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By Joakim Daun

As a result of the conflict in Darfur some 200,000 people were killed and some 1.9 to 2.7 million fled their villages and settled in IDP camps in the three Darfur States (OCHA 2009 and IDMC 2010).[31] Most of the displacement took place in 2003 and 2004, but small scale displacements took place after that and continue to take place (OCHA 2009 and Human Rights Watch 2011). Eight years later, in 2011, many IDPs have not yet found a durable solution[32] and the Darfur IDP situation should be considered protracted. The Government of Sudan (GoS) continues to promote return as the durable solution for the IDPs in Darfur. While some IDPs might voluntarily return, the majority of them are likely to stay in urban areas due to the larger trend of urbanisation. Therefore, the main approach to durable solutions for the Darfur IDPs should be reconsidered by the GoS and the international community with an emphasis on local integration and sustainable interventions.

Despite evidence that most IDPs are unlikely to return, GoS has continued to view *return* as the preferred durable solution.[33] In 2005, UNHCR and GoS signed a letter of understanding that UNHCR would monitor the right of return to areas of origin.[34] As of 2010 it was clear that there had *not* been any larger number of IDP return in West Darfur. Although some IDPs started returning in 2010, the majority have not opted to return.

Return has been promoted mainly in the form of 'model villages' (also known as 'cluster villages') where schools, housing, police stations and the like have been constructed. These types of efforts have largely been unsuccessful for various reasons. The return has often been induced by GoS, mainly at the local level, and there is rarely any long-term sustainable support that can allow the IDPs to settle in the area. In addition, the villages have often not been constructed in the places where the IDPs originated from, and they are often not properly consulted. Consequently, the majority of the villages remain uninhabited. Further, findings suggest the population movements have been *seasonal*, rather than *permanent*, with the vast majority of IDPs leaving the camps to engage in cultivation as a complementary livelihood strategy and returning immediately to areas of displacement following the harvest (UNHCR 2010).

Multiple factors contribute to return as a less than ideal durable solution. There are not only physical obstacles to return such as insecurity, access to land and availability of livelihoods, but also less tangible factors that must be taken into account, such as social or ethnic identity and access to humanitarian assistance and services. First of all, as of end of 2010, many areas of West

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[31] Some 250,000 Darfurians also crossed the border to Chad as refugees.

[32] The UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has in its *Framework on durable solutions for internally displaced persons* (2010) defined durable solutions for IDPs as: 1) Sustainable reintegration at the place of origin (referred to as "return"); 2) Sustainable local integration in areas where internally displaced persons take refuge (local integration); and 3) Sustainable integration in another part of the country (settlement elsewhere in the country).

[33] In August 2010, GoS launched its new policy called *Darfur: Towards A New Strategy to Achieve Comprehensive Peace, Security and Development*. The policy declared that 'voluntary, safe and systematic return of the IDPs to their home will be the lasting indicator of the successful solution of the conflict', and 'the organization of the return is one of the government top priorities.' The policy also prioritises providing assurances and incentives for IDPs to return to their homes as well as development support to people in their areas of origin.

[34] According to the agreement UNHCR shall monitor the voluntary character of any return and that it takes place in conditions of safety and dignity, as well as humanitarian access to IDP and returnee populations.

Darfur still remained non-conducive to return due to general **insecurity** and lack of law and order, particularly banditry, crop destruction, and looting (UNHCR 2011).[35] In particular, women face harassment and violence mainly when returning to cultivate (UNHCR 2010).

Second, the ability for IDPs to **access land** in their villages of origin, and the possibility for IDPs to re-assert traditional land rights are crucial to allow for permanent return to take place (Pantuliano 2007). Further complicating the issue is the fact that pastoralist/nomadic communities are changing their lifestyles and have started to permanently settle in areas where IDPs assert land rights (UNHCR 2009).[36] The native administration is currently too weak to address the situation and defend the land tenure rights of IDPs. Although there are local administrative structures such as Peace and Reconciliation Committees in some places, they often reflect significant power imbalances between sedentary and newly-settled semi-nomadic and pastoralist communities. If these committees are not significantly strengthened, return will not be a viable option for most IDPs. These issues remain politically sensitive, complex, and compounded by different understandings of the native administration and its relationship to the state and by a lack of legal documentation (Tajeldin 2010).

Third, **livelihoods** and food security are a major factor affecting returns. Decreasing food rations in the IDP camps have led to larger numbers of IDPs returning seasonally as a livelihood strategy but not to the extent that they would consider staying permanently. Those who have returned permanently tend to be those still depending on agriculture as their primary livelihood, and they have weaker camp-based mechanisms (UNHCR 2010).

The fourth factor that prevents return is **social/ethnic identity:** the IDP status still confers a political status based on the IDPs' perception of victimization during the conflict. Many permanent returnees continue to consider themselves IDPs and are not willing to give up that status. IDPs remaining in the camps are reluctant to return permanently, fearing the loss of their IDP status and the assistance and protection attached to it (De Waal 2009).

Fifth, most IDPs living in camps currently have better **access to humanitarian assistance and services**, mainly education, sanitation, and health, than they had before displacement. The provision of services in rural areas (villages of origin) is still largely non-existent. The line ministries, such as Education and Health, have so far been largely unable to place staff in rural areas and successful rural projects often rely on local structures, such as voluntary teachers, midwifes etc. to ensure sustainability.[37] Also, few international NGOs operate in these areas, partly due to lack of security, lawlessness and banditry (UNHCR and Human Rights Watch 2011).[38]

Thus, return may not be the preferred durable solution for many IDPs in West Darfur. Although there are some opportunities for return it is not likely to take place on the scale that has been envisioned and promoted by GoS. In 2010, UNHCR shared its return findings with GoS, indicating that few IDPs had returned permanently. Nonetheless, the issue continues to be

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[35] UNHCR identifies insecurity, land occupation and crop destruction as major constraints to return.

[36] UNHCR has in its field monitoring observed alleged land occupation in over two hundred villages in West Darfur since 2005.

[37] For example, students may be required to pay school fees to raise funds for teacher's salaries, and parents are often reluctant to send their children to school due to the high cost it imposes on the family.

[38] In its annual country report for 2010, *Human Rights Watch* reported that the 'United Nations and humanitarian agencies increasingly came under attack and were targeted for robberies, kidnappings, and killings by armed elements in Sudan's western region. UNHCR has also expressed its concerns about security for humanitarian workers and the reduced presence of NGOs in Sudan, mainly due to insecurity and government restrictions and scrutiny put in to place after the ICC indictments of President Bashir.'

politically sensitive. GoS disputed these findings and continued to view return as the most viable durable solution.[39]

The IDPs in West Darfur have become part of a *larger trend of urbanisation* in Sudan. From the start of the conflict until now, the cities in Darfur have doubled in size. Aside from the IDPs living in the camps in close proximity to the towns, there has been an additional huge influx from the rural areas (Pavanellon 2010). Scholar De Waal has pointed out the relevance of recognising urbanisation as an important element affecting durable solutions for IDPs:

Whatever political resolution is achieved, many IDPs – perhaps the majority – will have a future in the cities. If we recognize this reality, it can only help in finding workable solutions to the immediate challenges of livelihoods, services and protection for these people (De Waal 2009).

Despite the strong focus on return, GoS acknowledged in 2010 that a significant percentage of IDPs are now urbanised and will likely not return to their villages of origin.[40] Most of the IDPs have spent over six years in the camps and their livelihoods and social structures have changed from before their displacement. The changes in livelihood are strongly linked to access to services provided by international community, in particular among urbanised IDPs, whose coping strategies and educational and employment opportunities have undergone profound shifts in the past years. Further, children and youths growing up in IDP camps do not have the experience of living in rural areas with a rural farming lifestyle and cannot be expected return to villages in the rural areas where subsistence agriculture is the only possible livelihood (UNHCR 2011).

Since 2003, a large portion of IDPs has become urbanised, and many rural areas remain non-conducive to return. Therefore, there is a need to rethink the strategies to find durable solutions. Despite the intense political focus on return from GoS[41], there are likely greater opportunities for early recovery programming in urban areas. A stronger focus should be on those who have de facto locally integrated but still depend on humanitarian assistance. While it has now been recognised that many IDPs will never return, there has been little focus on addressing sustainable extension of services and creating sustainable livelihoods in urban areas. Also, a change in the service provision in camps is necessary. Many (if not most) of the international NGOs continue to provide 'care and maintenance' type assistance exclusively in IDP camps. Instead, livelihood opportunities and vocational training should be given greater attention, in particular for youths.[42]

These interventions should focus on community ownership and self-reliance to avoid the current problem of aid dependency. Although the 2010 government policy for Darfur focuses heavily on return, it also calls for the need 'to restructure of humanitarian operation in order to shift the focus from relief to development'. Further, it considers it a '…top priority for the government to re-direct the humanitarian efforts towards rehabilitation and shifting from depending on the relief to development and self-reliance'. Thus, more emphasis should be given to sustainable

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[39] For more on GoS' push for return and some of its related problems see Eric Reeves recent piece: 'Darfur: No Way Forward from a Dangerous and Unsustainable Situation'.

[40] The government estimated that 25-40 per cent of the IDPs may choose to locally integrate. De Waal has also argued that some 30% of the IDPs in the camps are economically integrated into the towns and that others have some urban and some rural based livelihoods.

[41] Potential reasons for the continued emphasis on return may include trying to decongest the urban areas and viewing IDP return as an indicator of achieved peace and stability in the region.

[42] For more details see: The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children's report 'Too Little for Too Few: Meeting the needs of youth in Darfur.'

development interventions, and it is essential that the national and local authorities become more involved in the process of assessment, planning, and priority setting for these interventions.[43]

The rapid urbanisation and associated land alienation as a result of conflict mean that many will not return to rural villages, and. while more efforts shall be given to local integration, this opens up possibilities for new land share arrangements in return areas. Hence, a constructive conversation with the GoS on the dimensions of alleged land occupation is necessary. This should include supporting and strengthening traditional conflict solving mechanisms in villages with land disputes between returnees and pastoralist populations. Such interventions can assist in creating peaceful coexistence between the two communities and allow for permanent return for those that cannot or do not want to locally integrate.[44]

Lastly, despite on-going insecurity, recent developments in regional peace initiatives could provide further momentum for a much-needed shift to self-reliance projects in the camps and urban areas and long-term peace in Darfur (*Sudan Tribune* July 14 & 17 2011). Hence, besides a change in strategy from the international humanitarian community, the success in the quest for durable solutions will foremost depend on the government's ability and willingness both to commit political will to address harmful legacies from this prolonged conflict and to provide economic resources and support for all durable solutions for IDPs.

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[43] Although this has been recognised by many international organisations, little has been done to change it.

[44] This has been done to some extent by UNHCR and other UN agencies, and these types of interventions could have a positive impact if implemented in more areas.

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