

Talking points Alfredo Zamudio – Director of IDMC
UNHCR HC Dialogue, 17 December 2015

Thematic session 2: Addressing ‘new’ root causes: urbanisation, environmental degradation, food
insecurity, water scarcity, natural hazards and climate change
Analysing displacement drivers to mobilise action

Excellencies, esteemed colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon and thank you for this kind invitation to share findings and observations from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre on root causes of displacement. We welcome the focus of this year’s Dialogue and the opportunity to re-think displacement and migration with all of you. IDMC’s messages today focus on analysis and action.

As many of you already mentioned yesterday, **responses to displacement must be informed by a solid analysis of its underlying drivers and their linkages**. For IDMC, this analysis should go beyond considering conflict, disaster or development displacement as separate phenomena.

We think it is important to get conceptual clarity about what constitutes root causes and drivers, and how they relate to proximate causes or triggers. I would like to refer you to the paper we published this week, which I hope can be a valuable contribution to this discussion.

Essentially, **analysing displacement drivers is the only way to identify the right leverage points and to develop more coordinated and sustainable responses across a wider range of actors, timeframes and mandates**. A complementary understanding of people’s capacity to adjust, mitigate and cope with these drivers at the local level can explain why and when different people flee, and processes through which areas may become uninhabitable.

Data across all phases of displacement and across all situations is required. Combining comprehensive contextual analyses with robust data should allow practitioners to identify ways to intervene to reduce displacement risk and to reach sustainable solutions. IDMC is innovating in the production of knowledge

and tools for policy makers to inform and bolster these efforts. We greatly value the partnerships we have with many of you here today around data collection. But more needs to be done, and we need to diversify and consolidate this partnership base in the future.

IDMC's analysis shows that the most common drivers of displacement are political. Conflict and disasters do not take place in a political vacuum. The majority of displacement crises, particularly protracted ones, are the result of political blockages that prevent adequate protection and assistance reaching IDPs and limit prospects for resolving displacement crises. The scope and severity of displacement situations is determined by political factors that include state fragility, weak governance, corruption, prioritising economic interests over IDPs' needs and rights, and the misuse of resources.

Take natural hazards. Our research shows that natural hazards – whether climate-related or geophysical – don't in themselves cause displacement. It is only when hazards hit highly populated areas and vulnerable communities that they become disasters and cause people to become displaced.

Human-made factors drive the global increasing trend in disaster displacement. These include rapid economic development, urban growth and population growth in hazard prone areas.

Although the relationship between climate change and displacement is not straightforward, we know **we can expect climate change to magnify the risk of displacement in the future.**

Many of you have mentioned urbanization as a key driver of displacement. Urban displacement is expected to grow in the coming decades, as rapid and unplanned urbanisation continues to increase and hazards become more frequent and intense. Most cities in developing countries have only been able to absorb their rapidly growing populations through the expansion of informal settlements. These settlements perpetuate displacement by leaving IDPs in crowded and precarious slum like conditions, and increasing their vulnerability to disasters, disease, sexual exploitation, and further displacement.

Looking at these complex phenomena shows that displacement is far more than a humanitarian challenge. It needs to mobilise a much broader range of actors and approaches. While prevention and response should be recognised primarily as a state responsibility, there are also roles for non-state armed

groups, civil society organisations, the private sector and intergovernmental and international organisations. Of key importance is to combine wide-ranging perspectives from those engaged in peace-building, climate change adaptation, land management, security and psycho-social care. Humanitarians alone cannot address the structural factors that drive crises and displacement.

Policy and operational frameworks have tended to approach displacement according to its immediate precipitating trigger – conflict, disaster, etc. – and have led to siloed responses. Some governments have adopted distinct national legal frameworks on protection of people displaced by conflict and disaster, and conflict prevention and disaster risk management are still regarded as discrete and separate issues. The result is that there is limited crossover of expertise, sharing of knowledge or joint working. **Effective responses to displacement require common frameworks and analysis and coordinated programming.**

Most of the drivers are within the realm of political control and therefore can be mitigated through stronger laws, policies and better governance. **We have a unique opportunity to address these in the post-2015 period.** The new Paris Agreement shows just how far we have come and we now have to focus on the next steps in support and implementation.

The Paris Agreement, Sustainable Development Goals, Sendai Framework, and the action plans that will emerge from the World Humanitarian Summit and Habitat III in 2016 have the potential to address the complex roots that underpin today's displacement crises and to consensually develop indicators to measure the drivers that lead to displacement. It is imperative that implementation of these policies is formally and coherently linked.

Displacement can be prevented and minimized. But for this, we need a solid understanding of all the factors that drive it. This understanding is crucial for identifying the right leverage points, prioritising investments, and getting the right people around the table. The task now is to gather the evidence and mobilise the political support that is needed.

Thank you.