

# Refugee Livelihoods Network (RLN)

## November 2005

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### IDP Livelihoods

While over the last decade, numbers of those displaced within borders are estimated to have surpassed those crossing international borders, internally displaced people (IDPs) are still not protected and assisted adequately. Due to great legal and institutional problems, they seem to be falling between the cracks of the international system. Recently, the UNHCR's Internal Working Group on IDPs has commissioned a review in order to bring greater clarity and consistency to the interpretation of UNHCR policy and operational guidelines on involvement with IDPs. The review, which can be accessed below, analyzes certain variables that have influenced or determined UNHCR's involvement with IDPs with a view to indicating how UNHCR could be more consistent and predictable in its decision making processes. Within the UN system at large, such deliberations are also taking place, as can be gathered from the Forced Migration Review IDP supplement (see 'Featured links').

In the midst of, and possibly as a consequence of, this confusion, those focusing on IDPs largely focus on protection issues; both from an institutional perspective and from the point of view of IDPs themselves. Far less attention is directed to issues of livelihoods: how has displacement disrupted livelihood patterns for IDPs, how are they dealing with this fact and what 'good practices' can be developed to improve their position. But, as Antonio Hill accurately points out, guaranteeing the right to life is meaningless without the right to a livelihood. The publications and electronic resources referred to in this RLN issue indicate that IDPs have found their livelihood options destroyed or severely limited. While they engage in various economic activities and make use of social ties to deal with their vulnerable position, new policies and projects need to be developed that enable them to move beyond marginal livelihoods.

- [The Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement](#)
- [OCHA Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division](#)

[Click here for this UNHCR review, commissioned by the Internal Working Group on IDPs](#)

### **Key publications and reports:**

Protection versus promotion of IDP livelihoods in Colombia

The widespread trend in the past decade towards a broader model of humanitarian relief has included 'livelihoods protection' as a preventive strategy to save lives. In Colombia, Oxfam GB and many other humanitarian agencies have pursued this strategy in the form of productive packages for displaced people. If productive livelihood assets can be preserved by preventing their sale in times of distress, the theory goes, households can continue to use livelihood strategies to cope with external shocks. The productive packages consist of once-off donations of tools, supplies and other assets for agriculture and livestock, and start-up inputs for six months to one year. Wherever possible, distribution is accompanied by relevant training. Antonio Hill reports that evaluations showed the direct short-term positive impact on people's lives, but were less conclusive on their contribution in terms of longer-term sustainable livelihoods. The article argues that, to overcome this, relief and development approaches need to be linked. Otherwise, organisations may guarantee the right to life for IDPs, but this right is meaningless without the right to a livelihood.

[Click here to link to this FMR article](#)

### **Food Security Report on IDPs in Liberian camps**

During 2004, the Food Security Department of Action Contre la Faim (ACF) regularly monitored and evaluated the food security situation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) residing in camps in Liberia. In order to gain a complete understanding of the situation, ACF also decided to conduct basic food security assessments with IDPs who recently returned to their place of origin. The report relates the observations of ACF

regarding the food security situation in the different places assessed, while formulating recommendations for the humanitarian community to efficiently address the needs of displaced Liberians. The majority of the population now displaced used to be engaged in farming, as well as mining and trade. Currently, IDPs attempt to address their needs through contract labour and petty trade. Evaluations indicate that the IDPs have developed strong coping mechanisms, but their livelihood situation has worsened greatly.

[Click here to view this ACF report](#)

### **Darfur – Livelihoods Under Siege**

What are the effects of the current conflict on livelihoods in Darfur? What issues do strategic humanitarian interventions need to address? This Feinstein International Famine Center publication reviews a combination of factors causing livelihood failure and asset loss in Darfur, including systematic asset-stripping by government forces, production failures, market failures, failures of access to natural resources and constraints on remittances of migrant workers. The study suggests that livestock rearing and trade has been severely affected by mobility constraints due to insecurity, looting, disputes over trade routes and access to pasture. Furthermore, migration and commodity trading are also severely limited by insecurity-induced mobility constraints, as well as by the closing of the Sudan/Libya border in 2003 causing a very significant decline in remittances. The paper presents a detailed list of recommendations, including the suggestion to create a Livelihoods Task Force to monitor the conditions affecting livelihoods and to develop, through participatory processes seeking local solutions, a strategy for protecting, supporting and rehabilitating livelihoods.

[Click here to access this publication by Helen Young et al.](#)

## **Forced Migration Online Research Guide on Internal Displacement**

This guide focuses on internal displacement, with a section dealing with 'actor oriented perspectives' towards IDPs. In addition to the more policy-oriented discussion of the legal and institutional aspects of internal displacement, an understanding of its social consequences and the way the internally displaced live and cope with it is instrumental to protecting and assisting them. War and displacement cause temporary and permanent transformations in peoples lives and livelihoods, such as in the case of disruption of livelihood opportunities, destruction of assets and infrastructure. In order to cope with this, IDPs rely on existing structures, including members of their family, village, community or other social networks. In fact, conflict and displacement do not inevitably lead to a total disruption of community, and humanitarian actors must grasp the prior social structures and histories of the displaced in order to offer effective assistance. Studies of the response mechanisms of the internally displaced also illustrate the varied set of economic activities that IDPs often partake in. However, structural barriers such as restrictions on leaving camps and authoritative regimes that limit involvement in decision-making often prevent IDPs from obtaining their own livelihood or planning their own future. It is important that the humanitarian sector learn from these findings and invest in devising ways to assist people in rebuilding their lives and livelihoods that make use of their own, pre-existing resources.

[This research guide by Cathrine Brun can be accessed here](#)

### **Learning and Good Practice:**

Revitalisation of Livelihoods and Assistance to Reintegration of Afghan Returnee and IDP families

Within the 2004 Shelter Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Livelihoods Project in North Afghanistan conducted by the UNHCR, a project of 'revitalisation of livelihoods and assistance to

reintegration of returnee and IDP families in Baghlan and Faryab provinces' has been approved. ACTED will act as an implementing partner, by contributing to the reintegration of returnee and IDP families within the framework of the ongoing voluntary repatriation in North Afghanistan. Apart from the reintegration the sub-project also seeks to revitalise the livelihoods of these families, as one of the main effects of the conflict and of displacement has been the destruction and deterioration of housing throughout the country. Contact the organisation for more information.

[Link to ACTED website](#)

### **Afghan IDPs and drought relief programme**

This Islamic Relief programme is aimed at the sustainable return of internally displaced persons in Baghni District, northern Helmand Province, of southern Afghanistan. Due to persistent drought and diminishing coping mechanisms, a steady trend in displacement to other parts of the province has been observed during the past few years. Over 85% of the population has so far been internally displaced while as much as 94% agricultural lands are hit by drought. The necessary preconditions for return include the rehabilitation of the irrigation network, assistance in preparation of agricultural land, distribution of livestock amongst landless returnees and provision of drinking water to avoid future displacements.

[Click here to access information on this programme](#)

### **Creating Employment Opportunities in Colombia**

It is estimated that over 3 million people have been internally displaced due to the decades-old internal armed conflict in Colombia and that the majority of these individuals have been displaced over the past 10 years. With support from the

U.S. State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, CHF International and local Colombian partners have designed an initiative to deliver much needed humanitarian assistance to displaced families, while linking them to broader support services, such as healthcare, education and employment. By creating opportunities for temporary paid jobs, CHF is providing necessary income and allowing the beneficiaries to gain employment experience, which is vital for getting a full-time permanent job. Working also positively impacts the self-esteem and mental health of the beneficiary by occupying his or her time with productive activities. CHF continues to identify and implement labor-intensive projects to employ displaced people. Some examples of employment to date are: cleaning and maintaining parks, painting municipal buildings, improving dirt roads and drainage ditches, and cleaning rivers and creeks to prevent flooding.

[To read more on this CHF programme, click here](#)

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The Refugee Livelihoods Network is an initiative of UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. (EPAU) The views expressed by contributors to the Network and in documents electronically linked to the Network are not those of UNHCR. For issues other than refugee livelihoods, EPAU can be contacted by e-mail at [hqep00@unhcr.org](mailto:hqep00@unhcr.org)