

Planning for durable solutions: “A place to be”

Eastern Blooming Land has been affected by conflict for ten years, causing the displacement of several thousand people. Some have crossed the border to seek refuge, while others have moved west, mainly to urban areas. Sporadic fighting still takes place in the east, so IDPs tend not to consider return feasible.

Lotus Quay is an area of the capital Blooming Town. It sits on a riverbank in the Greater Blooming Town area, and is prone to flooding. The population, initially of a few hundred families, has been growing steadily over the years. Many of the residents are IDPs who have fled the conflict in the east. According to recent estimates, there are now more than 15,000 people living in the area. Distinguishing between local inhabitants and others is complicated by the fact that many of the IDPs do not have documents, either because they have been lost or because they do not fulfil the requirements for registration.

Following flooding in the area and visits by the Blooming Emergency Management Agency, in September the local government orders the immediate relocation of all Lotus Quay residents. The municipal authorities have long advocated for the demolition of the settlement, which was built without permission on public land, was in breach of housing regulations and had no utilities or other basic services. Despite its shortcomings, the inhabitants, generally like living in Lotus Quay, given its proximity to Blooming Town’s markets and other services.

Before issuing the relocation order, the authorities identify two sites: a 20-acre plot in Nearer Land, not far from Lotus Quay, for the 2,000 people who could prove they were original settlers in the Greater Blooming Town area; and an eight-acre plot in Faraway Land, 250 kilometres east of Blooming Town, for those who could not. The relocations are planned to start in two weeks and be completed by 1 November.

The Lotus Quay residents learn about the authorities’ plans via the media. Only later are they formally notified, and given plans, instructions and timelines. Many of them stage a protest against the relocation to Faraway Land. They tell the authorities they have no intention of moving, and if they did they would have to be compensated for the loss of their current homes and employment opportunities. Advocacy groups say the relocation order offers no guarantees to those affected.

Little is known about Lotus Quay’s population, but a definitive solution is needed to avoid the problems caused by flooding in recent years. The authorities decide to postpone the relocation until 1 January. They call for a meeting of agencies and civil society organisations, and launch a mapping exercise to identify residents’ basic needs with a view to achieving a solution as soon as possible.