

AIES Presentation

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Internally Displaced People: What do we do?

GREETINGS

Thank you to the Australian Institute of Emergency Services for the opportunity to speak with you today.

INTRODUCTION

The principle theme of this conference is integration of agencies involved in emergency response. This is a vital issue of importance. Each agency here brings with them a particular area of expertise. It is only through effective collaboration that we can even attempt to address the needs resulting from emergency situations.

I am here today representing AUSTCARE. AUSTCARE is a not-for-profit, independent and non-sectarian Australian non-government organisation, an NGO. We don't have helicopters, huge warehouses or teams of medical experts. And yet we respond to emergencies to assist the most vulnerable, the displaced.

In situations of war, conflict or natural disaster, thousands, hundreds of thousands and sometimes millions of people can be uprooted from their homes and forced to flee in search of safety, either into another country to become refugees or remain in their own country, as the internally displaced. The needs of these displaced people are vast – some of which we have touched on today. They are in desperate need of immediate safety, shelter, water, food and clothes. They also need to be protected from violence, discrimination and further attacks.

Facing uncertain political situations, ongoing conflict, shaky ceasefires, landmines, trauma, property disputes, collapsed economies and destroyed infrastructure, many displaced people are unable to return home. This displacement can drag out for months, years or even decades.

It is this environment that NGOs work in.

My presentation today will cover three key areas:

1. Firstly, I will address the specific needs of refugees and internally displaced in emergency situations, and how NGOs seek to address them. Rescue, food, water, shelter and health must also be integrated with protection from violence, landmines, sexual abuse and discrimination.
2. The second area I will cover is the stages beyond the emergency. For many displaced people the emergency phase is only the beginning of years of drawn out displacement, living in poor conditions, separated from family and friends.
3. And finally, I will talk about how we might be able to work together, to find points of synergy, which could enable us to deliver a more effective, wholistic response to communities affected by natural or man-made disasters.

I have an important disclaimer to make. I do not speak on behalf of all NGOs. I couldn't even if I would like to. NGOs are not one homogenous group. They vary in size, source of funds, style of operations and types of programs. Some are international; others national – with international activities – and some are local or national NGOs. Most work with displaced populations to provide material assistance, establish and maintain refugee camps or help to reduce poverty.

AUSTCARE

Firstly, a word on AUSTCARE. AUSTCARE is an all-Australian NGO born in the shadows of conflict in 1967 and which has been providing emergency relief and long-term support to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and returnees in more than 30 countries.

Right now we are doing 21 projects in ten countries, including in East Timor, South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. We work with local and international partners to enhance human security at the grass roots level through practical peace building programs – improving governance, helping strengthen civil society in local communities, enhancing food security, improving education and

training, removing landmines, initiating micro credit schemes, and providing health support including against HIV/AIDS.

AUSTCARE's humanitarian and developmental work in post-conflict countries vital to peace-building and ending the refugee cycle.

The situations NGOs operate in

We are here today to talk about emergency response, essentially the rapid, effective short-term action to meet the immediate needs. And these immediate needs are vast. They extend beyond immediate rescue, food, water, sanitation, health and shelter.

Fleeing war, conflict or natural disaster, refugees and displaced persons are also particularly vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and restricted freedom. Living in a refugee camp does not always offer sanctuary. Refugees and displaced persons can face three key interconnected dangers;

1. Deliberate personal violence,
2. Deprivation and impoverishment resulting from hunger, disease and exhaustion;
3. Restricted access to local services as a result of damage to services or fear of violence.

Refugees and IDPs fleeing conflict and natural disaster now number around 45 million – more than double the population of Australia – and almost all of these people are the innocent victims of conflict. These people represent the “poorest of the poor”.

Sadly, up to 80% of today's refugees are women and children, many of whom will spend years living in refugee camps. Women and children are particularly at risk of sexual abuse, threats and exploitation. The elderly and disabled can face intimidation and neglect.

These people continue to live day to day, in fear of continued persecution, separated from family and friends, with limited access to education and employment and

surviving with only basic shelter and food. A significant number of refugees have experienced severe trauma and many have suffered or witnessed torture.

Protection

NGOs, such as AUSTCARE respond in emergencies to meet the basic needs – food, water, sanitation, shelter, and do so with the objective of ensuring that the most vulnerable are given priority. This is part of what is called, in the world of humanitarian agencies, protection. Immediate relief assistance has the objective of reducing vulnerability and preventing further susceptibility to exploitation, abuse and discrimination.

Protection activities aim to ensure the physical security of the displaced but it is not protection through armed presence. Vulnerable groups, such as women and the elderly, must be incorporated into camp planning and management, to ensure that their needs are integrated into design plans and that they are not put at further risk through ill-conceived aid. For example, the location of latrines within camp settings and the strategic use of lighting can have a major impact on women's physical security. Universal standards called the Sphere Standards govern refugee camp design as well as other types of emergency assistance, such as wells and tent construction.

Protection aims to uphold the respect for the human rights of refugees and displaced persons in accordance with human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law. When a situation causes the massive uprooting of people within their own country, we can draw upon the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. NGOs often carry out protection work through advocacy and negotiation with local authorities, military or paramilitary groups, police and other international actors on issues such as the recruitment of children, abductions, harassment, sexual violence, access to camps and theft of aid materials. These issues have a direct impact on the safety and security of displaced people. Without these issues being addressed, further instability can result.

In addition to integrating these protection issues into our work, AUSTCARE supports the protection work of UN agencies such as UNICEF, UNHCR (the UN refugee agency) and OCHA (the UN coordination body). Through our Rapid Response

Register, AUSTCARE seconds experienced people available for immediate short-term employment as human rights protection staff. Our aim is to boost the capacity of international and regional actors to better protect displaced persons where they need it: in refugee camps and communities.

AUSTCARE's Rapid Response Register enables agencies to improve the security and human rights situations of refugees and IDPs by quickly increasing field presence. This is the only mechanism within Australia focused solely on employment of civilian protection staff.

Complex Emergencies

The immediate needs and protection concerns of the displaced resulting from conflict and natural disaster have many similarities – chaos, disease, death, destroyed infrastructure, trauma. They are also quite distinct, as conflict brings added complexities of security threats – both to the local populations and staff.

The situation is further complicated when conflict and natural disaster occur together. In Aceh and Sri Lanka with the tsunami and in Pakistani Kashmir with the recent earthquake, we witnessed natural disaster overlapping with a conflict zone. This presents a complex emergency situation for NGOs, governments, armies and the populations themselves.

Sri Lanka

When the tsunami hit Sri Lanka on December 26th last year, the country was sliding back towards war. The ceasefire signed in 2002 had not resulted in a peace agreement and peace talks had completely broken down. The twenty year civil conflict had displaced 800, 000 people – some fleeing to India, but most remaining within Sri Lanka.

Skirmishes, strikes and ambushes were common. Assassinations, linked to the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) continued throughout the 2004 election. In July that year, a female suicide bomber blew herself up in a police station in Colombo, killing four police.

At the time, I was working with the UN refugee agency, UNHCR in Kilinochchi, the capital of the LTTE controlled area. Many displaced people from that area living in other parts of the country did not wish to return: the political stalemate, together with the destroyed infrastructure and landmines were not incentives for return. Even more so, the strict rule of the LTTE, regular disappearances and recruitment of children had a strong influence on many to stay away. But they stayed in decrepit camps, some in individual huts, others in communal shelters.

The tsunami created a pause. Amid the chaos of the first few days, there was a whisper that perhaps this “big wave” might help to put things in perspective.

However, as we know, the tsunami caused further political problems, adding to the suspicion that the Government and the LTTE felt of each other. The tsunami hit areas in the north and east where those displaced by the conflict lived, and other areas in the south and south west that did not have conflict IDPs. The huge international relief effort was principally focused on the worst hit areas, those in the south and south west, causing the LTTE leadership in the north to claim discrimination. A claim that was reiterated when the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, decided not to visit the tsunami-devastated areas under LTTE-control on his visit to survey the damage in January.

Like many organisations, AUSTCARE responded to the tsunami quickly, providing emergency shelter materials and initiating gender-based violence programs with our partner agencies. And like other organisations we found have the process of working in Sri Lanka challenging. The politics and mistrust between the LTTE and the Government hinder, rather than facilitate efforts at rehabilitation.

ACEH

In Aceh, the situation has been quite different. When the tsunami devastated the Indonesian province of Aceh, the region had also been severely affected by years of violence, armed conflict and displacement of communities. Over the 29 years of conflict in the province, 12,000 people, mostly civilians had been killed. An estimated 120,000 people were displaced between May 2003 and December 2004 alone.

The tsunami destruction of Aceh was catastrophic, displacing over 500,000 and killing 200,000. And different political outcome has resulted. In August this year, the same month that the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister was assassinated (widely believe to be committed by the LTTE), the GAM rebels in Aceh signed a peace agreement with the Indonesian Government, giving up their call for a separate state in return for withdrawal of Indonesian military. .

The GAM and Indonesian government have mostly supported and assisted the efforts of the international community. Indeed, in comparison to the challenge we faced in operating in Sri Lanka, in Aceh AUSTCARE has opened an office and has recently signed a contract with the United Nations Development Fund to reconstruct 40 brick factories – a much needed resource.

Those displaced in Aceh by the tsunami and/or the conflict has ongoing needs. It will take years to rebuild their province, and the trauma, the loss of loved ones will never go away. But the new hope for an end of fighting provides the best chance for real rehabilitation, both of the infrastructure and the people themselves.

Protracted Displacement

The examples of Aceh and Sri Lanka illustrate the complexities facing displaced populations. For the millions of refugees and displaced people around the world at this moment, the emergency phase is only the beginning. Most will continue to be living in uncertainty for the next decade. The fact is that until a political settlement is achieved, most displaced people are forced to live in poverty, often for generations.

There are phases of population displacement requiring different humanitarian responses, from short-term emergency situations through to post crisis rehabilitation and reconstruction, through to long-term development. These responses can not be separated from each other completely. Refugees need help at critical periods of flight and physical dislocation.

They also need assistance to help them realise one of three durable solutions to the displacement problem – voluntary repatriation to their home country when conditions

are safe, local integration when agreed by host governments and local communities, and resettlement to another country

Voluntary repatriation is considered the preferred course of action because it returns people to their homeland, in conditions of security, and in greatest numbers.

Once refugees have returned home, support is essential well beyond the initial reintegration period. Increasingly, there is understanding that repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction require a coming together of humanitarian and development actors and funds to support sustainable repatriation.

This is also where I want to highlight the threat of landmines. They exacerbate problems of displacement and repatriation, are often used to terrorise or force civilians to flee and prevent people from returning home when conflict is over. It is estimated that there are up to 50 million landmines in the world today and that one person is maimed or killed by landmines every hour.

Vulnerable people are often forced to use contaminated land. Most casualties happen when people are doing basic chores. Casualties of landmines are so often those striving to ensure their survival.

Cambodia is one of the world's least developed countries with incredible poverty and poor economic infrastructure as a result of nearly 30 years of civil war. Basic services are lacking, especially infrastructure in rural areas, which limits economic opportunities and contributes to the poverty cycle. Cambodia is also one of the most mine-affected countries in the world.

AUSTCARE has worked in two provinces bordering Thailand. The legacy of conflict here is devastating - 267 villages contaminated with landmines and UXO, infrastructure such as water sources, roads, schools and hospitals destroyed or damaged, a high prevalence of water borne diseases like childhood diarrhoea, many war victims – amputees, orphans and widows, a whole generation with no access to educational services during the conflict, limited access to agricultural services and training and health services not functioning.

In Cambodia today we can witness the resettlement of communities on land cleared of landmines, the construction of schools, of agricultural development through simple and sustainable methods, of cow banks and rice banks, of clean water from the construction of simple wells, adults who have been deprived of any education attending literacy classes as well as being able to see their children attending school, farmer field schools giving basic skills and crop selection and pest and weed control, water and hygiene education, and a host of other worthwhile projects.

For protracted refugee situations, *local integration* of refugees in country of asylum is a viable option. However, the majority of countries hosting large refugee populations are themselves developing countries. Many require enormous international assistance to ensure the effective integration of refugees.

Resettlement is the third durable solution, historically seen as the last resort, although for many refugees the only safe and viable solution. ‘Resettlement in a third country’ and ‘local integration’ have been applicable to less than one per cent of the world’s refugees over the last two decades.

How can we work together?

NGOs have a critical role to play in emergency response, and in the ongoing rehabilitation and reconstruction of communities. But to return to the theme of the conference, we need to work with other actors to provide effective assistance. As I mentioned at the beginning of my presentation, most NGOs do not have massive logistical capabilities, they do not have the ability to secure law and order in an area, and they do not have machinery to build essential services. Without the involvement of actors who have these areas of expertise, it can be impossible for NGOs to operate.

Later this month, AUSTCARE’s CEO Mike Smith is meeting with the Indonesian Government to discuss opening an office in Jogjakarta. As a retired Major General from the Australian Defence Force who has now crossed into the humanitarian sector, Mike well understands the need for further integration of actors involved in emergency response. While he is there, he will meet with universities to discuss the

idea of developing the capacity of the local emergency services within Indonesia to respond more effectively.

With 2005 dubbed the year of natural disasters, it is impossible for international relief experts to be everywhere. It is therefore crucial that local capacity is built, particularly in disaster prone areas. Building local capacity to provide services and aid is key area of AUSTCARE expertise, such capacity building could also be extended to emergency services.

Each agency here today brings with them a particular area of expertise. It is only through effective collaboration that we can even attempt to address the needs resulting from emergency situations

And there is often effective coordination between actors on the ground. The tsunami and recent South Asia earthquake are examples where coordination has worked well. However, there is room for further coordination. We need to think about emergency response in a wholistic way – it is not merely the immediate rescue needs of the victims of disaster, nor is it only their water and sanitation needs, nor is it prevention of sexual violence – recovery and the slow process of rehabilitation can only succeed with an integrated approach between assistance and protection.

Emergency response can only be effective if it is implemented with partners to ensure a transition from emergency agencies to reconstruction and rehabilitation actors.

Thank you.