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Policy questions and lessons

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Full Length Research

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It is a fact that the phenomenon of internal displacement is not just a matter that has bedeviled Uganda alone but several developing countries in the world. Much as most of these countries have eventually come out with policy measures to address the plight and well being of the affected and vulnerable members of society, it has always remained clear that serious and strategic leadership and commitment has not been effectively demonstrated. Resources, especially funds have been inadequate, but also the little available have been mismanaged! The central Government of Uganda took too long to come out with its own National Policy on Displacement despite so many years of displacement. This demonstrates apathy and fear of responsibility. In this research paper, it is emphasized that it is vital that the entire process of managing displacement be given effective attention and resources it deserves. The main processes that demand effective management of displaced persons include: settlement in camps, voluntary return, and resettlement in domicile homes, integration and reintegration. At the centre stage of managing these processes, it is vital that the central Government demonstrates good governance and respect for human rights especially for the displaced persons in camps.

Key words: Management, policy and displacement.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the plight of people forcibly displaced within their own borders has become a serious matter of international concern. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees report (2006), the poor living conditions in the Internally displaced camps in the world is still alarming requiring the international and national authorities to act to avert the challenges. It is documented that the main causes have always been basically human induced. It is a fact that the persistent political unrests have forced many people into internally displaced camps with poor living conditions that eventually and severely increased the magnitude of poverty in many countries. The notion of Internally Displaced Persons should be looked at as referring to persons or groups of persons who have been forced to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of natural or human induced disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border (Brooking Institution’s description). From this description, it is definite that the list of causes of displacement in the world is not exhaustive. Roberto Cohen (1996) argued further that the foregoing description should include the following main elements: coercion which induces displacement, human rights violations as a result of the displacement, and the lack of the protection provided by national governments. These conceptualizations and interpretation have been informed by displacement developments in such countries like: Rwanda, Colombia, Angola, Uganda, Tajikistan, Somalia and Sudan among others in the world.

In general, IDP camps are characterized by poor living conditions which include poor shelter, inadequate medical facilities, poor sanitation system, inadequate food supplies, high illiteracy rate, insecurity and other social forms of social inadequacies - all of which require governments and other actors in society to address (Okongo, 2008). We should be reminded that the history of internally displaced communities has taken a long period of time in many parts of the world. The State of the World Refugees Report (2006) estimated that there have been over 25 million internally displaced persons in the world. The pattern of problems of displacement usually varies from country to country, and region to region.

Furthermore, United Nations High Commissioner for
Refugees Report (2000) indicated that the problem of internally displaced persons is on the increase especially in developing countries. In the case of Uganda, in 2004 internal displacement was about 1.5 million in Northern and Eastern parts of the country.

In Uganda, because of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) war which started in 1986, about 1.5 million people became displaced. It took Uganda Government under the leadership of President Yoweri Museveni eight years to come out with Internal Displacement Policy – “The National Policy of Internally Displaced Persons, August 2004”. The need however arose overtime in respect to developing a standard coordinated, multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary procedures and guides for the Government Institutions, Development and Humanitarian Agencies in planning and responding to matters of Internal Displacement of persons. The policy is intended to address mainly disaster related needs of the population in a significant way, so it is argued. The policy is derived from the existing International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights instruments in existence. The policy is meant to create greater awareness of the needs and rights of IDPs, mobilizing support within the country and from development partners and humanitarian community (National Policy for IDPs, 2004). In a sense, and as provided for in the policy document, the Government commits itself to the following:
- Protecting its citizens against arbitrary displacement;
- Promoting the search for durable solutions to causes of displacement;
- Facilitating the voluntary return, resettlement, integration and reintegration of the IDPs; and
- Ensuring that every person internally displaced or otherwise receives information relating to this policy (National IDPs Policy, 2004).

It is on record that large communities in Uganda have at one time or the other been forced or obliged to flee their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of or in order to avoid effects of either natural or human induced disasters. From 1971-1979, the dictatorial rule of President Idi Amin left about 500,000 people dead and hundreds of thousands either internally displaced or forced into exile in countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, and Zambia. From 1981-1985, the war in “Luwero Triangle” caused significant displacement and loss of lives (Internally Displaced People: A Global Survey, 1998). The Uganda People’s Army insurgency in the North – East of Uganda followed from 1987 causing immense human suffering especially leaving an estimated 300,000 people displaced and many others dead. In the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, Lamwo, Agago, Pader, Amuru and Nwoya hundreds of thousands of people were internally displaced for over 20 years as a result of the “Holy Spirit Movement” rebel group of one called Alice Lakwena, and later the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) under Joseph Kony. In August 2003, LRA incursions into Acholi and Lango sub regions caused massive displacements, raising the figure to 1.6 million people. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) insurgency (1994-2001) caused the death of hundreds of people and internal displacement of 150,000 others in the Rwenzori region. In one sense, there has never been any region in Uganda that has never been affected by internal displacement into camps and squalid conditions for human survival since Uganda’s independence in October 1962!

**Statement of the problem**

The responsibility of assisting and protecting internally displaced persons lies foremost with the national authorities. In situations of armed conflicts, combatants and occupying powers also have legal responsibilities for the IDPs under the international humanitarian and human rights law. In situations where the authorities are either unable or unwilling to meet their responsibilities, international humanitarian and development organizations have the right to offer their services to alleviate suffering and support national efforts. National or defacto authorities should not arbitrarily deny IDPs access to these services and should grant humanitarian organizations rapid and unimpeded access to the internally displaced. According to World Food Program Report (2005, 2006, 2007), it is pointed out that there is evidence that the living conditions of the displaced wherever they have been, have continued to deteriorate despite the support by Uganda Government, NGOs and other donor agencies in the form of basic material needs and non material needs as exemplified in the case of Koch Goma and Pabbo IDP camps in Northern Uganda. Dr Francis Deng (Former UN Special Representative on IDPs) who visited Uganda in August 2003 said that he was struck by: “the level of devastation due to the conflict and the precarious situation the internally displaced are facing”.

Pointing to the complex and intertwined causes of the conflict, Dr Deng noted the need for a regional perspective and possibly third party mediation to address the problems to achieve lasting peace in the Uganda.

**Purpose of study**

To identify the main problems and challenges associated with the management of internal displacement with a view of generating relevant conclusions and recommendations for consideration by different stakeholders in society.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Study approach and consideration**

The researcher relied mainly on qualitative and explanatory dimensions of investigation. Relevant primary and available secondary data were used and relied on to generate and validate claims on internal
displacement in the country. It is also imperative to note that given the fact that the investigator has lived in the conflict region of northern Uganda from 1971 to date, he has been able to bear witness and provide primary account of knowledge and experience in respect to what has been occurring in the region. In the circumstance of this investigation the researcher has observed ethical issues related to data generation and management.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Challenges of internal displacement
The National Policy for Internally Displaced Persons in Uganda came into effect in August 2004, and yet internal displacement in Uganda started way back in 1971. It is observable that in this policy, Government commits itself to protecting its citizens against arbitrary displacement and promoting durable solutions to the causes of displacement. It is on record that most of the displacements of the population into camps have been forceful and orchestrated by Government authorities or representatives such as Resident District Commissioners (Resident District Commissioners are representatives of the President of the Republic of Uganda at the district level. They are supposed to execute directives of the sitting President as provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda. In many cases, they have been known to be coercive and brutal on the local population in the areas affected by rebel insurgencies or conflict. Many local people have tended to fear them because of the powers that they wield. Whenever they issue directives, the local population find themselves to comply even when some of those directives are legally wrong) supported by Uganda People’s Defense Forces (UPDF). This process of forceful evacuation of the population into camps constituted gross violation of their rights; more so when the Government was ill prepared to provide for the basic needs of the population in the camp environment (Dr Olara Otunnu, the former United Nations Undersecretary in charge of children’s affairs has extensively conducted research and written on the gross violation of people’s rights at the gazetted IDP camps in northern Uganda. He argued that Government of Uganda forced people into IDP camps; and did not adequately prepare and provide for the needs of such displaced persons; and that gross human rights abuses were common, and meted out by government soldiers with great impunity). Notable among the camps that had squalid conditions of survival included: Pabbo, Koch Goma, Acholi bur, Mucwini, Padibe Namokora, Anaka Palenga, Bobi, and Agweng - to mention some of them. According to the Chairperson of Gulu District Disaster Management Committee, he had this to say (The Chairperson of District Disaster Management is mandated by law to oversee how to manage resources meant to address the welfare of the displaced persons in camps. He or she is supposed to coordinate humanitarian assistance and work of humanitarian agencies in the district for the mutual benefit and welfare of displaced persons in camps): “The people in the camps are very poor. I mean, the life is horrible. The people here are not living, they are existing. They are next to death”.

According to United Nations OCHA/IRIN publication in respect to an account of life in Northern Uganda (November, 2003), it is indicated that: “Life in the camps is one of abject poverty. Food is short in supply, and many infants suffer from malnutrition. Water is scarce since camps often do not have boreholes. There is little access to health care services. In some camps there are schools but not enough teachers. Moreover, school life is constantly disrupted by the insecurity”.

It is further reported and documented by United Nations OCHA staff members (2003) that IDPs persistently complain that life in the camps has had a disastrous effect on their society. Reported signs of social breakdown include high levels of promiscuity, substance abuse, unprotected sex and increased numbers of child mothers. It is a fact that as people stay longer and longer in the camps, what is left of their dignity is gradually eroded. Disrespected by the traumatized youth, forced to look on, powerless, as their society is turned inside out by violence and fear, some of the older adults became mentally ill (Report from Camp leaders, 2003). While Government authorities assert that the residents of the northern part of the country have been relocated for their own good and protection, the camps became the Lord’s Resistance Army’s targets. District officials in Gulu expressed that between, for example April and July 2003, rebels burned four IDP camps in the district alone. Pabbo IDP camp which was the largest at the time was attacked 17 times by the rebels between January and July 2003. In a sense, there has been no proper protection of the displaced persons in the IDP camps by Government forces as expected.

The rebels in Uganda have tended to view the inhabitants of the camps as enemies, as Government supporters; and during raids, they could leave written threats ordering the IDPs to leave the camps or die. Rebels could attack convoys bringing supplies to the camps to a halt. As a result, relief organizations generally could not travel to the Northern part of the country without military escorts. This then tended to limit the extent to which the camps could be supplied with basic relief items.

According to a study report by Human Rights Focus (2008), it is indicated that the IDPs ranked poverty as the most inflicting on their survival; and considered it as an outstanding and vital denominator of the challenge of the return in Acholi land. The population considered it as critical to be effectively addressed in the return and resettlement process. This problem has remained to date as an outstanding economic and social concern. The
people in the region have found themselves boxed into a situation of dire poverty as the return process continues to pose great challenge to contend with. The National Policy for Internally Displaced Persons (2004) emphasized the need for facilitating the voluntary return, resettlement, integration and reintegration of the IDPs. But this exercise has not gone down well. For instance, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC 2010 was a body established in the war affected areas mandated with the responsibility of overseeing, monitoring and evaluating the provision of services to those living in the IDP camps. Such a body was to provide periodic reports so that appropriate action may be taken by the relevant parties or stakeholders in the region) pointed out concerns of food security in return areas. It added that while returnees have begun to grow food, many have been at risk of becoming food insecure again in the future. Less than half of the available land in the region have not been cultivated mainly on account of the challenge of clearing overgrown and thick bushes; coupled with the uncertainties involved in planting on disputed land; and the challenge of accessing agricultural tools, improved seeds, and fertilizer - all loomed high to bedevil prospects of effective return, resettlement and reintegration process. Much as returnees needed continued support to overcome these constraints and achieve food security, land access and effective land use have not kept up with the pace and needs in the return areas. A joint report by Norwegian Refugee Council and IDMC (2010) points to the inadequate services in the return areas. It states that the Government of Uganda failed to plan effectively for the restoration of services in the return areas. The mid-year review of the 2008 "Consolidated Appeal for Uganda" noted an "appalling lack of basic services in transit sites and return areas" A year later, the mid-year review of the 2009 Appeal observed that "inadequate or nonexistent basic infrastructure and services in return areas remain a serious concern and is believed to partially account for the reduced pace of return". The 2010 Consolidated Appeal observed that to date there has still been little progress made in this regard: “For various communities, impediments to accessing functioning basic services, coupled with limited or unfavorable productive economic prospects in return areas, represent the biggest challenge to their achievement of sustainable return and reintegration”. UNHCR in their report (2010) emphasized that inadequate provision of services such as in the health care, management of justice in the affected areas, security of persons and social support have created particular problems to the IDP, and especially to victims of gender-based violence. The phenomenon of domestic violence, rape, early and forced marriage have been widespread in Northern Uganda. Food insecurity has heightened women’s vulnerability to gender based violence and the percentage of female headed households benefitting from livelihoods support has decreased due to the closure or reduction of humanitarian activities and relevant functions in northern region. It is a fact that the population in the war affected region have known and greatly appreciated the work of foreign humanitarian agencies more than the support provided by Government and its sectoral institutions (Refugee Law Project Working paper No 11, February 2004).

Good news! The National IDP Policy (2004) is now in place, and the position of the Government of Uganda has greatly changed overtime compared to the period of time when the policy was non-existent. The policy provides for the need on the part of Government to fulfill its commitments by providing for the needs of the displaced and vulnerable persons; as well as respecting and upholding human rights observation in such an environment. The interventions by international humanitarian agencies including the United Nations Humanitarian portfolio over the years have yielded fruits; and remarkably reduced the magnitude of suffering of the population. Both Government officials and humanitarian organizations’ leaders would then cite the relevant sections of the National IDP policy when executing obligations in favor of the population.

CONCLUSIONS

It is vital to re-assert that the responsibility for assisting and protecting internally displaced persons lies first and foremost with national authorities. In situations of armed conflict, combatants and occupying powers also have legal responsibilities for the IDPs under international humanitarian and human rights law. In the case of Uganda, those who have been affected most by the vagaries of the prevalent conflict over the years have included: children, girls, women, and the youth population.

According to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement number 28 (1), it is emphasized that relevant authorities such as Government institutions and humanitarian agencies have the primary responsibility to establish conditions as well as provide the means which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country. This aspect of the policy framework is in line with Uganda’s policy framework promulgated in August 2004. With this policy framework in place, there should not be fundamental reasons as to why internally displaced persons should suffer, with their human rights being out rightly violated as such. This implies that the policy framework in place should be respected and complied with by all relevant stakeholders in society.
Recommendations
The United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and Uganda’s National Policy on Displacement should not just be made known to different stakeholders in society, but the content should be greatly disseminated and discussed as widely as possible - targeting different parties in the country. When individuals are aware of their human rights, it becomes difficult for the duty bearers to down tread on them and violate their rights.

It is imperative to design and implement comprehensive approaches to meeting the needs of the displaced children and other vulnerable communities and individuals in society. This may include a range of intervention measures related to the victims’ physical wellbeing, their psychosocial health, educational needs, their cultural requirements and affiliations, and the protection of their legal rights. A total picture of displacement and what it means to vulnerable communities is important to be appreciated so that this may engender sound and productive basis for care and advocacy programs.

Those responsible for causing and aiding directly and/or indirectly displacement should be held responsible, and should answer for their deeds fully before competent courts of law. The phenomenon of blanket amnesty to criminals who have given up rebellion later should not be accepted as such since the victims of war would feel betrayed by the actors. Justice should be seen executed in practice. War criminals should answer for their wrongs in the competent courts of law.

The international community and Uganda Government in particular should focus on durable solutions to avert possible potentials and occurrence of displacement overtime. Pre-emptive measures should be put in place to avert life-threatening conditions that may lead to full scale displacement of individuals to camp environments. Concrete early warning systems and responsible political sensitization programs should be inbuilt in the operation and management of line ministries and departments for eventual implementation. In Uganda, the Ministry of Labor, Gender and Social Development, together with the office of the Prime Minister should take this duty and responsibility as a matter of priority.

REFERENCES