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Introduction

1.1 The Good Practice Review in context

The growth in complex emergencies in the North since the demise of the cold war continues to challenge the traditional conceptualisation of relief assistance. Emergencies and the need for temporary settlements are not new, but on humanitarian grounds, large scale complex emergencies are increasingly demanding a revision of the accepted mode of practice of providing for DP (displaced population) human settlement needs.

Box No. 1

The growth in complex emergencies

In 1995, 38 million people fled civil conflict and more than 160 million were affected by natural disasters. To provide for this, 3.4 billion US dollars were spent in addition to the 4.2 million tonnes of food aid distributed. This scale of response is six times higher than a decade ago at the height of the famines in Ethiopia and Sudan (Walker)¹.

Such figures underscore the need for improved performance and nowhere is this more relevant than in the physical planning and human settlement sector.

No longer are DPs a purely southern phenomenon, barracked in fields of plastic tents living a refugee camp existence. Climate, expectation and considerations of improved practice suggest that alternative settlement for DPs should be considered where emphasis is placed on human needs and not purely on technical issues. This Review argues that such concerns should form the basis of THS (temporary human settlement) planning wherever the need may arise.

The discussion starts from the premise that while prevention is better than cure - it is far better that mass population movements are prevented from happening and that the need to plan for and actually provide temporary settlement be eliminated - reality is such that mass population movements do happen and that planning for these movements and the temporary settlement needed to accommodate them can be improved.

This sixth in the series of RRN Good Practice Reviews aims to contribute to the discussion of what constitutes good, or at least better, practice in the area of planning temporary human settlement for DPs. It is not a technical manual about how to design the layout of a DP settlement. Camp planning guides, such as the UNHCR Emergency Handbook and the relevant sections in RedR's (Registered Engineers for Disaster Relief) Engineering in Emergencies, (1995), detail this process. It seeks to broaden discussion beyond the 'default camp option', opening up choices of settlement alternatives, contending that the location in which a DP is assisted lies at the core of issues concerning the political, environmental and economic sustainability of DP assistance.

Where possible, the author has drawn on actual field and programme experience to illustrate points. Some are inevitably used to illustrate examples of 'bad' practice. However, in so doing it is recognised that the programmes cited will have been faced with serious constraints as to what they could and could not achieve. These operational constraints are very real for the front line in all of these discussions - the field worker. Apologies in advance therefore, to anyone who may feel that programmes that they have been involved with are unfairly criticised if they are used as examples to illustrate points in the text. This is not the intention of the Review. The benefit of hindsight is a valuable privilege.

1.2 The purpose of the Review

Until now, the longer term implications for assistance programmes of the choice of area or region in which DPs are to be located have often been overlooked or

even dismissed on the basis that such considerations are too complex or politically sensitive to interfere with. Consequently, current practice remains focused on site specific physical details of locations for ‘camps’, viewed essentially from an engineering and architectural perspective. Typically, sites are allocated by a host authority in areas which are uninhabited, environmentally fragile and offer little potential for the development of activities or initiatives which work towards DP self sufficiency. It may even be for precisely these reasons that they are on offer. Increasingly, however, it is clear that the choice of the location needs to be viewed as a crucial factor in a development process. The Review suggests that if such an objective were to form the basis of current practice, issues of sustainability, dependency, cost recovery, ownership and participation would gain greater prominence. As it is, these issues rarely feature outside textbooks and evaluations.

Where people live largely determines their ability to meet their basic needs. For DPs, the location in which they are allowed to live will form the basis of their survival strategy and dictate, to a large extent, their ability to integrate with the local population and economy. For the local population, a rapid and dramatic increase in the numbers of people living in an area may impose an unsustainable burden on already fragile economies and environments, which can lead to further suffering and even conflict.

However, if DPs are considered as a resource, THS location also has the potential to contribute and provide stimulus to local and regional economies.

This Review therefore makes two principal contentions: i) that best, or better practice, in the sector, should be dedicated to ‘planning for’ THS in emergencies, not ‘planning of’ camps or sites and that ii) the necessary shift to longer term or realistic project life planning will need to be clear exactly who the response is being planned for and ensure that the option of targeting assistance programmes to provide for both the DP and the host population is considered; ‘target area’ as opposed to ‘target group’ planning.

To a certain extent, parallels can be drawn with and lessons learned from the way in which countries prone to natural disasters plan for the eventuality. A programmatic approach is adopted in the knowledge that at some point in the future there will be a need to address the disaster and that organisations and agencies involved should be prepared. Current preparations for the predicted El Niño drought in Southern Africa offer an example of such planning. (See

Box 2). It is argued that a similar systematic approach to planning for emergency prompted THS needs should be adopted.

Hastily created 'camps' located in inappropriate locations have become the norm for DP shelter and settlement responses. This 'business as usual' approach is becoming less and less acceptable for many concerned with the welfare and provision of assistance to emergency affected populations. Before camps become totally encultured as acceptable semi-permanent solutions, we need to consider what can be done to improve on this present practice by planning for and acting in favour of more sustainable and humane emergency human settlements.

Box No. 2

The failure of camps for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh

The camps established for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh provide an extreme example of the failure of 'camps' to meet human needs from the location in which they live. It seems clear that the conditions the Rohingyan refugees had to endure fell below any standard of human settlement. The extremely cramped conditions in the camps provided opportunities for maintaining lives, but very little else. Yet the objective of humanitarian relief programmes is generally to reduce suffering. We need to ensure that in the process of reducing short term suffering, THS programmes are not designed such that they create the potential for long term suffering for either the DP or local population.

Reconceptualising the implications of location for DP programmes reinforces increasing awareness that today's emergencies no longer fall into the category of temporary and short-lived. The enduring presence of many 'camps' poses a real challenge to the notion of temporality and has been a significant consideration throughout the preparation of this Review. Changing the paradigm will be a demanding and challenging task requiring significant policy, organisational and structural changes between and within organisations involved in the process of planning for THS. Before such a change can be considered, there is a need for open discussion and debate of the options. In each context, a different approach will need to be adopted.

1.3 Scope

Discussion in the following pages is concerned primarily with population displacement as a result of conflict (complex emergencies) as it is such movements which have accounted for the greatest concentrations of DPs since the end of the cold war. Discussion of return, resettlement and integration as understood by UNHCR's 'Durable Solutions' for displaced populations, lies outside the scope of this Review, nor will it consider the process of villagisation or forced grouping of ethnic groups for political or military convenience.

1.4 Intended audience

The Review was written with two principal audiences in mind; those concerned with setting policy for human displacement responses and programme managers from the NGO, UN, donor, Red Cross and host government sectors at both headquarters and field level. It is also of relevance to technical specialists, who, frequently being the first to arrive at a new emergency, may find the Review to be of help in providing a wider, non-technical context for the decisions they are asked to make.

1.5 Terminology

Displaced Population (DP) - Throughout the Review, the term 'Displaced Population' is used. The term refers to both 'International Refugees' and to 'Internally Displaced Persons'. Reference to refugee or IDP will only be made where there is a need for increased specificity. In the context of this Review, it is considered that the problems of both groups, if not the responses to them, are essentially the same.

Temporary Human Settlement (THS) - this term has been chosen to replace the more widely used terms of 'camp' or 'site'. Camps are considered to be one form of THS. There is considerable institutional resistance to the use of this term, primarily related to the notion that a 'settlement' indicates permanency. This is particularly the case for 'refugee' programmes where camps are, for a number of actors involved, considered to be short lived in order to provide a temporary solution to a temporary problem.

For the purposes of this Review, a THS refers to a location where DPs are assisted with shelter and other forms of humanitarian assistance. It refers to

human settlements and as such argues in favour of employing human settlement planning practices. Crucial to the term is the notion of community. A THS is considered to be a collection of dwellings forming a community, which is planned for on the understanding that assistance may be provided on a short-term or semi-permanent basis. It refers to the built environment in which DPs are temporarily accommodated. It does not refer to nor is it intended to cause any confusion with the term ‘settlement’ or ‘resettlement’ as used by UNHCR.

The Review contends that the choice of where to locate DPs will fundamentally affect the assistance programme in three key ways:

- it is of significant to a DP’s chances of working towards self sufficiency;
- it will have a major impact on life cycle costs;
- it has the potential to be beneficial to the local host population and the DP.

Sustainable - refers to the environmental, political and economic sustainability of THS options. It has been difficult to escape using the term ‘durable’ in this context. This is unfortunate as its use has very special meaning for the UNHCR. In the eyes of UNHCR, a ‘durable solution’ refers to the final solution to a refugee crisis. However, it has been difficult to find a satisfactory alternative to the word which, understood in the pure sense, describes much of what this Review essentially seeks to communicate. Camp locations tend to be placed in fragile environments in which the survival needs of a population are provided for. They can be expensive, artificial and thus, more often than not, unsustainable in the currently understood interpretation of this term.

The reason for this emphasis on longer-term planning horizons is partly a response to the fact that many ‘camps’ last far longer than originally intended. As such, they tend towards ragged collections of dwellings which bear witness to the fact that when originally planned more attention was paid to the engineering and technical interpretation of international standards and guidelines which cater specifically for refugee camps, than to the social and economic rights of the DP. The consequence is usually sterile, rigidly planned replicas of so many camps that have been before them. The crucially important human element is often missing.

The Review will, by drawing on recent literature and the Peer Group’s experiences, try to suggest ways in which THS can be made more durable, sustainable, solid, self-supporting (or however the reader prefers to phrase it).

1.6 Difficulties associated with producing the Review

Discussion of ‘planning for’ as distinct from ‘planning of’, taken together with the contention that current THS solutions do not always meet essential criteria, led the author and editorial team into a potentially very wide-ranging discussion of many aspects of humanitarian assistance delivery. The process inevitably led to discussion of a number of professional disciplines involved in emergency responses and the need to expand the professional profile of aid agency staff and redefine coordination structures to adequately address the process of planning for DPs generally.

The second principal hurdle relates to access to documented examples of efforts to seek alternatives to camp solutions. While this argument is not new, and many aid professionals involved in discussions around the production of this Review agreed that the continued preference for camps as the only solution to the accommodation needs of a DP could not be justified, evidence to support alternatives was often hard to come by. Literature on the subject has long supported the idea of boosting coping mechanisms and local capacity to absorb DP influxes, but it has proved difficult to identify agency documentation of where this has happened for large scale DP movements. In part, this is because little written material is published or made available by agencies. Indeed despite the fact that the number of IDPs in the world now far outnumbers that of refugees, suitable case study material on programmes designed specifically for IDPs has not been forthcoming. It is reasonable to assume that, as IDPs are less well catered for by the international humanitarian system, there are more likely to be significant numbers of IDPs who have resolved their own survival needs. There must be lessons to be learned from this experience; lessons which can then be applied to crises where the international community does become involved. These need documenting and sharing.

