

The Displacement Dilemma – a review of IDP issues & concerns in Eastern Chad

“We want to go back to our village but we can’t go back to the violence, we can only return if the armed men leave”

Since the beginning of large-scale internal population displacement in Eastern Chad in 2005, the government, UN agencies and many humanitarian organizations expressed concern that assistance to these populations could result in a culture of dependency or create a ‘pull effect’ for non-affected Chadians. Consequently, Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps were initially not established. Chadians fleeing violence were left to fend for themselves seeking refuge in neighboring communities who, despite their own difficulties, provided for the displaced populations as best they could.

With no subsequent improvement in the security environment few IDPs have returned to their homes. In 2007, there were yet further displacements swelling the total number of IDPs to more than 155,000 overstretching both community coping mechanisms and the limited aid provided by NGOs. Within months the situation was labeled a humanitarian disaster¹ and assistance was scaled up by the UN and other aid agencies.



In September 2007 the international community, under UN mandate (resolution 1778), resolved to deploy a multi-dimensional force MINURCAT² and EUFOR³ to provide protection for refugee camps, IDP sites and humanitarian aid in the short-term, and to help the Chadian government reestablish security, judicial and administrative control over disputed areas with an eye to stabilizing the country and ultimately facilitating IDP returns.

IDP assistance and return policy remains a contentious issue in Eastern Chad. A number of competing visions are seeking to define the most appropriate course of action to help the displaced find durable long-term solutions for their families.

Absent from the debates so far, however, have been the most important and knowledgeable commentators: the internally displaced persons themselves. In order to remedy this oversight CARE undertook a systematic survey of 315 IDP households and conducted a series of interviews with beneficiary groups in the spring of 2008. By sharing the results in this brief, we hope to ensure that IDP voices are heard, their issues addressed and that they gain a rightful seat at the policy table.

¹ Situation Report #1, Fiscal Year 2008, “Chad Complex Emergency” (April 2008) USAID.

² UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT)

³ European Force for Chad and CAR

Key Study findings

1. 99% of surveyed internally displaced persons (IDPs) cited security concerns as the number one reason preventing their return to their villages of origin.
2. 94% stated that unless long-term sustainable security is established they would not return to their villages of origin.
3. A vast majority (91%) thinks the Government of Chad has the responsibility to ensure a safe environment for return or resettlement.
4. Given the current environment, when queried as to the best durable option for their families' wellbeing only 11% stated a voluntary return to their villages of origin would be in their best interest - with 79% stating that they would prefer local integration in the host sites where they were presently settled.

CARE recommendations at a glance

1. The Chadian Government should not use displacement or return policy for political or state security reasons. Those displaced should enjoy all rights (including freedom of movement) guaranteed under Chadian law and should be protected from harm by the state.
2. Resettlement options and aid should be given to the IDPs in accordance with the *"Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement"*. Furthermore aid levels and distribution should not be instrumentalized – NGO's should ensure that their aid is given according to need alone.
3. IDP voices and wishes must be taken into consideration when defining funding, programming, and settlement activities.
4. EUFOR and MINURCAT should concentrate on improving security and in helping to strengthen and re-establish government administrative and judicial presence and control across the Chadian territory. They should refrain from using Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in order to promote premature returns to unsafe areas.
5. The international community should increase support for localized conflict resolution initiatives. This along with other solutions for sustainable security and service delivery in the villages of origin must be found in order to guarantee appropriate conditions for durable voluntary returns of IDPs in Chad.

Anatomy of the IDP crisis: the causes of displacement & the inhibitors of return.

The various peoples⁴ of the Assounga region have had a history of small tribal skirmishes fueled by intermittent cattle rustling and land-use tensions (between nomadic and sedentary groups). These chronic incidents were generally low-intensity affairs which historically were resolved through indigenous conflict resolution efforts. Under the guidance of their traditional leaders the area's inhabitants had generally co-existed peacefully with the neighboring tribes settled on either side of the porous border with Sudan's' Darfur region.

Unusually violent and repeated cross-border attacks by Jenjawed militiamen on villages in the Dar-Sila and Assounga departments of the Ouaddai region in late 2005 led to the first large scale internal population movements in Eastern Chad. The arming and instrumentalization of the Jenjawed and of other groups inside both Chad and Sudan is one of the main factors responsible for the increased level of violence which has been witnessed. In the Assounga region these attacks (as in neighboring Sudan), have been directed almost entirely towards non-Arab villages.

Many of those interviewed spoke of being driven from their homes, houses being burnt and villages looted in the wake of government forces withdrawing from the area which permitted the attackers to overrun their villages with complete impunity. Following the initial largely indiscriminate attacks in the Borota region some local tribes joined or colluded with the Jenjawed in order to protect themselves and their belongings, to resolve longstanding grievances or to gain access to additional land and livestock.

IDPs also mentioned an internal cause for some of the violence: their chiefs had been approached to support certain anti-government armed groups either through direct participation in their campaigns and or by paying a tax per family. Upon refusing to pay, certain tribes or ethnic groups became subject to attack and forced expulsion while other tribes in the same villages were able to remain.

With the intensification of rebel group movements and the potential for intensified internal conflict government forces were

redeployed from their garrisons in the outlying areas and from some smaller border crossings towards major cities (Abeche, Goz-Beida, Guereda, etc), leaving a security vacuum in which both cross-border and inter-communal violence could spread un-hindered.

This intra-communal fighting between different ethnic groups worsened with the direct support by the Chadian government to some non-Arab groups who were, in some cases, set up as local militias armed by the government to ensure their "protection" against attacks⁵.

Some militias took this opportunity, with the lack of formal (administrative or traditional) authorities, to resolve old family feuds, and settle land disputes. IDPs in Goundiang camp for example spoke of being dispossessed from their lands and belongings by nearby villagers and/or tribes. It was therefore impossible for them to return to their original three main villages as their fields and homes had been expropriated by force by their neighbours.



"I know some of those who carried out the attacks, those who came and stole our things and killed men in my village. So I cannot go back until there is security."

~ Quote from interview in Arkum IDP Site.

⁴ populated by a mix of different peoples (Ouaddai, Arabs, Mimi, Massalite, Fur and Dadjo)

⁵ Dadjo in particular, who were initially most affected by the attacks and displacements

Peace and stability, the only way forward for voluntary return

98% of respondents stated that unless security was re-established in their villages of origin they could not go back as they feared further attacks. In the three sites surveyed IDPs felt secure from both cross border and inter-communal attack. Distance from the border, strength of local villagers and presence of foreign aid workers were all cited as having a positive effect on security.

For the most part conflicts between host communities and IDPs are resolved by meetings of chiefs and elders. In a number of cases host populations have benefited from assistance and increased services as a result of having welcomed IDPs to their villages, which definitely facilitates the relationships. This being said competition for and scarcity of natural resources (water, firewood and land) along with other grievances are beginning to test the welcome shown by some host communities. This was particularly evident in Goundiang where the IDP population was under-strain as access to resources and services were now creating a division between them and their hosts.

In villages of origin, village chiefs who returned did not feel comfortable inviting those still displaced to return, given that there is little belief that either the gendarmerie or the Chadian Army (ANT) can protect them from and/or prevent future attacks. Few had heard of EUFOR's deployment or civilian protection mandate.

Despite a positive and localized conflict resolution initiative which allowed some displaced families to return home and arguably reduced the number of recent security incidents in the Borota region, inter-ethnic tensions persist and many predominantly Massalite chiefs remain fearful of renewed cross border and/or inter-ethnic attacks.

They stressed that they could not restore herds, nor rebuild assets and compounds, out of fear that doing so could draw unwanted attention and reprisals. Some sent livestock and possessions salvaged from the raids far from their villages and had family members reside in IDP sites.

Recommendations

Solutions for lasting security in the areas of origin must be found prior to promoting voluntary return.

The international community should increase support for localized conflict resolution initiatives and, through the UN-mandated MINURCAT-EUFOR mission, should encourage and support the Chadian government in the re-establishment of local administrative, judicial, security and social services, all preconditions for durable peace and eventual return of IDPs.

The role of the Government

The Government's initial inadequate response to IDP needs can partly be explained by lack of resources and of a designated lead response agency. Once rectified the government extended its cooperation, permitted access and assistance by the international community and cooperated in establishing several health clinics and schools in areas with high IDP concentrations.

This being said, as the crisis now continues into its third year there remains little concerted effort to either meet the displaced population's basic needs in the host villages or to establish administrative authority, control or basic services in the disputed areas of intended return.

Almost in unanimity the IDPs feel that the Chadian government is responsible for re-establishing security and social services in their home villages – however few could imagine how or when this might come about. That feeling is also shared by those few who pushed by necessity have returned to their villages of origin despite the insecurity which predominates.

In spite of the lack of security or services in IDPs home villages the government has maintained its goal of encouraging premature returns to their areas of origin. In fact it has been said: "The strategy seems to be focused on the preservation of the government's stability and the integrity of the territory against Chadian rebels, but not necessarily on the security of civilians."⁶

Recommendations

The Chadian Government should not use displacement or return policy for political or state security reasons. Those displaced should enjoy all rights (including freedom of movement) guaranteed under Chadian law and should be protected from harm by the state.

A policy and practice framework for identifying villages and modalities for return needs to be identified; area selection and aid to be delivered should be vetted by the Chadian Government, the IDP population, the UN and the International assistance community.

⁶ "Internally Displaced in Chad: Trapped Between Civil Conflict and Sudan's Darfur Crisis" p21 (July 2007). Norwegian Refugee Council and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The role of the International Community: A quick fix or a long-term solution?

As security deteriorated and humanitarian agencies came under repeated attack, the international community responded through the deployment of a UN-authorized mission in Eastern Chad (MINURCAT, defined in resolution 1778). Its mandate is to improve the security situation, protect at-risk civilian populations (Sudanese refugees, IDPs, and civilians at risk of attacks) and to secure the working environment for humanitarian aid delivery (primarily via the missions' military component - EUFOR).

At the time of the study the delayed UN/EU mission was being progressively deployed and some advance convoys had passed through the IDP site areas. There were a number of incidents. Members of one convoy inexplicably informed IDPs in Arkum camp that they should prepare to return home and queried them on what assistance they would need in order to do so. A second convoy drove through makeshift barriers in the evening hours and caused panic among the residents.⁷

Despite the force's growing visibility very few IDPs understand their role or equated such presence with restoring security for their benefit. Furthermore, incidents like those mentioned above do not serve to inspire trust or confidence with the IDP populations.

Of concern is that MINURCAT and some countries contributing to EUFOR have shown an interest in encouraging early return of IDPs. While there is understandably considerable political pressure for EUFOR success in Chad, the indicator for success should not be IDP return numbers, but rather the number of areas made safe for return. We fear that the use of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in return areas, outside of a comprehensive framework for sustainable solutions, will in the long run be counterproductive and may lead to re-victimization and re-displacement of those being prematurely returned to unsafe areas.

In addition, as MINURCAT lacks capability to undertake its own QIPs, it has sought out NGO implementers to manage QIPs on its behalf in villages which it deems suitable for return. MINURCAT's three self-stated priorities are to: 1) create security 2) help re-establish the government's ability to manage and control its administrative territory and 3) help lay the foundation for a nascent justice system in Chad. However, it has chosen not to use QIP funding to these ends but has instead decided to use QIPs to provide water, education and other services in return communities in order to promote expedient returns. NGO's should maintain their impartiality and neutrality and not serve as conduits for such QIPs unless the condition for safe, durable and voluntary return outlined in the Guiding Principles for IDP return have been met.

⁷ These incidents were reported to EUFOR which has stated it will take measures to avoid recurrence.

Recommendations

EUFOR and MINURCAT should concentrate on improving security & helping to strengthen and re-establish government administrative, judicial presence and control over the Chadian territory.

Quick Impact projects (QIP's) targeting IDP assistance needs in return villages should not be undertaken to encourage returns to unsafe areas.

The humanitarian response

IDP families in Allacha, Goundiang and Arkoum have been under-assisted. Having received only 2 irregular or partial food distributions (1600Kcal day) in the last year, they are managing to cope by combining the limited amount of aid received with small income generating activities, farming and collection of wild seeds and plants. On average households have two weeks of food supply on-hand and will likely have difficulty in the traditional harvest gap period (July-Sept).



Many families have already resorted to selling off their remaining family possessions and the few non-food items received from NGOs (ie. plastic sheeting, soap) in order to buy food.

Seeds and tools projects have enabled a number of families to supplement their diets and incomes. However, such programs have not led to families becoming self-sufficient in foodstuffs. Most IDP families have had to pay rent for substandard and undersized plots on which to plant and a number of vulnerable families weren't able to participate in the programs at all. Harvest sizes have not been sufficient to cover basic nutrition needs nor to store seed grain for the next planting season.

Medical needs have been largely covered free of charge in the more central sites by government clinics and in smaller sites by mobile NGO clinics. Vaccination coverage, therapeutic feeding programs and epidemiological surveillance have until now been largely guaranteed. One outstanding challenge has been providing emergency and specialized care and this should be reinforced by the Ministry of Health and its partners. As the displacement crisis lengthens however there are fears that cost recovery and a reduction in the services on offer could severely impact the health situation of the IDP population. We were told that a number of services which had been provided were no longer free and as a result some IDP families stated that they were unable to afford treatment.

Although schools and education projects have been established for IDP children and host communities; the free education guaranteed for IDP children under guiding principle #23 has been severely compromised. Unfortunately school fees, uniforms and education materials have not often been freely provided and thus access for the poorest families impeded. In Arkum site for example a number of respondents spoke of keeping their children home because of a 500CFA school fee and the cost of school supplies being beyond their reach.

Worryingly, many IDPs indicated a lack of assistance in the sites was forcing their families to split up in search of sustenance. We were told some adolescents had left for the cities⁸, some women and children had relocated to nearby refugee camps where food aid was rumored to be more substantial, and despite the potential risk a number of families had sent family members home to try and tend their abandoned fields. All too often such survival mechanisms only increase the protection challenges and add to the IDP's general vulnerability.

It is in this light that the recent increase in announcements of funding for activities supporting the return of IDPs by various key donors in Chad is disconcerting. The international community must be vigilant to ensure that IDP under-assistance in sites is both reversed and not used as a 'push' tactic. Nor should they use aid in home villages as a 'pull tactic' to artificially induce premature IDP returns to areas where the conditions for lasting return do not presently exist.

⁸ There are also credible reports of induced recruitment into armed elements

Recommendations

Resettlement options and assistance should be given to the IDPs, in accordance with the United Nations "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement".

Donors should continue funding humanitarian and transition projects in IDP sites and surrounding villages, and not succumb to political pressure to target their funding primarily to villages of return.⁹

Aid agencies must provide assistance equally to IDP sites, resettlement areas and villages of return so that the IDPs' freedom of choice is upheld and their decision is not forced by or based solely on access to aid.

IDP Guiding Principles at a glance¹⁰

P1: IDPs shall enjoy the same rights and freedoms under international and domestic law as do other citizens.

P15: (IDPs) must be protected from forced return/relocation to areas at risk.

P18: IDPs have the right to: a) essential food & water b) basic shelter/housing; c) clothing d) medical services/ sanitation.

P28: Authorities should establish conditions & provide means to allow IDPs to return voluntarily and in safety to their homes or to resettle elsewhere, and they should facilitate the reintegration of returned or resettled IDPs.

P24--26. IDPs and aid actors must be protected from attack, and aid given according to need.

⁹ IASC IDP study group in N'Djamena on the 28th of April 2008 "Cadre stratégique pour la recherche de solutions durables en faveur des populations affectées par le déplacement à l'est du Tchad",

¹⁰ Summarized from the "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement" – located at www.reliefweb.org April 15th 2008.

Methodology

The reports findings and recommendations have been arrived at by combining 20 field practitioner interviews, a convenience sampling of 15 IDP households and groups (both in IDP sites and in return villages), followed by a systematic sampling (by questionnaire) of 315 IDP households in the three IDP Sites of Arkoum, Goundiang and Allacha. All field research was carried out in March and April of 2008.

Site mappings were conducted in order to ascertain the total number of IDP households with each household being defined as a separate living quarters or hut. 3150 huts were thus identified and a 10% sampling size of 315 households was selected (92 in Allacha, 50 in Goundiang, 172 in Arkoum). The survey was conducted in every 10th hut and the results were data captured within 3 days of the survey being completed.

All interviews were conducted by CARE Chad staff. Interviews were kept confidential. Quotes are not attributable by name and do not necessarily go with any pictures in this report.



NB: While some of the reports recommendations and conclusion may be pertinent to the situation of displacement across all of Eastern Chad, it should be noted that our primary concern and understanding of the situation comes from our experience accompanying IDP populations in the Assoungha region where CARE works.

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