

ENVIRONMENTAL RECOVERY AND DISPLACEMENT IN POST-DISASTER AND POST-CONFLICT SETTINGS¹

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper focuses on the importance of environmental restoration in ensuring durable solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in post-crisis settings. The paper is informed by missions conducted by Refugees International to some of the worst climate-related crises in recent history, including the 2010 Pakistan Floods, the 2012 drought and food crisis in the Sahel, and the 2013 typhoon in the Philippines. Refugees and IDPs face unique and significant environmental risks in the context of armed conflict and disasters: gender-based violence, loss of resource-based livelihoods, resource conflicts, and the vulnerabilities associated with relocation to degraded and hazard-prone areas. Opportunities and challenges related to integrating environmental restoration into programming for early recovery, livelihoods, and disaster risk reduction are discussed. The paper concludes with recommendations for how more holistic humanitarian approaches that incorporate environmental dimensions can be effective strategies for ensuring long-term recovery and durable solutions for displaced populations in post-crisis settings.

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INTRODUCTION

During and in the immediate aftermath of armed conflict and natural disasters, the

environment and natural resources are rarely considered a priority by governments, humanitarian agencies or donors given the massive need for life-saving assistance like

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food, water, healthcare, and shelter. However, environmental destruction resulting from conflicts and natural disasters—as well pre-existing them—creates significant protection risks to those affected by these crises and significantly undermines their ability to recover. This is particularly true for displaced populations.

This paper focuses on the importance of environmental restoration in ensuring durable solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in post-crisis settings. The first section begins with a brief introduction to Refugees International and its Climate Displacement Program, followed by an overview of the linkages between natural disasters, climate change, humanitarian crises and displacement. Section two delves into some of the unique protection risks degraded environmental conditions present to IDPs and refugees, followed by recommendations for how environmental recovery can be part of an effective strategy for protecting displaced people as well as facilitating durable solutions.

While the importance of environmental management in displacement camp settings is discussed, considerable attention is given to the relevance of environmental recovery in the context of recent trends including protracted crises, non-camp settings, and urban displacement. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations for how more holistic humanitarian approaches that incorporate environmental dimensions—especially as relate to early recovery, restoration of livelihoods, and disaster risk reduction—might prove effective strategies

for ensuring long-term recovery and durable solutions for displaced populations in post-crisis settings.

THE ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN DISPLACEMENT: EMERGING LINKAGES

Natural Disasters, Climate Change, and RI's Entrée into the Environmental Realm

For 35 years, Refugees International (RI) has engaged in advocacy on behalf of millions of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) across the globe. Formed in 1979 as a citizens' movement in response to the Indochinese refugee crisis, RI expanded in the following decades to become a preeminent advocacy organization for the needs of refugees, IDPs, and stateless people living in limbo without citizenship rights.

Informed by field missions to countries experiencing displacement crises, RI documents displaced people's needs for basic services such as food, water, and shelter, as well as protection from harm. We then formulate expert recommendations to policy-makers and those engaged in the humanitarian response (e.g., national governments, the U.S. and other major donors, UN agencies) to ensure that refugees, IDPs, and stateless persons are adequately protected and assisted.²

As RI moved into the 21st century, it became evident to its leadership that war and conflict were not the only drivers of displacement. Disasters brought on by natural hazards were responsible for displacing increasing numbers of people, often overwhelming the capacity of national

² RI's independence (the organization accepts no government or UN funding) allows for impartial and fearless advocacy with the interests of only displaced

people in mind. For more information, see www.refugeesinternational.org

governments to respond. This was especially true in poor and conflict-ridden states which already were of concern to RI. Moreover, increasing evidence of global climate change and its projected impacts such as more frequent and severe floods, storms and droughts presented an emerging threat with significant and complex implications for population displacement and the international humanitarian system. RI was concerned that the current normative frameworks were ill-equipped and insufficiently resourced to effectively protect the growing numbers of people uprooted by extreme weather and the effects of climate change. In the case of those forced to flee their countries altogether, RI recognized that the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (UN, 1951), which defines who is a refugee, their rights, and the legal obligations of states to protect and assist them, would be inadequate given the rather proscribed definition of who qualifies as a “refugee” under the Convention.³ RI was concerned that those forced to flee their countries as a result of natural disasters or the effects of climate change may not be included in the Refugee Convention, creating a significant protection gap.

However, it was not until 2009 and the war in Darfur that RI was compelled to take up the issue more concretely. The tragic events in Darfur provided present-day evidence of the propensity of growing natural resource scarcity brought on by drought and other environmental changes to fuel underlying ethnic, social and political tensions. RI became deeply concerned that

the significant legal, policy, and institutional gaps in the humanitarian framework for addressing and responding to climate-related displacement were not being adequately addressed by the U.S. government, the UN, or the international community more broadly.

In late 2009 RI launched the Climate Displacement Program. The goal of the program is to educate policymakers and the public about the devastating impact of natural disasters and climate change on human security, and forge solutions that protect and assist those displaced by climate-related crises. Since the program’s founding, RI has conducted missions to some of the worst climate-related crises in recent history including the 2010 Pakistan Floods, the 2012 drought and food crisis in the Sahel, and the 2013 typhoon in the Philippines. (RI’s experience assessing these disasters informed many of the observations and conclusions in this paper.) In addition, the program advocates for broader solutions, including the need to increase investments in preparedness and disaster risk reduction measures in order to mitigate the impacts of climate-related crises on displacement of vulnerable populations. RI is also a member of the consultative committee to the Nansen Initiative, a state-led, bottom-up consultative process launched by the Swiss and Norwegian governments in 2012 intended to build consensus on the development of a protection agenda for those displaced across international borders by natural hazards, including the effects of climate change (Nansen Initiative, no date).

³ A “refugee” as defined under the Convention is someone who: “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political

opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”

Conflicts, Natural Disasters, and Human Displacement

Conflict, persecution, and disasters—both natural and man-made—often result in significant population displacement by forcing people to flee in order to avoid harm. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were 15.2 million refugees at the beginning of 2013 although this number is likely to have increased in 2013 and 2014 as a result of the ongoing crisis in Syria, and new eruptions of violence in the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Iraq. In addition, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) estimates that in 2013, 33.3 million people were displaced within their own countries by armed conflict, generalized violence, and human rights violations (IDMC, 2014, p. 9).

The numbers of people displaced by natural disasters is also enormous, although less well understood. IDMC collects annual figures for people displaced within their own countries by disasters related to hazards such as storms, floods, and earthquakes. According to its most recent report, in 2013, 22 million people were internally displaced by such events, primarily floods and storms (IDMC, 2014b, p. 36). This was three times the number of people displaced by conflict and violence. The number of people displaced either in their own countries or across borders by more slowly unfolding hazards like drought, or more gradual environmental changes like desertification, coastal erosion and sea level rise, is not known.

Leaving behind homes, personal belongings, and means for earning a livelihood, displaced populations flee in search of protection and assistance. Often displaced people find refuge with family members or among local communities in safe or

less/non-affected areas (“host families” or “host communities”). In some cases, fleeing populations spontaneously congregate in areas where they feel safe and/or have access to basic necessities like water and shelter, thereby forming “spontaneous camps.” In a more limited number of cases, displaced people go to camps set up by government authorities or humanitarian agencies where they can receive humanitarian aid.

In fact, at present more displaced people live outside of camps than in them. According to the UNHCR, only one-third of refugees worldwide now live in camps (UNHCR(a), no date). IDMC found that more than 60 per cent of conflict IDPs in the countries monitored were living outside camps, and in more than half of the countries, 95 to 100 per cent of the displaced population lived outside of camps (IDMC, 2014a, p. 13). This includes significant numbers of IDPs and refugees who flee to urban areas. More than half of the refugees UNHCR serves now live in urban areas, with the remainder outside camps living in rural areas (UNHCR(a)). UNCHR also estimates seven million refugees are in protracted refugee situations, with the average duration of protracted situations approaching 20 years (PRS Project).

While most crisis-related displacement occurs when people flee in order to avoid harm, natural disasters, in particular, can result in other forms of displacement as well. In a growing number of cases, people living in affected areas who flee during the disaster are prevented from returning either because the area has been rendered uninhabitable as a result of the disaster and there is “nothing to return to”, or because the government deems the area unsafe or at-risk of future disasters. This can

result in permanent displacement. Experience shows that government plans to relocate people in the wake of natural disasters are wrought with challenges. For example, following Typhoon Haiyan, plans by the Philippine government to prevent people—primarily poor fishermen—from rebuilding in coastal areas has come up against numerous obstacles and raised numerous human rights concerns (Refugees International, 2014a). As a result, as of May 2014 (six months after the typhoon hit), significant numbers of people remained displaced (IOM, 2014, p. 11). At present, there are no internationally-recognized or widely adopted principles to guide government-led relocation in the case of natural disasters and climate change, leaving a significant protection gap for those displaced by these events.⁴

The Environmental Dimensions of Post-Crisis Displacement

Armed conflict and natural disasters can have significant impacts on the environment including the physical destruction of natural landscapes, ecosystems, and natural resources upon which people rely for their livelihoods. For example, the 2010 mega-floods in Pakistan—which inundated one-fifth of the country's landmass—caused the destruction of close to five million acres of agricultural land (Refugees International, 2011). The floods also washed away trees, wetland fish and bird breeding grounds, and river mammal habitats (Khan et al., 2010).

The environmental devastation caused by Typhoon Haiyan, which hit the Visayan Islands of the Philippines in late 2013, was even more massive. Accompanied

by a coastal storm surge that inundated thousands of miles of coastline and winds approaching 200 miles per hour, the storm wiped out vital fish habitats like mangroves, coral reefs, and freshwater fish ponds, and destroyed substantial areas of forest cover including 33 million coconut trees, a main economic sector in affected areas. The typhoon caused indirect environmental damage as well. A major oil spill occurred when an oil facility was damaged in the storm. Debris, dead bodies, and oil and chemicals leaked contaminates into the groundwater, a major source of domestic water in affected areas (Republic of the Philippines, 2013, 9-10; 14-15).

The mass movement of people fleeing conflicts and disasters can also have substantial environmental consequences, as can displacement camps wherein thousands of people often reside. During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, more than 700,000 Hutus who fled the country took refuge in camps on the outskirts of Virunga National Park, where they cleared more than 8,600 acres of surrounding forest and brush for firewood and shelter materials. The Rwandan and Congolese armies also cleared broad swaths of forest in order to decrease the threat of ambush by rebel forces. As a result, the Park was declared the first United Nations World Heritage site endangered due to an armed conflict (DeWeerd, 2008).

Similarly, a 2008 study of IDP camps in the Pader district of Northern Uganda following decades of war revealed the camps' significant adverse environmental impacts. This included deforestation (138.861km² of land de-vegetated), soil erosion, habitat destruction and pollution,

⁴ Several initiatives are, however, underway. See The Peninsula Principles on Climate Displacement within States (2013).

which in turn, adversely affected people's wealth, social and cultural fabric, rendering them poor with no sufficient means of livelihood and self-empowerment (Owona, 2008).

In 1987 the UN General Assembly passed its first resolution concerning the environment and assistance to refugees in which it noted "the deleterious effect of the refugee presence on the environment, which has resulted in widespread deforestation, soil erosion and the threat of destruction to an already fragile economic balance..." (UN, 1987). Since then, the UN has passed dozens of resolutions dealing with the environment and refugees (Salmio, 2009, note 177 and appendix 1).

During and in the aftermath of armed conflict and natural disasters, restoration of the environment and natural resources are often not viewed by governments, humanitarian agencies, or donors as a priority given the massive need for life-saving assistance like food, water, and healthcare. However, environmental destruction resulting from these crises—or in some cases, pre-existing them—creates significant protection risks to those affected, and significantly undermines their ability to recover.

This is particularly true for displaced populations. Refugees and IDPs—by virtue of their displacement—often lack sufficient access to essential environmental services that support their immediate means of survival, health, and wellbeing such as food, clean water, fuel for cooking, and sanitation. In addition, lack of access to natural resources can impede the ability of displaced people to earn a livelihood, recover, and become self-sufficient following a disaster, and often affects their decisions regarding return and resettlement. As such, it is

important to consider not only how degraded environments in post-crisis settings create unique protection risks for displaced populations but also how environmental recovery programs can contribute to durable solutions for IDPs and refugees.

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND PROTECTION RISKS TO DISPLACED PERSONS

Risk of Gender-Based Violence

It is widely recognized that adverse environmental conditions in and around displacement camps create heightened protection risks for displaced women and girls, in particular. Overcrowding, co-habitation, poor lighting, and lack of privacy in latrines and showers all contribute to unsafe conditions in displacement camps that put women and girls at risk and lead to increased incidence of gender-based violence. Rapid deforestation in and around camps to meet cooking fuel and shelter needs compounds this risk by forcing women and girls to wander farther and farther to collect firewood, exposing them to attack, sexual assault, rape, and even death (Women's Refugee Commission).

Loss of natural resource-dependent livelihoods

Environmental devastation and loss of access to natural resources following armed conflict and natural disasters (again, whether caused by these crises or pre-existing them) also undermines the ability of displaced people to regain their livelihoods. This is particularly true in parts of the world where refugees and IDPs rely directly on natural resources like agriculture, fishing,

and animal rearing/herding for their livelihood (and in many poorer countries, for their very survival). For example, Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines devastated the coconut farming sector, putting at risk the livelihoods of over one million farming households, and severely affected nearly two-third of fishing communities which were extremely poor to begin with (Humanitarian Response, 2014).

The traditional “camp-centric,” “care and maintenance” approach to humanitarian response wherein basic service delivery is designed around a single distribution site does little to help displaced and returning populations recover. This is true both in the case of sudden-onset natural disasters in which there is a tendency for IDPs to return as quickly as possible after the harm subsides, and in more protracted displacement scenarios where the failure of humanitarians to address livelihood needs leaves IDPs and refugees dependent on aid. Access to livelihood opportunities has proven to be a significant factor in determining IDP choices to return or resettle in the places to where they have fled, as is the case in Sub-Saharan Africa (IDMC, 2014a, p. 20).

Conflict or tension arising from competition over natural resources

The arrival of refugees and IDPs in areas suffering from environmental devastation, degradation, or loss of access to natural resources can create tensions with local communities. For example, following the eruption of violence in Mali in 2012, thousands of refugees fled to neighboring countries who were themselves in the midst of a regional drought and food crisis. In some cases, refugees outnumbered the local population, leading to tensions over access

to limited supplies of food, water, and animal fodder (Refugees International, 2012). For example, Bassikounou—a town of around 42,000 inhabitants in Mauritania—became host to 54,000 refugees at a nearby camp, leading to tensions with local residents. Reportedly, the situation in Nigeria is similar.

In large parts of northern Nigeria, deforestation, desertification and recurrent floods reduced sustainable access to land and other natural resources. Many people have been forced to flee south towards the country’s volatile Middle Belt region in search of pasture, arable land and a place to settle, putting them in direct competition with local communities over scarce resources and leading to increased insecurity and episodes of violence (IDMC, 2014a, p. 12).

In contrast, programs that seek to enhance restoration of natural resource-based livelihoods of displaced populations can have benefits.

Risk of recurrent displacement for displaced populations living in degraded and hazard-prone areas

Refugees and IDPs living in and outside of camps also face heightened protection risks due to the degraded environmental conditions in which they live. Not surprisingly, governments often site displacement camps on undesirable and degraded lands—or such lands become degraded over the life of the camp—leaving them susceptible to natural hazards. Flooding in refugee and IDP camps is a regular occurrence and can result in death. For example, in June 2014, flash floods inundated a Somali displacement camp in

Kismayo killing three children (Reuters, 2014; BBC News, 2013).

Displaced populations living outside camps also often reside in environmentally fragile and risky areas such as within flood plains or along steep hill sides, primarily because these areas are unoccupied—in many cases because they are unsafe for human habitation. For example, one of the largest populations of Afghan refugees in Pakistan lived in an area along the Indus River that was prone to flooding. When the country was hit by massive floods in 2010, 90 percent of the site was destroyed, displacing tens of thousands of Afghan refugees (Refugees International, 2011).

The tendency of displaced individuals to end up on degraded, hazard-prone land is especially true in urban contexts. In Soacha, a sprawling suburban slum outside of Bogotá, Colombia, landslides in 2009 displaced many conflict IDPs living in the area a second time, prompting the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to note the urgent need for adequate housing in the municipality “since most of the IDPs who arrive in Soacha continue to settle in risk prone zones and lack legal titles over the land” (IRIN, 2007; OCHA Columbia, 2009).

ENVIRONMENTAL RECOVERY AS A STRATEGY FOR FACILITATING PROTECTION, RECOVERY, AND DURABLE SOLUTIONS FOR DISPLACED POPULATIONS

Environmental Conditions in and around Displacement Camps

Among the environmental impacts discussed above, those related to improving environmental conditions in and around refugee camps have gained the most attention. UNHCR, the agency charged with

protecting and assisting refugees, has adopted a Sustainable Environmental Management Policy which recognizes environmental management as a policy priority. The policy advocates four principles of action:

- **integration:** ensuring that the environment features in other related programs or activities such as site planning or sanitation;
- **prevention before cure:** taking action as early as possible to minimize potentially large-scale challenges and irreversible effects;
- **cost-effectiveness:** with limited resources at its disposal, UNHCR must always strive to maximize the efficiency of its assistance programs; and
- **local participation:** involving refugee and local communities in the development and management of environmental activities is fundamental to managing natural resources in a sustainable manner.

In addition, in 2005 UNHCR and CARE International developed the Framework for Assessing, Monitoring and Evaluating the Environment (FRAME) in refugee-related operations, which includes tools and guidelines for managers and field practitioners in addressing environmental issues in all stages of camp management (UNHCR (no date, b).

UNHCR has, nonetheless, faced challenges in implementing measures to protect the environment. A 2009 study found that while the agency invested time,

energy and resources into the environment, “UNHCR has not really questioned the traditional forms of assistance. Indeed, new environmental tasks have been added to older ones without really looking at the existing problems critically.” The report noted that the limited refugee protection mandate of the agency, as well as lack of funding from governments, limited its ability to focus on environmental concerns (Salmio, 2009).

A 2011 joint organizational effectiveness assessment of UNHCR by the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), a network of 18 donor countries, similarly concluded that “UNHCR’s strategic documents articulate a clear institutional approach to cross-cutting priorities such as gender equality, environment, and HIV/AIDS. However, it is not clear in available documentation whether this high level strategic support translates into changes on the ground” (MOPAN, 2011, pp. ix; 22-23).

A multilateral aid review (MAR) by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in 2011 also found UNHCR’s implementation of its environmental policy lacking: “UNHCR are strong in this area with comprehensive guidelines and the inclusion of environmental protection in their budgeting and planning, but they could still do more to further imbed and develop their approach” (UNHCR MAR, 2011). In its response to the MAR, UNHCR stated that

Environmental management is indeed a policy priority at UNHCR and related policies and guidelines have been integrated in all phases of programme design and management. Improving technical capacity within UNHCR and among its partners remains a critical

priority, as well as increasing support for community-based initiatives and practices in refugee, IDP and returnee operations. Since 2010, UNHCR has undertaken significant steps to further improve environmental programming tools and facilitate their implementation as well addressing environmental issues from a cross-sectoral perspective. These initiatives include: (i) assessment of environmental impacts and development of community environmental action plans in Chad, DRC, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Nepal and Thailand; (ii) promotion of the use of renewable / alternative energy for both cooking as well as lighting in Sudan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Somalia; and (iii) the development of the Framework for Assessing, Monitoring and Evaluating the Environment to measure compliance with environment policy. Results are used to guide decision making (UNHCR, 2011, p. 1).

DFID’s 2013 MAR did not measure UNHCR’s progress regarding environmental protection (UK DFID, 2013, p. 26). Thus, whether the agency has been successful in its efforts to implement policies, build technical capacity, or increase support for community-based initiatives, has not been independently evaluated in the past few years, nor additional challenges identified.

More recently, UNHCR has taken on environmental concerns that directly relate to protection issues. The agency recently adopted the “Global Strategy for Safe Access to Fuel and Energy (SAFE)” for 2014-2018, which aims to enable refugees to meet their energy needs in a safe and sustainable way (UNHCR, 2014a). The strategy promotes the appropriate use of household fuel and energy technologies including the expanded use of renewable energy, as well as

reforestation for fuel provision and environmental protection. Core to UNHCR's refugee protection mandate, the strategy aims to safeguard refugees from protection risks such as GBV through the provision of lighting, energy technologies and fuel in camps, to promote improved health, nutrition, education and livelihoods, as well as to decrease tensions between refugees and host communities due to competition over energy resources. (See also UNHCR's 2012 strategy "Light Years Ahead: Innovative Technology for Better Refugee Protection" (UNHCR, 2012).)

Beyond this, however, given the enormous pressure on humanitarian accounts at present, and the fact that most refugee and IDP response needs are unmet,⁵ in the absence of additional donor interest in this area, it is unlikely that UNHCR or other camp managers will have the ability to substantially increase their limited financial and human resources to focus more on improving environmental conditions both inside and outside of camps. As such, it is more important than ever for UNHCR and IDP camp managers to integrate environmental management across all other sectors, especially protection and livelihoods, and for UNHCR to continue efforts to implement its policies and increase technical capacity through, for example, training of field staff.

Integrating Environmental Restoration into Early Recovery, Livelihoods, and Disaster Risk Reduction Programming

Both in and outside of camp settings, a possible approach to including

environmental restoration as a post-crisis recovery strategy is to integrate environmental components into (1) early recovery, (2) livelihoods, and (3) disaster risk reduction (DRR)/resilience programming. Unfortunately, at present, all three areas face significant challenges.

First, these areas are often underfunded in the humanitarian response phase of a crisis given a preference among donor to direct funds to emergency, life-saving sectors. The early recovery and livelihood clusters (where they are activated, which is not the case in all emergencies) are often the least funded. For example, as of June 12, 2014, the Syrian early recovery and livelihood cluster had received only 7.5 percent of its funding requirement, and the Central African Republic, less than three percent (Financial Tracking Service, 2014). In addition, activities tend to focus on cash for work programs as opposed to activities that actually link to long-term recovery of livelihoods of displaced and affected populations, including those that are dependent on recovery and restoration of natural resources and the environment (Refugees International, 2014a).

Likewise, in post-disaster settings in which natural hazards like floods and storms are likely to reoccur, the need to "build back safer" by implementing DRR activities during the response phase is widely recognized. However, DRR programming on a significant scale is rarely possible in post-disaster settings, again due largely to humanitarian budget constraints. This is particularly true for humanitarian agencies like U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), where humanitarian response funds are

⁵ For example, as of June 2014, UNHCR funding needs under the Syria Refugee Response Plan were 35.5 percent met, and only 18 percent met under the South

Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan. See Financial Tracking Service (2014).

drawn from the same finite budget accounts each year. The more these funds are drawn down throughout the course of the year to respond to crises, the fewer funds are available for DRR activities. Thus, it is important that development actors do more to prioritize DRR activities including those that are focused on environmental restoration like reforestation and mangrove planting.

A second challenge derives from the long-existing “relief to development gap.” In post-disaster contexts, early recovery, livelihoods, and DRR strategies must link with development programs and actors in order to be effective, something with which humanitarian actors have long struggled (UNHCR, 2013).

There are many cases in which the failure to effectively link the humanitarian response to longer-term recovery—including environmental recovery—has hindered durable solutions for displaced populations. A good example is a recent assessment of an IDP return project in Somalia now being implemented by UNHCR and its partners under the Somalia Returns Consortium (Samuel Hall Consulting, 2014). Launched in 2012, the IDP return project has supported the voluntary return of over 10,000 households (40,000 individuals) from camps and informal settlements to areas of south and south-central Somalia that are relatively secure. According to the assessment, while two-thirds of the returnees had decided to go back to their villages based on the expectation that they would be able to resume their traditional livelihoods—primarily farming and/or pastoralism—57 percent reported that within a relatively short time-frame they found themselves reliant once again on food aid (or the sale thereof) as their main source of sustenance. The assessment also found

that over time, many households reported individual family members had decided to leave again, most likely in order to find other means of survival. In short, the assessment revealed that unless returning IDPs can support themselves in their home areas, returns may be short-lived.

One the reasons returning Somali IDPs may not have been able to re-establish their traditional forms of livelihoods is the severe environmental degradation in the areas selected for return (International Business and Technical Consultants, 2014). A recent environmental assessment of Somalia commissioned by USAID provides a sobering account of what returning farmers and pastoralists face. According to the report, the environmental reality of Somalia today is that land degradation is severe and, in most places, getting worse. “[L]and degradation,” it claims, “may well be the largest environmental contributor to food insecurity and poverty in Somalia” (International Business and Technical Consultants, 2014). In short, environmental recovery is integral to ensuring that displaced populations are able to return and become self-reliant, thereby achieving a durable solution (Refugees International, 2014b).

Opportunities to Use Environmental Recovery to Promote Durable Solutions for Displaced Populations

Despite these obstacles, several more recent trends may offer opportunities to build environmental recovery into programs aimed at assisting displaced populations. The first is the recognition that today many displacement crises around the world are protracted, raising the importance of supporting displaced persons’ livelihood activities—both in and outside of camp

settings—among both humanitarian and development actors. A good example is UNHCR’s ongoing development of a new livelihoods policy that focuses on building refugees’ self-reliance. Development of the strategy may provide an opportunity for UNHCR to factor environmental protection and recovery into its livelihoods programming, especially as relates to refugee populations reliant on natural resource-based livelihoods (UNHCR, 2014b).

The second trend that may provide space for increased focus on environmental recovery is the growing recurrence of conflict and disasters in the same countries/regions, thereby placing new emphasis on the need to build the resilience of affected populations to cope with and recover from these crises. In post-crisis contexts, resilience-building initiatives create an opportunity for building bridges between humanitarian and development actors that should include a focus on environmental recovery and sustainability as a strategy for building resilience. This will require development agencies and multi-lateral development banks, in particular, to increase their focus on environmental recovery and sustainability projects that help build the resilience of people displaced by these crises. For example, UNDP’s new Strategic Plan contains a framework for linking humanitarian and longer-term development efforts to focus on crisis recovery (e.g., noting a major focus on “post-disaster planning for recovery and preparation of recovery and reconstruction plans and programs that are inclusive of and accountable to displaced populations”) (UNDP, 2014, p. 37).

A third trend is the growing number of displaced people now residing in urban areas, many of whom are unable or unwilling

to return home, and would rather permanently settle in the cities where they currently reside. Experience shows that the cluster or sector approach employed by humanitarian actors does not fit well into urban contexts. In addition to creating a division between government (including local government authorities) and international actors, the sector approach to humanitarian response that divides programming into separate areas such as gender, livelihoods, protection, and shelter is less effective given the myriad challenges faced both by displaced populations and other urban dwellers (Pantuliano et al., 2012, p. 13). In urban contexts, challenges and vulnerabilities of host communities and displaced populations—especially IDPs—cannot be thought of separately. For example, given the increasing trend wherein displaced populations end up in slums, both displaced and non-displaced people often face the same struggles to survive and the same lack of service provision, poor housing, poor sanitation, and lack of employment opportunities. The already low standard of living in urban slums can cause tension and competition between host and displaced communities over access to resources and livelihood opportunities (Pantuliano et al., 2012, p. 5).

Responding to urban displacement is forcing humanitarian and development actors to develop new approaches. Addressing the needs of displaced persons residing in urban settings requires recognition of the inter-related nature of various challenges in urban areas. It has been pointed out that a more appropriate system should seek to have “city and neighborhood coherence” rather than “sector coherence” (Pantuliano et al., 2012, p. 13).

A good example of this is the response and recovery plan adopted for the Philippine city of Tacloban which was 90 percent destroyed in late 2013 by Typhoon Haiyan and the 20 foot storm surge it brought with it. In addition to killing thousands of city residents, the typhoon and storm surge caused massive damage to Tacloban's housing, infrastructure, economic sectors, and services. Of the houses totally damaged, about 10,000 belonged to the urban poor who also lost most livelihood sources. Following the storm, the city was faced with the problem of informal settlers living in close proximity to the sea leaving them vulnerable to recurrent disasters. As a result of a government policy to prevent displaced populations previously living in these areas from rebuilding, six months later, many remain displaced. Thus, the city's strategy for recovery had to address the challenge of identifying "safe zones" to which displaced populations could be relocated.

The Tacloban City Proposed Recovery and Rehabilitation Plan⁶ emphasizes "the building back better principle and actions consistent with our long-term development vision, policies and plans." Among the plan's guiding principles are implementation of an inclusive and holistic approach to redevelopment that is socially, environmentally, economically and culturally balanced, and the use of emergency response activities as building blocks for long-term recovery.

The plan is built around four "core drivers" aimed at leading the city to recovery, rehabilitation and sustainable development: (1) social and shelter including

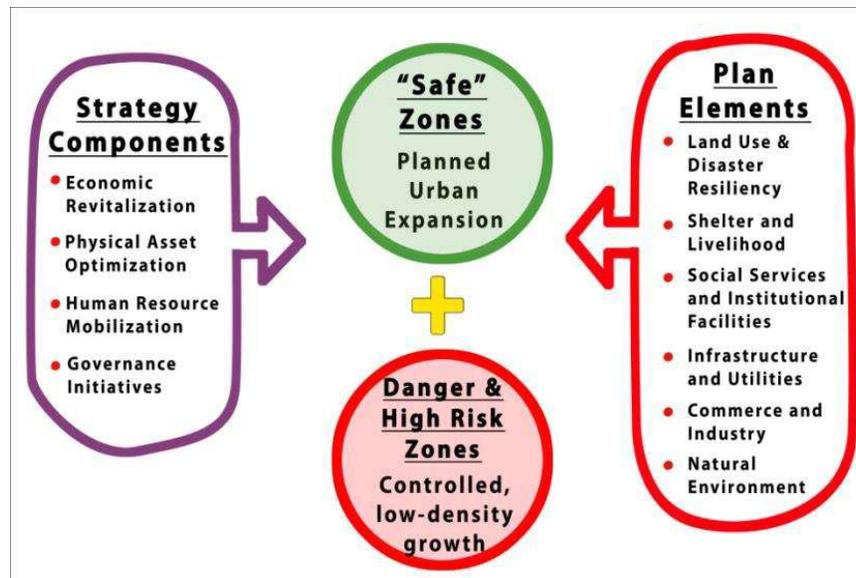
land, housing, access to electricity, water, education and health services; (2) economic including agriculture, trade/commerce, and services; (3) infrastructure like roads, bridges and public buildings; and (4) the environment including protected zones, waste management and water sources. Figure 1 depicts the holistic approach adopted in the policy.

If effectively implemented, this type of "settlement" approach to disaster response in urban settings will provide a useful model that could be adapted to other post-crisis settings. While implementing the Tacloban City Recovery and Rehabilitation Plan will require substantial financial resources, it also represents a more adaptive humanitarian response that considers both the immediate and long-term needs of displaced populations.

Unfortunately, even well-funded humanitarian crises do not always take into account environmental risks and vulnerabilities of displaced populations, nor provide sufficient support for disaster prevention and preparedness in resettlement areas. For example, many Haitians displaced by the 2010 earthquake have moved out of IDP camps in Port-au-Prince to areas on the outskirts of the city known as Canaan, Jerusalem, and Onaville. As of September 2013, approximately 14,100 households were living in these areas which are characterized by harsh, treeless terrain, lack of basic services and slum-like conditions, and high exposure to natural hazards like floods, landslides, and earthquakes.

⁶ Released in March 2014 and prepared by the Tacloban Recovery and Sustainable Development Group in partnership with UNHABITAT.

Figure 1: Elements of the Tacloban City Proposed Recovery and Rehabilitation Plan



Source: City of Tacloban (2014).

Community committees in these areas have begun their own initiatives to improve their environments by planting olive and papaya trees, mapping out roads, and purchasing solar panels for electricity. However, the continued development and safety of the area will need both government and external support. Disaster risk could be reduced by interventions such as flood control and soil conservation. Disaster risk reduction activities could also provide employment opportunities for locals (Sherwood et al., 2014, p. 28). Attempts to regularize IDP camps by transitioning an existing camp into a planned neighborhood should be preceded by an environmental feasibility survey that determines factors such as risk of natural hazards and the height of the water table of the land in question (Sherwood et al., 2014, p. 33).

The contrasting experiences from Tacloban and Port-Au-Prince provide

evidence that more comprehensive, forward thinking approaches to crisis recovery require not only substantial resources, but also political will and ownership by national governments and affected populations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- More robust donor support is needed to prioritize improving environmental conditions in and around displacement camps as a strategy for promoting the protection and self-reliance of displaced people; camp managers are encouraged to integrate environmental management across all other sectors, especially protection and livelihoods, and increase technical capacity in this area.

- Humanitarian and development actors must increase support for displaced persons' livelihood activities—both in and outside of camp settings, and both during their displacement and upon return. Environmental restoration must be a strategy for ensuring that displaced and returning populations have access to sustainable livelihoods. UNHCR's ongoing development of a new livelihoods policy that focuses on building refugees' self-reliance may provide an opportunity for UNHCR to factor environmental protection and recovery into its livelihoods programming, especially as relates to refugee populations reliant on natural resource-based livelihoods.
- In post-crisis contexts, resilience-building initiatives create an opportunity for humanitarian and development actors to jointly focus on environmental recovery and sustainability as a strategy for building resilience of people displaced by these crises.
- Responding to crises and displacement in urban areas provides an opportunity for humanitarian and development actors to work collaboratively to develop new, more holistic approaches to redevelopment that are socially, environmentally, economically and culturally balanced, that use emergency response activities as building blocks for long-term recovery, and that address the inter-related nature of various challenges

in urban areas and help build more sustainable cities.

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