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Discussion Paper

Development approaches to displacement

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United Nations Development Programme



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Cover photo: A Syrian female farmer plants seeds in a UNDP-supported farmer cooperative nursery in the village of Tal Abbas in Akkar, Lebanon. Photo: Dalia Khamissy/UNDP



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Development approaches to displacement

I. Introduction

Forced displacement presently affects over 60 million people worldwide, of which over 38 million are internally displaced persons (IDPs).¹ Current data suggests that women living in protracted displacement² slightly outnumber men, and given the difficulty in accessing female IDPs in many contexts, it is likely that their number is underestimated.³ The number of refugees and IDPs continues to grow and the length of stay in host countries has been on the rise in recent decades.⁴ More than 45 percent of refugees live in a state of protracted displacement lasting for more than five years while about 50 percent of IDPs have been displaced for more than three years.⁵ They live in ‘second exile’, caught between the inability to return to their homes and the lack of durable solutions⁶ elsewhere. While the average duration of 33 current protracted refugee situations at the end of 2014 is estimated at 25 years, most of the situations (24) have lasted for more than 20 years.⁷

This paper is developed as a reference document. Its objective is to provide a broad overview of UNDP’s offer of support with respect to protracted displacement. The document underlines the importance of investing in development approaches to displacement, providing a number of concrete examples from current and past programmes. This paper complements a series of country notes with programme examples across all regions.

II. Root causes of displacement

- **Poverty and lack of sustainable livelihood opportunities**

An estimated 600 million jobs are needed in the next decade to sustain growth and social cohesion worldwide. In a significant number of countries, rising unemployment is fueling social unrest and leading to forced displacement (to be distinguished from economic or labour migration). More than 200 million people globally are unemployed, with 74 million young people (aged 15–24) looking for work in 2014⁸ and an estimated one billion likely to join the labour market between 2012 and 2020. While in some developed countries youth unemployment has reached disturbingly high levels, as many as two thirds of youth in

1. For refugees, see UNHCR, ‘Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2014’, 2015. For IDPs, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), ‘Global Estimates 2015’, 2015. For people displaced by disasters, visit www.internal-displacement.org/global-estimates.

² Protracted displacement is generally defined as refugee situations where more than 25,000 refugees have been in exile for more than five years and other displacements (including internal) for which there are no solutions in sight.

3. Norwegian Refugee Council and IDMC, ‘Global Overview 2015: People internally displaced by conflict and violence’, Geneva, 2015.

4. Globally, this is 13.9 million more persons newly displaced by conflict than the year before, including 2.9 million new refugees. See UNHCR, Note 2015.

5. UNHCR, ‘World at War: Global Trends - Forced Displacement in 2014’, 2015.

⁶ Durable solutions refer to solutions that will allow refugees to rebuild their lives in dignity and peace, including voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country in situations where it is impossible for a person to go back home or remain in the host country.

7. Ibid.

8. International Labor Organization, ‘World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2015’, 2015, at http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/2015/WCMS_337069/lang--en/index.htm.

developing economies are either without work, not studying or engaged in irregular informal employment.⁹

Employment opportunities, in particular, remain distributed unevenly between, as well as within, countries. The absence of social protection mechanisms, which can help protect against economic and environmental shocks (whether sudden onset or slow, such as drought and limited access to arable land) exacerbates these tensions and increases forced displacement.



Microdams created with UNDP support to secure pastoral livelihoods. Photo: UNDP Ethiopia.

- **Protracted conflicts and violent extremism**

From 2007 to 2014, the number of active conflicts almost tripled, from four to eleven. The number of protracted conflicts also increased, as evidenced in, amongst others, Central African Republic, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, South Sudan, Syria and Ukraine. In many fragile situations, the 'rule of force' applies, not the rule of law, including weak enforcement of justice frameworks and lack of accountability. This includes violations of international and domestic law, injustices and insecurity, which dominate the lives of millions of people living in fear, or forced to flee their homes and communities.

9. International Labor Organization, 'Global Employment Trends 2013: Recovering from a second jobs dip', Geneva, 2013.

More than 30 countries across all regions are now fighting violent extremist groups. In 2014, the five countries with the highest levels of violent extremist attacks generated over 16 million refugees and IDPs.¹⁰ In Iraq alone, ongoing violence, much of which is associated with the Islamic State (IS), displaced 2.2 million in 2014, while many more are being forcefully displaced by IS within the region, and by other related groups in Syria. The prevailing violent extremism by Boko Haram and the government-led counterinsurgency operations against the group, ongoing inter-communal clashes and natural disasters together have led to the internal displacement of over 2.15 million people in Nigeria.¹¹ It has also resulted in large movements into neighbouring countries, including more than 120,000 refugees and 40,000 asylum seekers.¹²

- **Natural and man-made disasters**

Between 2008 and 2013, on average 27.5 million people annually were displaced by disasters, most of them in Asia and Africa and in countries that are fragile and conflict-affected.¹³ While displacement in the context of a sudden onset event such as a hurricane or tsunami is directly attributable, slow-onset disasters such as desertification and drought (including El Niño) are likely to have a larger, but more hidden impact on displacement. Climate change effects and poor natural resource management, leading to environmental degradation and the erosion of livelihoods are driving the movement from rural to urban areas, where people often settle in unsafe, hazard-prone locations as well. The Humanitarian Financing Panel recently pointed to wrong-headed funding priorities as another factor, noting that “12 out of a group of 23 low-income countries received less than US\$10 million for Disaster Risk Reduction over 20 years while receiving US\$5.6 billion in disaster response funding.”¹⁴

- **Poor governance**

Endemic political exclusion, marginalization, discrimination and oppressive political environments combined with frequent human rights violations are also key push factors for displacement. Many flee forced labour and/or military conscription, arbitrary arrest and detention, as well as degrading treatment and torture. Poor governance and corruption also provide a breeding ground for organized crime. In Central America, high levels of crime and related violence have driven mostly young people to make the extremely dangerous journey through Mexico to the United States.

10. UNDP, ‘Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity’, Policy Note, December 2015.

11. See <http://www.internal-displacement.org/sub-saharan-africa/nigeria/figures-analysis>. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) set up a Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) in July 2014 to support the Government in collecting and disseminating data on IDPs. As of December 2015, DTM assessments identified 2,151,979 IDPs.

12. See https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/NGA_SRP_150323_EN.pdf.

13. 2014 Human Development Report.

14. High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, ‘Report to the Secretary-General’, 17 January 2016.

Addressing root causes: Preventing and responding to violent extremism in Africa

The growth of violent extremism and the devastating impact of groups embracing violent ideologies is not only undermining past development gains, but also threatens to halt prospects for decades to come. Following the increasing number of attacks by Boko Haram, for instance, foreign investment in Nigeria has declined by 30 percent, leading to even more worrying levels of unemployment. High levels of violence and insecurity prevent many children and students across Africa from attending school or university, impacting their quality of life now and in the future.

Extremist violence also has direct impacts on displacement and mobility in the region: The presence and operations of Boko Haram alone have displaced an estimated 2.1 million people internally, and forced more than 160,000 Nigerians to flee to Cameroon, Chad and Niger (UNHCR, December 2015). These movements often exacerbate pre-existing conflicts and dynamics of displacement amongst pastoralists. Increasing levels of insecurity forced Cameroon to close its border with Nigeria, hitting hardest those whose livelihoods depend on cross-border informal trade.

UNDP is launching a new four-year regional initiative to prevent and address the growth of violent extremism in Africa, with a particular focus on violent extremism tied to the politicization and manipulation of religion. The project will be implemented in three groups of countries, including 'epicentre countries' such as Nigeria, Mali and Somalia; 'spill-over countries', including Cameroon, Chad, Kenya, Mauritania and Niger; and 'at risk' countries, including Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. The project focuses on interventions in six key areas: socio-economic development; rule of law and security; disengagement and reintegration of members of extremist groups; media and technology; community resilience and gender-specific initiatives. Programming in these areas is supported by two cross-cutting initiatives on research, policy and advocacy, and capacity-building for regional and sub-regional organizations.

In its focus on the immediate causes of violent extremism, the project complements UNDP's core programming, which addresses many of the underlying causes, including weak state capacity, poor service delivery, endemic marginalization and poverty, and the lack of a coordinated regional approach.

III. Displacement: A development challenge

Displacement arises from and poses a combination of challenges that require effective development approaches. The above identified root causes of displacement tend to come together in a mutually reinforcing manner in many countries and regions, creating hotspots of vulnerability. The growing

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