to the rights of internally displaced women and girls by using a gender-informed approach.

Gender concerns for internally displaced women primarily relate to two core issues: protection—safeguarding women and girls from rape, abduction, forced sexual slavery, genital mutilation,<sup>3</sup> torture and murder; and upholding their rights to equal access and full participation in assistance programs. Gender violence is a common feature of displacement. Chronic physical and mental trauma persist because responsible parties fail to concern themselves with or to publicize the lasting effects of physical abuse. Agencies rarely examine protection issues in depth, much less initiate or support investigative research on gender violence in IDP populations.

In refugee work, the dedication and hard work of concerned international assistance organizations over the past decade are beginning to yield positive results on gender issues. Awareness of the plight of refugee women and their right to protection began to surface in the 1980s as a result of the work of numerous individuals and advocacy organizations. Since then, policies and guidelines have been developed, gender positions established at all UN agencies, and training programs adopted to address gender and protection concerns.<sup>4</sup> The issue of protecting refugee women has by no means been resolved; it remains a continuing struggle, but at least the mechanisms for improving the situation are in place.

In the case of IDPs, such mechanisms do not yet exist. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement<sup>5</sup> identify the rights and guarantees relevant to the protection of the

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<sup>3</sup> Reference is made to the case that occurred in Sierra Leone in December 1996 when over 1,000 young internally displaced girls were forcefully circumcised in a mass ceremony. It is probable that the risk of being subjected to forced FGM was greatly increased because of the girls' IDP status and the congregation of a large number of girls living together in an insecure setting.

<sup>4</sup> Martin, Susan Forbes, *Refugee Women* (1992), *UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women* (1991), *UNHCR's Sexual Violence Against Refugees: Guidelines on Prevention and Response* (1995), *Guidelines on Prevention of Sexual Violence* (1995), Taft, Julia, *Issues and Options for Refugee Women in Developing Countries*, (1987)

<sup>5</sup> *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, Feb. 11, 1998, United Nations E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2

internally displaced and offer a basis for protection and assistance. Although not a binding legal instrument, the Principles provide practical guidance to governments, NGOs and other agencies working on behalf of the internally displaced. The Guiding Principles are derived from extant human rights and humanitarian law, as well as refugee law by analogy.

In addition to their rights to protection and physical safety, displaced women and children have the right to basic human necessities guaranteed by international laws and conventions:

- food, water, sanitary facilities, cooking and heating fuel, shelter, blankets and clothing
- health care, including reproductive health services, mental health, and maternal child care
- education and skills training to promote women's self-determination and independence
- opportunities to provide meaningful input into programs that directly affect women
- a chance to participate in social life

In general, agencies have been more willing to direct attention and resources to providing material assistance than to involving themselves with participation, protection and gender violence issues. This shortcoming appears most often in cases dealing with rape and domestic violence—sensitive issues that require skill, expertise, and time. Agencies have not devoted adequate attention to reporting gender violence, documenting lessons learned, or establishing the effect of programs; this lack of attention may stem from the emergency mentality under which IDP interventions operate.

Because no UN agency has the overall responsibility for providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, the response of the international community has been *ad hoc*. IDPs, by definition, remain within national borders, meaning that their own governments are responsible for meeting their protection needs. Unfortunately, their governments are often unable to provide protection, or may even be responsible for the displacement. In Colombia, internally displaced persons suffer attacks and arrests by paramilitary forces, drug cartels and government forces. The government has does little to protect them. Worse yet, assistance agencies are often reluctant to interfere and risk the anger of the host government, so the issue of protection may be ignored altogether. Greater advocacy efforts are needed to stress that the situation of IDPs is a legitimate concern to the international community because of the universal human rights issues involved.

Effective, gender-sensitive responses to IDP crises will require a coordinated effort among all UN agencies and NGO partners to introduce and train staff about gender, human rights laws, conventions, UN policies and guidelines. The training should be formal, structured, and linked to job performance and evaluations. Given the high staff turnover in assistance agencies, special efforts to support orientation and refresher training on these issues would improve assistance programs.

Human rights and displacement specialists emphasize the need for agencies to take the following steps in order to improve services for internally displaced persons:

1. Recognize the advocacy potential when women and children make up the majority of the IDP population;
2. Aggressively seek better understanding of the root causes of internal displacement, and disseminate findings, including the impact on women;
3. Agree on a gender-sensitive protocol of response, a method of designating lead agencies, and the means of coordination;
4. Hone the collective abilities of organizations to forecast impending displacement situations and make projections on how such displacement might affect women and children;
5. Advocate with governments, presumptive authorities, and international agencies for appropriate and humane responses to displacement, with a focus on the gender dimensions of displacement and human rights;
6. Appoint gender specialists at field locations to ensure that the rights of women and girls are protected, and that gender abuses and human rights violations are monitored and reported;
7. Pressure authorities to facilitate the safe and expeditious return of IDPs to their homes as soon as their safety can be assured, with special attention to ensuring the safety of children and women;
8. Disseminate the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and other relevant international human rights and gender rights instruments to all parties interacting with internally displaced persons;

9. Establish and implement an interagency training protocol on gender and human rights laws pertinent to IDPs for use by all agencies working with displaced persons;
10. Develop gender-sensitive “Best Practices” models for IDP assistance programs that may be replicated in a variety of settings;
11. Advocate for better access to IDPs in order to provide humanitarian assistance;
12. Include women in all peace, reconciliation, and reconstruction activities;
13. Make use of advanced communications technology such as computer modeling and videos to depict potential outcomes—social, economic, and gender impacts—of displacement in particular situations.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The global crisis of internal displacement presents an enormous challenge to the international assistance community. Although the precise number is unknown, experts estimate the number of people displaced within native borders to be around 30 million, of whom women and children comprise about 80 percent.<sup>6</sup> The rights of women, including access to basic services—food, water, shelter, and health care—are often ignored. Moreover, displaced women have no voice; their circumstances compel them to accept the little assistance offered while being denied the opportunity to actively participate in program design, monitoring, or assessments on activities that directly affect their and their children's lives.

This paper focuses on the gender dimensions of internal displacement. An examination of IDP literature reveals few references pertaining to women. Given that women outnumber men in IDP populations and that the needs of women and men differ, the absence of a gender perspective in the assistance community and in the literature illustrates that gender is either being ignored or is not properly understood. Either shortcoming should motivate immediate and deliberate action to promote a focus on gender. Such a gender focus would require that the different needs of women and men would inform and shape the assistance provided them so as to be most appropriate to their situation.

What are the most effective and appropriate ways of preventing violence towards internally displaced women and girls from a rights-based perspective? What is the best way to increase the participation of women at decision making levels in assistance programs? How can international organizations protect and care for IDPs without overstepping cultural boundaries? The protection issue is the most challenging problem facing assistance agencies; it extends to all IDPs—women, children and men.

Several overarching issues directly affect the lives of all IDPs and relate to the delivery of humanitarian assistance:

- Gender issues are seldom addressed and are nearly absent from IDP literature;
- International agencies may have limited access to IDPs due to a site's poor security or remote location;



- IDP groups are difficult to identify; they may be extremely mobile or blended into the local community;
- Assistance may increase the vulnerability of the IDPs, especially for female-headed households who may fear being targeted by militants after receiving aid;
- Agencies may not coordinate assistance satisfactorily because their roles are not clearly defined;
- Assistance agencies tend not to move beyond the stage of emergency distributions and curative measures toward more sustainable and independence-promoting activities (such as seeds and tools, or income generation);
- In some countries, sanctions (or donor mandates) may prohibit development-oriented program activities needed at some long-term IDP sites.

The number of internal conflicts based on ethnic and religious differences are on the rise since the end of the Cold War. Programs for IDPs lack a framework for assistance and protection comparable to those that exist for refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has a clear mandate—supported by international refugee and humanitarian laws—to protect and assist refugees. No such framework exists, however, for assisting and protecting IDPs.

Certain UN agencies may take on, or be assigned, the role of lead agency for a particular IDP situation. Once designated, that agency deals with the emergency by assuming overall responsibility for the displaced population. To date, UN response has been more or less *ad hoc* depending on the particular interests, expertise, and agenda of the different agencies.

Humanitarian agencies normally respond to IDP emergencies by providing the basic or most urgent needs. Although it is not necessarily their objective or intent, these agencies may also become involved in protecting the physical safety of IDPs—particularly women and girls—and ensuring that their fundamental human rights are guaranteed.<sup>7</sup>

The home country is responsible for the care of its displaced people. Sometimes, governments simply lack the resources to provide assistance. In many cases, however, the

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<sup>6</sup> Cohen, Roberta, and Francis M. Deng, *Masses in Flight*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Cohen, Roberta. The Displaced Fall Through World's Safety Net. *The Christian Science Monitor*, Feb 6, 1997.

ruling authority is the source of suffering and will not aid IDPs. The Sudanese government has been accused of systematically persecuting certain displaced ethnic groups (mainly Christians from the south). In Afghanistan, thousands of displaced Afghan women—many of whom are widows—suffer under the restrictive regime of the Taliban, and have lost most of their basic human rights.

## II. GENDER ANALYSIS: SIMPLIFYING AN UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER

Applying a gender framework in humanitarian assistance is not complicated but does require a rudimentary understanding and acceptance of the basic premise upon which all gender theory rests. Gender, simply put, refers to the female and male roles within a given culture; these roles and the expected behaviors of men and women are based on cultural practices formed over time. One cannot study gender by concentrating on females or males to the exclusion of the other sex; gender involves dynamic interactions between the women and men.

Feminist social theory describes the social construction of gender. How gender is constructed explains the position of women in society. Women in developing countries negotiate their lives within a construction of gender framed by their particular cultural groups. When lives drastically change, as in the case of forced displacement, women often lose their negotiated positions and revert to less equitable social statuses.<sup>8</sup>

Several main theoretical frameworks underpin all writing on the integration of gender issues into humanitarian and development work. The first developed was the Harvard Framework, from which the People-Oriented-Planning method emerged. The Harvard Framework underscores the importance of examining, among other things, who does what, who owns what, and who controls what within a community. The Moser Method<sup>9</sup> is another useful framework that breaks gender-specific needs into practical needs and strategic interests. The Moser Method focuses on gender planning training as a means of meeting the special needs of women. Moser defines the triple role of women as reproductive, productive, and community managing.

UNICEF's system of gender analysis and training, Women's Equality & Empowerment Framework (WEEF), outlines a conceptual continuum of women's empowerment. WEEF does not discard the useful premise of the Harvard Model and the POP approach that emphasizes "access to resources." The Harvard Model addresses people's economic interests. It does not focus on women's equality or empowerment. The Harvard

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<sup>8</sup> For a cogent discussion of the biological versus the cultural roles of women refer to Shery B. Ortner, *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture*, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?", Boston: Beacon Press. 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Caroline Moser, *Gender Planning and Development: Theory, practice and training*. New York: Routledge 1993.

Model does not provide an analytical framework for looking at the political and ideological dimensions of women's development. The analysis then is limited to a technical perspective with no theoretical capacity for analyzing women's development at the level of inequality, discrimination and oppression. UNICEF has focused its interest on the process of empowerment by which women can overcome discrimination in the provision of resources. WEEF differs from other frameworks in its "bottom-up" perspective to improving women's lives. WEEF provides a systematic and analytic understanding of the grassroots empowerment process. Other frameworks espouse "top-down" perspectives in which the problems of women are identified by outsiders (researchers and field workers.) WEEF does not promote the treatment of women as the passive beneficiaries of projects.

The People-Oriented Planning (POP) method, a training tool developed by Mary Anderson and Catherine Overholt for the UNHCR and has become an important aid in gender planning. POP was designed to assist refugee workers in improving participation in and access to programs by providing a framework for analyzing the socio-cultural and economic factors in a refugee setting that could influence the success of planned activities. POP was first introduced in 1992. UNHCR is currently in the process of training all staff to use the POP method. Several NGOs have incorporated POP methods, and some UN agencies have borrowed certain aspects of POP for their gender training portfolios.

POP stresses that relief workers must analyze the social and economic roles of women, men, and children and understand how these roles will affect and be affected by program activities. The method emphasizes the need to understand the dynamics of change that the displaced population is undergoing. Participation of the beneficiaries is a major determinant in the success of relief operations and must include women and children along with men.

### **III. DISPLACED WOMEN: THE KEY ISSUES**

Displacement has different effects on women than it has on men, and differs during various stages of crises. When displacement occurs, far more damage results than simply the loss and destruction of goods and property; people's lives and the social fabric are left in tatters.<sup>10</sup> As terrible as the disruption may be, women usually suffer the effects more acutely than men do. Changes in gender roles are accelerated in situations of conflict as women are forced to assume responsibilities previously held by men.

Complex emergencies may upset the balance between men and women. Women and children often make up the majority of the IDP population. Reconstruction in post conflict periods may provide opportunities to build on the capacities of women that may have been extended by the IDP crisis.

#### **A. Significant Differences between IDPs and Refugees**

Refugees by definition have crossed international borders to seek a safe haven, most often they are fleeing conflict, and have suffered violations of their human rights. Refugees are eligible for international protection and assistance under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Internally displaced persons may suffer systematic violations of their human rights, conflict, ethnic or religious oppression, but remain within the borders of their own country and have no institutional or legal mechanism for receiving international assistance. They remain under the jurisdiction, and responsibility, of their governments. The system responsible for upholding the rights of IDPs may also be the system responsible for their displacement and the violations against their rights.

As traumatic to women as any displacement may be, usually the circumstances are worse for the internally displaced than for refugees, even though the situation in which the two will find themselves is similar. As a case in point, the author observed Burundi women refugees living in Tanzanian camps and displaced women living in Burundi. In the camps, refugees received health care services, food rations, primary education for their children, and adult skills-training. UNHCR protection officers monitored the refugees' physical safety, and international refugee laws delineated their human rights. In the Burundi displacement camps,

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<sup>10</sup> Segura-Escobar, Nora and Donny Meertens. "Uprootedness, Gender and Internal Displacement in Colombia," *Beyond Law*, Vol. 6, Issue 17, January 1997.

also called “regroupment centers,” these services were not available. Perpetrators of sexual violence and other exploitation went unpunished. No one stood up for the rights of women, as IDPs have no designated agency from which to seek protection in cases of rape and other violent acts.<sup>11</sup> Women interviewed in the Burundi camps confided that to survive they “had to be nice to the soldiers guarding the camp.” Sadly, the exchange of sex for protection or food is a common occurrence among internally displaced women, who have no recourse to international oversight and protection.

Multiple variables act upon service delivery and access to IDPs. Clearly, specific guidance regarding gender violence, protection and participation issues for displaced women and girls would be extremely useful to all agencies working with IDPs.

## **B. Effects of Displacement on Women**

The effects of displacement depend on its duration, but immediate manifestations include family separations, exposure to gender violence, trauma associated with the deaths of family members, impaired health, and the loss of the home and possessions. Displacement may effect women’s rights to inherit land and property. Over time, the cumulative effects of personal loss may result in depression and physical deterioration. Post-traumatic stress syndrome is a common ailment among women who have been displaced for more than a few months. The long-term impact of displacement on women may mean the permanent loss of social and cultural ties, the termination of career and regular employment, and disruption or loss of educational opportunities. Some marriages do not survive the stress of displacement; divorces are common in IDP settings. Children suffer most when displacement spans periods of several years. They miss education during their formative years, undergo immeasurable trauma and psychological stress, suffer stunted growth due to extended poor nutrition, and have difficulties in socialization.

### **1. Changing gender roles**

Displacement also changes gender roles as families become separated, relatives are killed, and homes are destroyed. When such events occur, women may become heads of families and find themselves forced into unaccustomed roles and responsibilities for which

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<sup>11</sup> In situations where a UN agency has lead agency responsibility for IDPs, procedures may exist for handling gender abuse cases, but there is no protocol across agencies.

they are ill prepared. The IDP camps in which women and children seek refuge present a lifestyle alien to their cultural values and in this unfamiliar social context gender roles change radically. Women's vulnerability to sexual exploitation, domestic violence, and rape increases as gender roles shift.

Domestic violence is often the outcome of gender role reversals when men—normally the providers for their families—face the idleness and humiliation of IDP life. The stress, uncertainty, and deprivation can cause men to take out their frustrations on their families. Assistance agencies need to consider the potential of domestic violence when planning assistance programs that exclude the male members of the household.

## **2. Gender violence**

Gender violence in conflict situations is a violation of the fundamental human right to mental and physical integrity as protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>12</sup>, CEDAW<sup>13</sup>, and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment<sup>14</sup>.

Violence is the chief source of fear for displaced women and girls. Researchers have begun to focus attention on the long-term effects of living under the threat of violence<sup>15</sup>. Conflict situations greatly increase the violence inflicted upon them; at no other time are women and girls more vulnerable. During conflicts, women often not only lack the protection of their families and spouses, but also are under threat by armed soldiers, who may regard them as spoils of war. Even when abuses are not aimed at them personally, women suffer violations of their human rights disproportionately when the normal codes of social conduct are ignored because of conflict.

Gender-based violence refers to violence targeted to a person because of their gender, or that affects them because of their special roles or responsibilities in their society. In many cases women have sole responsibility for their households. Certain responsibilities of

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<sup>12</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, General Assembly, A/RES/17 A (III), 10 December 1948 (UDHR).

<sup>13</sup> The Convention to Eliminate all Discrimination Against Women, A/RES/34/180, 18 December 1979 (CEDAW).

<sup>14</sup> Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, General Assembly, A/RES/39/46. 10 December 1984 (Torture Convention)

<sup>15</sup> Roe, Michael, "Displaced Women in Settings of Continuing Armed Conflict" in *Refugee Women and Their Mental Health: Shattered Societies, Shattered Lives, Women and Therapy*, Vol. 13, Nos 1 and 2, 1992.

women's gender roles put them at greater risk of injury: crossing landmine fields or walking near military encampments in the course of their gender-defined task of searching for water and firewood subjects women to maiming, crossfire injuries and sexual attacks. Gender-based violence may be manifested in several ways: domestic violence, rape, and forced prostitution and marriages. Although rape and other sexual abuses are recognized as serious crimes in early humanitarian laws, only recently has the international community addressed these forms of violence as serious infringements of fundamental women's rights. As noted earlier, internally displaced women are more vulnerable to sexual abuse than are refugees because few institutional mechanisms are in place to protect them.

Rape is a deliberate tactic used in war to dehumanize and dishonor not only the woman but also her husband and the entire community. The humiliation and degradation of rape are only compounded by the impunity of the perpetrators: Amnesty International reported a Peruvian official admitting: "...rape was to be expected when troops were based in rural areas, that it was somehow 'natural' and that prosecutions could not be expected."<sup>16</sup>

The incidence of rape against refugee and internally displaced women is even higher than reported;<sup>17</sup> women IDPs are often reluctant to report rape for fear of retribution from the perpetrators. Other forms of sexual coercion are rife in IDP settings; young girls are often abducted, forced into marriage, sold, or forced into prostitution. Special programs are needed to reduce the likelihood of such occurrences. In general, the greater the mobility of displaced women, the greater their vulnerability. Therefore, programs for displaced women need to pay special attention to situations where displaced women are highly mobile.

### **3. Breakup of families**

The loss of social support systems and community solidarity experienced when rural people are displaced and moved to urban centers may cause families to break up. Families that lose their social networks of support often lose everything. Men may be unable to find work or may become involved in the conflict leaving the woman responsible for the household—often an unaccustomed role for which she may be ill prepared.

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<sup>16</sup> Amnesty International (August 1990) *Conventions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women*. Transcript of testimony before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC.

<sup>17</sup> Segura-Escobar, Nora and Donny Meertens. "Uprootedness, Gender and Internal Displacement in Colombia," *Beyond Law*, Vol. 6, Issue 17, 1997.



Women separated from their husbands or widowed must take on the responsibilities of providing for the household. IDPs from rural areas must adapt to living in an urban environment, and often find only menial or degrading work.

#### **4. Loss of Social and Cultural Ties**

Displaced women generally lack community support; in many instances, the community is fragmented. Key opinion holders, respected elders, and important role models are frequently absent. Displaced women in former Yugoslavia reported feeling unwelcome in the areas where they had fled, and suffered discrimination at the hands of local people.<sup>18</sup> The disintegration of community unity increases the vulnerability of women and children and weakens their coping mechanisms. Women and adolescent girls become easy targets for abuse when they are separated from normal support systems, husbands and other male family members. Internally displaced women continue to require protection against further displacement and abuses even after they return home. Women especially need support from their communities to defend their rights and cope with their plight. When families lose their support networks they may fall victim to crime and violence.

#### **C. Protection for internally displaced women**

“It’s cultural, there is nothing we can do” is a response often heard from aid workers to excuse themselves from responding to cases of human rights abuse. Aid workers have used the “cultural practice” response to excuse their inaction in the following documented cases involving displaced persons:<sup>19</sup>

- A male school headmaster was caught after repeatedly raping his young female pupils;
- Family members of a 14-year-old girl received death threats, were assaulted, and shot at when they tried to protect the girl from a forced marriage to a militia member;
- Over one thousand young internally displaced girls in a West African camp were forcefully circumcised.

Agencies working with IDPs in various cultural settings must be prepared to address misconceptions regarding cultural practices when dealing with issues such as those in the cases mentioned above. Assistance agencies must take urgent action to educate their local and

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<sup>18</sup> Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Refugee Women in Former Yugoslavia*, 1995.

international staff about human rights, refugee laws, UN conventions and resolutions (such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and CEDAW), agency policies and operating practices in order to combat harmful practices that violate international standards. “It’s cultural” is not acceptable as an excuse to ignore requests for protection. Agencies must clearly state their policies, and staff must be held accountable for carrying out their agencies’ policies and practices. Agencies and their staff must bear in mind that one of the founding principles of human rights law is that it is not culturally relative, but that basic human rights are universally applicable as a matter of law.

### Issues

It is a mistake to assume that the presence of international organizations alone will protect IDPs. We need only look to the Kibeho Camp massacre in Rwanda, where atrocities against IDPs took place under the eyes of the international community, to see the fallacy of such an assumption. “The UN was unable to contribute to the protection of thousands, mostly women and children, who were killed in the Rwandan army’s operation to close the camps—a move, the government claimed, that was fully endorsed by the international community.”<sup>20</sup> What would have made a difference at Kibeho? Would the responses by those who tried—too late—to prevent the massacres have been successful if the Guiding Principles had been available to fortify their actions? Would the outcome have been different if a lead UN agency had had a clear mandate to protect the IDPs?

Structural measures can be taken to increase protection and reduce the risk of violence against women and girls living in IDP camps. Such measures include improved lighting, changes in the camp layout, community security patrols, provisioning of firewood, locating water sources and latrines in safe areas, and employing women as guards. Moreover, assistance agencies can support community awareness programs and incorporate gender sensitization into regular programs.

The *UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women, and Sexual Violence Against Refugees: Guidelines on Prevention and Response* are excellent resources. These

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<sup>19</sup> These examples are drawn from actual cases documented by the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children during field assessment missions to Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Pakistan.

<sup>20</sup> Kleine-Ahlbrandt, Stephanie, *The Protection Gap in the International Protection of Internally Displaced Persons: The Case of Rwanda*, Geneva: The University of Geneva: Institution of Higher Learning.

guidelines should be more widely implemented by all agencies working with refugee and internally displaced women. Guidelines are needed that address the specific aspects of protecting internally displaced women and girls. The UNHCR's guidelines provide useful models that could be used in the design of an IDP protection manual.

Basic everyday chores become risky when women venture out in search of firewood or water—activities that greatly increase their vulnerability to physical attacks. Women may be forced to barter sex for food for their families, or even to obtain water. Recent reports from the Sudan indicate that prostitution is widespread in the IDP camps. Displacement in the Sudan has caused the economic disempowerment of young women, many of whom now resort to selling sex to survive. The incidence of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, is believed to be high (based on the high prevalence of symptoms, not tests.)

The same report from the Sudan noted an above-average pregnancy rate. Several women interviewed mentioned the desire to become pregnant so they could qualify for supplemental food rations. The response of one agency operating in the area was to stress the need for family planning programs. This example illustrates the “knee-jerk” reaction often seen in emergency relief operations. In a crisis environment with people on the verge of starvation there is pressure to act quickly. For many problems though the quick fix may be the wrong answer and may exacerbate the problem. Access to family planning is important and should be available to all IDPs. But the problem in this example is access to food, and the solution lies in addressing the ability of women to feed their families and themselves. The magnitude of the problems of internally displaced women and girls is not well understood. Better data collection methods, disaggregated by age and sex, would help agencies provide assistance. Unless accurate profiles are generated, needs assessments and monitoring activities will not reflect true pictures of IDP populations.

The social disruption of displacement dismantles the social status of women, and effectively returns them to subordination based on their physical vulnerability. Having lost their social and cultural under-pinning, women in displacement may return to, or first experience, a vulnerable state. Taking advantage of the weakest has long been a key strategy of conflict; fighters are trained to zero in on their enemy's weak points. In situations of displacement, women and girls become easy targets of aggression, a vulnerable flank upon

which aggressors focus their attacks to humiliate and defeat their opponent. For the internally displaced, the aggressor may be their own government, or fellow villagers turned rebel. Capitalizing on the notion that women represent the collective ‘honor’ of a group, by dishonoring or conquering women the aggressor gains ground. The international assistance community must intervene to protect the rights of women and girls and thwart attempts at cultural repression and extermination, even if doing so means suspending or replacing cultural practices that in normal times would be considered essential to a culture’s vitality.

#### **D. The fundamental right to basic human needs**

When IDPs are forced to flee their homes, often they escape with only the clothes on their backs. Women are usually the ones who must secure the family’s necessities. The basic human needs are the fundamental right of all displaced persons. These include food, water, shelter, non-food items (blankets, clothes, pots,etc..), health care, sanitation facilities, education, and opportunities for income generation. In addition to helping with basic rights, assistance agencies should seek to provide displaced women with opportunities to achieve or maintain levels of self-determination, as well as opportunities to make decisions that affect their lives. No amount of material assistance, however, will benefit internally displaced women if they are not physically secure. The buckets and blankets supplied by international agencies were of no use to the hundreds massacred at Kibeho camp in Rwanda.

##### **1. Shelter**

Internally displaced persons are considered “temporary”; assistance is thus categorized as emergency relief. According to Sue Ellis and Sultan Barakat, who studied the long-term effects of ‘temporary’ accommodation on displaced persons in Croatia, relief efforts focus on saving lives, not on livelihood preservation.<sup>21</sup> Governments or relief agencies may provide temporary shelter for IDPs: “the emphasis is on logistics—speed, transportation and construction materials—while ignoring the economic, physical, social, political, and psychological realities of human need.”<sup>22</sup> Today’s displacement events last an average of six

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<sup>21</sup> Ellis Sue and Sultan Barakat. “From Relief to Development: The Long-term Effects of ‘Temporary’ Accommodation on Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Republic of Croatia,” *Disasters* V20N2. 1996.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, page 112.

years (Asia and Africa), but 21 percent have lasted for 10 years or more.<sup>23</sup> Typically, internally displaced women are not consulted in housing determinations. As short-term housing slips into long-term and even permanent solutions, the detrimental psychological and physical effects worsen. This paper recommends that housing providers use participatory approaches and enlist women in all housing planning activities. When women are part of the decision-making process, housing design, location, and construction are better suited to their needs.

Homelessness and lack of adequate shelter force many displaced women and young girls into prostitution. In Sierra Leone, girls who have been released or have escaped from the rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), find their way into towns such as Bo. Many lived as captives of the RUF for years, and are now afraid to return to their home villages because they believe they will be unwelcome. They sleep in market stalls at night and eat whatever leftover food they can forage or beg. Many eventually turn to prostitution to survive. Several Bo women set up a drop-in center for nearly one hundred homeless girls who were former captives. The women contacted several UN agencies and a few NGOs to ask for support for their center. They were told such assistance was not the responsibility of the agencies, though the girls desperately needed medical care, food, housing, and skills training. International attention has focused on demobilizing boy soldiers but little notice is made of the rights of girls. Traumatized girls may need even more help reintegrating into society than do boys.

The Graca Machel<sup>24</sup> study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children calls attention to the plight of children separated from families and their exploitation as soldiers and captives of war. The social reintegration of girls affected by armed conflict has not received the attention needed.

## **2. Right to Food**

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<sup>23</sup> Schmeidl, Susanne. "Comparative trends in forced displacement: IDPs and refugees, 1964-96," in *Internally Displaced People A Global Survey* edited by Janie Hampton. Norwegian Refugee Council. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd. 1998.

<sup>24</sup> Machel, Graca. Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, UN Doc. A/51/306 of 26 August 1996.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that displaced women and girls are worse off than men; they receive an unequal ration of food, eat less, and eat last.<sup>25</sup> Female-headed households fare worse in terms of food allocations, especially when men control the distribution. The ideal method of assuring that women get their share of food in displacement settings has not been established, although the World Food Programme tries to ensure that women are the direct beneficiaries of food aid. Regardless of who collects the food, what really matters is who ends up eating it. Reliable data on household livelihood and food security among IDPs are scarce. Both CARE and Save the Children have begun to look more closely at livelihoods and household food supplies in a number of locations. That approach makes sense because it reveals whether or not food actually reaches the intended beneficiaries. These programs have produced useful assessment tools for gathering information. The shortfall of the approach is that it is time consuming, requires trained field workers, and good access to the population to be studied. An advantage of using the household as the unit of analysis is the method identifies “vulnerable households” without singling-out particular groups such as widows or female-headed households.

Women’s lack of access to agricultural land often underlies their food insecurity. Women farmers may be denied access to land because of national laws. For example, in Burundi women do not inherit land either from husbands or from their parents. In most cases there are no legal measures in place to ensure equitable treatment.<sup>26</sup> Without access to agricultural land, women are forced into perpetual dependence for food. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Article 14.2, addresses the rights of rural women, in particular that they have equal treatment in land reform, resettlement schemes, and access to agricultural credit and loans. Under CEDAW there are no immediate remedies for women whose rights are violated as there are no avenues for individual petitions. Moreover, CEDAW cannot force states to comply with their reporting obligations.

### **3. Right to Health Care**

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<sup>25</sup> Voutira, Eftihia, *Improving Social and Gender Planning in Emergency Operations*, a report Commissioned by the World Food Programme, Refugee Studies Programme. Dec 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Deng, Francis M. *Internally Displaced Persons, Profiles in Displacement: Burundi*. United Nations, E/CN.4/1995/50/Add.2 28 Nov 1994.

Access to health care poses a serious problem to displaced persons; women and children usually suffer the most from inadequate health care. Women's reproductive responsibilities added to the conditions found in IDP settlements, poor nutrition, inadequate sanitation, and communicable disease compromise the state of women's health.

Internally displaced women suffer more health problems than do non-displaced women. Overall, mortality rates are higher among IDP populations than they are for refugee populations. The lack of reproductive health services, including family planning and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, may present the greatest threat to the mortality of women IDPs. In certain cultures, women will not seek health services from a male practitioner. More female health workers are needed to overcome this obstacle in IDP settings.

#### **4. Education, skills training, and economic opportunity**

The majority of displaced persons receive no educational opportunities or skills training that would prepare them to earn incomes. In most displaced settings data collection is poor or non-existent; thus data on education may not be available. As noted by Roberta Cohen,<sup>27</sup> even though education and literacy training can lead to employment opportunities and self-sufficiency, development and assistance agencies have not become interested in funding such programs for displaced persons. Donors are reluctant to fund education because of its association with permanence. Yet, education is a key to rehabilitation and a major step towards independence.

Most IDPs have limited opportunities for income generation. Apart from small, short-termed projects supported by the UN or NGOs, and linked to skills training, few jobs are available to IDPs. Many IDPs lack social ties and connections that would help them secure employment. Women are less likely to find work in urban centers due to lower literacy rates, lack of daycare facilities to care for children and fear of moving around in unfamiliar surroundings on their own.

#### **E. Participation of Internally Displaced Women**

Displaced women often have no role in camp activities and programs that directly affect them. Most programs are designed for, rather than by, IDPs. Consequently, many

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<sup>27</sup> Cohen, Roberta, *Refugee and Internally Displaced Women: A Development Perspective*, The Brookings Institution, 1995.

assistance programs are inappropriate and ill-conceived. Some programs actually do more harm than good. For example, in the Rwandan refugee camps in Tanzania there were so many women without husbands that specially marked tents were set up and situated in an area designated “safe.” During the brief period when the system was used, the number of sexual attacks increased markedly.<sup>28</sup> The bright orange tents acted like beacons pointing to unaccompanied women. Had the women been consulted, more suitable and safer arrangements would have been made.

The greater the involvement of internally displaced women in planning, designing, and monitoring of programs the less likely abuse and exploitation will occur. Given the scarcity of documentation on IDP programs, verification of this claim reverts to successful participatory programming borne out in refugee studies. Internally displaced women need support from their communities to defend their rights and to cope with their plight. Agencies can encourage them to become more involved in existing organizations at the local level.<sup>29</sup>

Participation may be defined as the active and meaningful involvement of people at different levels in the decision-making process for the determination of societal goals and the allocation of resources to achieve them, and in the voluntary executive of resulting programs and projects. When displaced women participate in activities that affect them, they are less likely to suffer from isolation, depression, and are more likely to have better self-esteem and self-confidence. Participation will increase the probability of successful outcomes of interventions because programs will be more suitable to the needs and wants of the beneficiaries. The higher the level of involvement of internally displaced women in programs such as food distribution and food for work programs, the greater the chances of them receiving the equal entitlements, especially for female-headed households.

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<sup>28</sup> Field notes of author of an interview with a UN agency staff.

<sup>29</sup> Obregon, Liliana and Maria Stavropoulou. “In Search of Hope: The Plight of Displaced Colombians,” in *The Forsaken People: Case Studies of the Internally Displaced*, edited by Roberta Cohen and Francis Deng, 1998.



#### **IV. INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO THE NEEDS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED WOMEN**

##### **Lack of a Clear Mandate for Assisting IDPs**

The UN has no procedural strategy for mandating the responsibility for the protection of IDPs. Those concerned with IDP issues within international organizations generally agree that it is not feasible to set up a new agency to assist IDPs. As Roberta Cohen has suggested, “what is needed is an international system that assures that no major case of internal displacement goes neglected.” Cohen further states that with a central coordinating mechanism in place, the appropriate agencies with the expertise to respond rapidly could do so without having to be asked in each instance.<sup>30</sup>

The UN should establish a coordinating body to assist IDPs, and to ensure that gender and protection issues are a priority. Internally displaced persons—particularly women and children—will continue to be subjected to human rights abuses until their protection is a priority at the highest UN level.

In the meantime, individual agencies can assume lead roles in certain IDP areas. The logistics of such arrangements can be worked out and coordinated appropriately among UN agencies and with NGOs and government agents. It is vital that these agencies understand gender concerns and implement gender-sensitive programming.

**UN Secretariat:** The Secretary-General appointed the Special Representative on Internal Displacement, Francis M. Deng, in 1992. Through Mr. Deng’s country visits, reports, books, and his introduction of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, he has brought to the fore the needs of IDPs. The Guiding Principles provide a foundation upon which the international assistance community may build. The principles provide the legal framework upon which to structure gender-sensitive assistance that observes international human rights laws and conventions. The Guiding Principles will advance discussions throughout the UN system and open the door for improved coordination and progress towards a shared conceptual framework for assisting IDPs.

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<sup>30</sup> Cohen, Roberta, “The Displaced Fall Through World’s Safety Net,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 6, 1997.

Francis Deng and his colleague Roberta Cohen at the Brookings Institution Project on Internal Displacement recently produced *The Forsaken People and Masses in Flight*.<sup>31</sup> These volumes provide detailed case studies drawn from Deng's investigative country studies and from IDP literature. These important contributions increase the general understanding of IDP issues.

**Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA):** OCHA coordinates efforts of the United Nations bodies for humanitarian assistance and IDPs at the UN headquarters level. The OCHA recently appointed a person to be in charge of gender concerns. In special cases, for example in Afghanistan, OCHA is working with UNDP to dispatch a gender advisor in the field.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) designated its Working Group as the main inter-agency Forum on IDPs. The Representative of the Secretary-General on Internal Displacement has suggested a more pro-active role for the IASC whereby it could be more active in contingency planning for IDP issues, in assessing the roles agencies are willing to play, and in apportioning responsibility to each agency in resolving IDP issues. The Working Group of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee designated UNICEF, the Secretary-General's Special Representative on IDPs, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) as focal points for a project on best practices for IDPs. The Working Group assigned the Norwegian Refugee Council/Global IDP program to conduct a feasibility study for a database on IDPs.

The 1996 study, Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, prepared by DANIDA, noted the lack of consistent working definitions among agencies and an inadequate understanding between agencies and donors as to what constitutes an appropriate level of investment in emergency preparedness.

**UNICEF:** UNICEF is active in a number of internally displaced situations, in keeping with its mandate to improve the lives of women and children by providing services in the areas of health care, education, nutrition, and sanitation. Sometimes the organization has been the lead agency for situations with large numbers of internally displaced, for example in

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<sup>31</sup> Cohen, Roberta and Deng, Francis editors, *The Forsaken People and Masses in Flight*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 1998

southern Sudan. UNICEF has demonstrated its recognition of the integral connection between assistance and protection. It has made efforts to address protection problems particularly when they affect the delivery of assistance.<sup>32</sup>

UNICEF has taken the lead role in addressing the gender and IDP issue, demonstrating its intent to promote gender-responsive programming and to mainstream gender awareness throughout the organization by promoting the use of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Training Manual (June 1994).<sup>33</sup>

**UNHCR:** The UNHCR has assumed responsibility for IDPs in certain situations. Limitation in its mandate, however, as well as financial limitations, staffing, and other constraints restrict UNHCR's capacity to respond to IDP needs in all situations. Clear guidelines from headquarters regarding involvement on IDP issues are needed in the field so that solutions may be found quickly. UNHCR's mandate is to protect refugees; it does not have a statutory mandate for assisting victims of internal conflict, although it may be requested to do so by the Secretary-General or by the government of the country of displacement. By establishing the position of Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women and appointing regional focal persons, UNHCR has demonstrated its interest in addressing the needs of refugee women.

**UN High Commissioner for Human Rights:** UNHCHR could play a greater role in the protection for the internally displaced, but has been limited by operational and financial constraints. The UNHCHR is mandated, however, to promote and protect "the effective enjoyment" of all human rights. This includes monitoring the human rights situation on the ground and providing technical assistance.

**United Nations Development Programme:** UNDP, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV), has fielded 16 UNV gender specialists to support UNDP and UN system activities in country offices. These specialists are working to mainstream gender into UN programming. This program does not target IDPs, but could be a model for other UN programs.

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<sup>32</sup> Deng, Francis M. Report to the Secretary-General, E/CN.4/1995/50-Feb 95.

<sup>33</sup> UNICEF Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment. Developed by Longwe, Clarke and Associates for UNICEF, Training and Development Section, June 1994

**United Nations Development Fund for Women:** UNIFEM's African Women in Crisis (AFWIC) program addresses concerns of refugee and displaced women in Central and East Africa. Their programming includes reproductive health care, trauma counseling and training and development of skills.

**World Food Programme:** WFP has provided food aid to internally displaced persons for over 30 years. The agency takes a definitive stand on engaging the participation of women in food distribution. WFP is committed to:

- reducing gender gaps in the access to resources, employment, education, and skills development through the earmarking of resources;
- distributing relief food directly to the household's senior female, where possible, using participatory approaches;
- adopting special measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making on the planning, management, and implementation of food-assisted activities;
- giving due consideration to women's specific nutritional needs when designing food aid interventions;
- generating and disseminating gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation; and working with NGOs under contractual arrangements that specify conditions to fulfill gender-specific planning, targeting, distribution of food aid, and monitoring of progress.<sup>34</sup>

### **Non-UN International Organizations**

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) assists war-affected populations. ICRC provides protection and assistance to both IDPs and refugees. ICRC's neutrality also applies to gender issues; they normally do not implement programs that target one sex or the other. The ICRC is involved in many activities pertaining to the IDP situation such as tracing, visiting detainees, looking for disappeared persons, to mention but a few.

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<sup>34</sup> World Food Programme, *Sudan Emergency Annual Report*, 1996.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) focuses on a wide range of issues dealing with migration, spanning the gap between refugees and IDPs.<sup>35</sup> The Constitution of IOM makes specific reference to activities on behalf of IDPs. Following this mandate, IOM made cooperative agreements to assist IDPs in more than 30 States and has initiated programs to address the needs of IDPs in those locations. IOM's assistance to States is in the form of technical cooperation for building the capacity of States to deal with the problem of internal displacement. These activities include: information sharing, training officials, supplying technical equipment, and information management systems. IOM conducts data collection and analysis of humanitarian trends and contributes to the documentation of migration and displacement. IOM facilitates transportation for IDPs returning to their home areas and provides assistance in resettling them.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work with both IDP and refugee groups, depending on their institutional mandates and partnership relationships with UN agencies. Because guidelines which specify protection and participation protocols for IDPs have not been available, each organization deals with gender issues according to its own policies and interests. The commitment to gender equity programming varies among, and within, organizations. "Industry" standards and means to impose accountability are missing.

Human rights NGOs with gender foci play important roles in IDP situations, monitoring and reporting on abuses. Acting as watchdogs, they can help spotlight serious protection problems and advocate for action. Human Rights Watch Women's Rights Project, Amnesty International and the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children have issued reports on the impact of armed conflict and displacement on women and girls.

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<sup>35</sup> Cuny, Fred, "Assistance in the Post-Cold War Era," in *Humanitarianism Across Borders Sustaining Civilians in Times of War*, edited by Thomas G. Weiss and Larry Minear. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 1993

## **V. NEXT STEPS--RECOMMENDATIONS AND A PLAN OF ACTION**

### **What Can UNICEF Do?**

UNICEF's mandate as the leading agency in promoting the rights of children worldwide gives it an important role in advocating and promoting the rights and concerns of internally displaced women and girls. UNICEF's experience working with IDP populations reflects its strong commitment to relief and development efforts aimed at ensuring the rights of women and children. The example of the Operation Lifeline Sudan illustrates UNICEF's dedicated efforts in gaining access to displaced persons.

The gap in substantive information pertaining to displaced women became apparent during the preparation of this paper and the accompanying Annotated Bibliography. Responsible actions must be based on reliable data; clearly such data is lacking. Substantive research is needed to fill the void. A number of IDP situations have continued for several years. These settings present opportunities for long-term research. Such studies would produce information far beyond the type of data gathered during typical assessments that usually employ rapid assessment methods—those most often used to write program plans and funding proposals.

The following points suggest ways that UNICEF can improve its work on behalf of displaced women and children and improve assistance programming.

1. Compile documented case studies detailing the circumstances of displaced women with particular attention to:
  - a. The right to physical safety and protection (including documenting incidences of violence against women and girls)
  - b. reproductive health issues: family planning, pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and HIV, and counseling services following rape, torture and other forms of gender violence.
  - c. identification and documentation of coping mechanisms which adversely affect the health and welfare of women and girls
  - d. disaggregated data on the general health of women and girls, including their nutritional statuses, behavior and cultural practice shifts in displaced settings

- e. social behavior and shifts in gender roles and responsibilities (use of Knowledge, Attitudes, Beliefs (KAB) surveys, focus groups and cluster samples)
  - f. household livelihood assessments (particularly food security for female headed households, and property inheritance rights)
2. UNICEF should consider sponsoring a series of roundtable discussions or workshops on IDP protection and gender. Strategies are needed to address such issues as: kidnapping, forced military conscription, sexual exploitation, sexual violence, and physical and psychological trauma resulting from exposure to conflict and violence.
  3. UNICEF should consider promoting an inter-agency mechanism to ensure institutional responsibility for gender in IDP situations. For example, UNICEF might encourage agencies to take the initiative in establishing regional or situational advisory committees or task forces which address the wide range of gender concerns outlined above.
  4. UNICEF and other UN agencies should endorse the continuance of the position of the Special Representative on Internally Displaced Persons. The Special Representative is the only individual in the UN system with a mandate from the Secretary General to focus exclusively on internal displacement.
  5. UNICEF should continue to use its good offices to influence other agencies to place less emphasis on distribution of material assistance and focus on self-determination and community development efforts. Humanitarian assistance providers must acknowledge the direct relationship between access to adequate income and the protection for displaced women: agencies should provide skills training, literacy courses and micro-credit opportunities.

### **Advocacy**

Women and children make up 80 percent of the world's internally displaced. Why hasn't this inspired a more urgent humanitarian response? Advocacy is needed to advance the international human rights agenda and to disseminate important instruments such as the

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, so that these are well understood by UN agencies, NGOs, and governments. If the Guiding Principles are to have an impact they must be widely distributed, discussed, and incorporated into codes of conduct. A widespread training and indoctrination program for staff on the Guiding Principles will help to ensure their effectiveness.

All agencies working with displaced persons should commit to promoting and distributing the Guiding Principles. As with all policies and guidelines, their effectiveness is limited by the extent to which they are implemented. Given the urgency of the IDP problem, the lack of agency mandate, and the absence of operational guidelines to assist and protect displaced persons, every effort must be made to close the gap between the principles and their implementation.

In the absence of a single agency mandate for assisting IDPs, UN agencies must diligently work to improve institutional arrangements. Assistance programs for IDPs can be improved by agencies with gender-balanced field staffs that will be better positioned to respond appropriately to the needs of displaced women and girls.

UN agencies and their implementing partners need to take new approaches to assisting internally displaced persons. In particular, they need to focus greater attention on protection, on sustaining livelihoods, on self-determination and independence building activities, on involving women in the peace process, reconciliation, and on managing community development activities.