**SOLUTIONS TO INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT**

**Considerations from Mercy Corps**

June 2023

**Introduction**

Mercy Corps is a global organisation working in more than 40 countries around the world responding to conflict, crisis and fragility. From Syria to South Sudan, Iraq to Somalia, we work with some of the 1.5 billion people whose lives are currently riven by conflict and violence, addressing both the devastating impact and the root causes of conflict and fragility. In 2022 we positively impacted the lives of 38 million people across nearly 300 programmes.

We welcome this opportunity to draw attention to aspects of the second, third and fourth themes identified by the Special Rapporteur that merit a particular focus, either because they have been neglected by other stakeholders or are particularly complex to resolve.

**Theme 2: Internal displacement due to generalised violence**

***Recommendation: Invest in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in order to address the underlying drivers of displacement***

Displacement is both driven by conflict and drives complex conflict dynamics. Whether violence is actually experienced or simply viewed as a threat, it forces people to flee. As conflicts rage unabated, they fuel bigger waves of displacement, which are lasting longer than ever before. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace, the average level of global peacefulness has deteriorated for ten of the past 14 years yet institutional spending on peacebuilding, conflict prevention and peacebuilding has been falling globally. [In the UK, for example, there has been a decline from 4% of the total aid budget in 2016 to 2% in 2021.](https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/the-decline-of-uk-peacebuilding)

Mercy Corps’ 2016 report [An Ounce of Prevention](https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/ounce-prevention) and research from [Somalia and Afghanistan](https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/aid-migration), illustrate why bigger, smarter and more sustained investments in high-level diplomatic efforts and evidence-based conflict prevention, peacebuilding and good governance interventions are vital to stemming displacement. They also reveal that the more young people feel insecure, have been exposed to violence and are pessimistic about the security situation, the more likely they are to move.

***Recommendation: Prioritise conflict sensitivity and conflict analysis in displacement settings***

No matter how much they may seek to avoid it, all actors operating within a conflict environment will inevitably play a role in that conflict. Mercy Corps’ [Conflict Sensitivity Training Course & Toolkit](https://www.mercycorps.org/conflict-sensitivity-training-course) provides a step by step process to ensure interventions avoid exacerbating conflict dynamics.

In terms of conflict analysis in contexts of displacement, it is important to combine in-depth conflict analysis of root causes of conflict and displacement to understand the underlying factors, with more regular analysis of population movements (for example relying on humanitarian analysis) and also rapid conflict analysis on emerging tensions and incidents of violence. A full understanding of the impact of conflict and displacement have on government service provision, for example, is vital to addressing governance related grievances driving conflict or impeding successful reintegration. This relates to a gap we have in conflict sensitivity guidelines designed for host governments which would help strengthen government accountability to affected populations.

Conducting conflict analysis in contexts of chronic and repeated displacement presents specific challenges. Building trust and relationships with stakeholders engaged in a conflict sensitivity process is vital and the more time available to do that, the better. If population movements continue to occur, it can often feel as though you are starting over. That is why combining in-depth macro analysis with repeated/rapid micro analysis makes sense, although an alternative is to follow a community on the move rather than focus on the dynamics in a specific location.

Our research from [Venezuela](https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/on-the-move) (2020), the [Northern Triangle](https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/subsist-or-persist) (2019) and [Somalia and Afghanistan](https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/aid-migration) (2018), highlights that understanding what influences decisions to move, and the psychology behind those decisions, is often missing in practitioner and policymaker analysis. These case studies resonate for internal displacement despite focusing on understanding drivers of migration and forced migration more broadly. We find that stressful situations such as conflict and poverty reduce an individual’s ability to weigh the pros and cons of alternative choices. Consequently, when individuals are under stress, they may be more likely to be risk-taking and their decisions may be more likely to be automatic, prioritising current payouts over future ones.

Finally, our research series [‘The Currency of Connections](https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/BentiuPoCResearch_Brief_Final_092519.pdf)’ explores the role of local support systems in displaced contexts and makes the case for incorporating an analysis of social connections, and how they evolve in contexts of displacement, into programmes for displaced communities.

**Theme 3: Internally displaced persons in peace negotiations or mediation processes and in peacebuilding to achieve sustainable peace**

***Recommendation: Invest in local level engagement for feasible and sustainable solutions***

While ensuring governments take ownership of the overall priority of addressing displacement, local level engagement is vital to fully understanding the issues and identifying and delivering sustainable solutions. Specifically, we recommend international and national stakeholders to engage the following actors in an inclusive and transparent manner:

* Local civil society (including religious and traditional leaders)
* Representatives of displaced people
* Representatives of host communities
* Development actors (and beyond the humanitarian sector)

Working with host communities on development initiatives is good for conflict sensitivity and the pursuit of durable solutions. It helps mitigate potential tensions between displaced communities who may receive the bulk of humanitarian assistance and the often struggling communities who host them; but also strengthens the capacity of those communities to host. See Mercy Corps’ 2021 [Advancing Peace in Complex Crises Framework](http://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/advancing-peace-complex-crises) for additional details.

**Theme 4: Sustainable integration and/or reintegration into the communities in which they settle or return to**

***Recommendation: Invest in approaches that drive social acceptance of returnees***

We have examined what facilitates effective return and long-term reintegration in a variety of contexts. Our [research from Iraq (2021)](https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/towards-durable-solutions-displacement) investigated the barriers to return and reintegration of IDPs, and found that social acceptance of refugees was a major impediment. This in turn threatened to prolong Iraq’s displacement crisis, exacerbate intergroup tensions and trigger further violence. We found that fostering a sense of shared “victimhood” (fleeing because of ISIS) created greater bonds and therefore greater likelihood of acceptance after return. The research demonstrates that designing programmes that take into account the factors that drive social acceptance of returnees is crucial not only for ending displacement, but also for building social cohesion, promoting reconciliation, and preventing future conflict.

***Recommendation: Invest in local actors and prioritise inclusion in programmes and policies for community-buy in and sustainability***

In 2019, Mercy Corps and Princeton University published a joint [report from Colombia, Liberia and Nigeria](https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/rethinking-return-lessons) examining the challenges of implementing programmes and policies in post-conflict settings and the factors that contribute to whether and how forcibly displaced people (FDPs) return. Across all three contexts, formal inclusion of FDPs in decision making structures was lacking and would likely have improved government responses to displacement. Given the inevitable long tail of return, investing in local institutions would have facilitated sustainable programming.

In Nigeria, we found that multiple levels of government were sidelining the role of traditional leaders at the community level, partly because incorporating traditional leaders would position displacement into a complex set of political issues. However, this resulted in low level of community-buy in and involvement in the design and implementation of government led IDP reintegration programming.

In Liberia, the national government and UNHCR and IOM coordinated well around returns but they did not not sufficiently engage local actors. When the international organisations left, there was insufficient capacity to continue the work. In contrast, a strong civil society and FDP social movement in Colombia was pivotal to the relative success of FDP programming.

**Key Resources**

Towards Durable Solutions to Displacement, Understanding Social Acceptance of Returnees in Post-ISIS Iraq (Mercy Corps, 2021)<https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/towards-durable-solutions-displacement>

Conflict sensitivity training course and toolkit - (Mercy Corps & CDA Collaborative Learning, 2021)

<https://www.mercycorps.org/conflict-sensitivity-training-course>

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# Rethinking Return: Lessons from Colombia, Liberia and Nigeria (Princeton University & Mercy Corps 2020)

<https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/rethinking-return-lessons>

The Currency of Connections - The reconfiguration of social connections in Bentiu, South Sudan (Mercy Corps, 2019)

<https://www.mercycorps.org/currency-connections>

Time to Turn Around: The Decline of UK Peacebuilding (Mercy Corps & Saferworld 2023)

<https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/the-decline-of-uk-peacebuilding>

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