

Coordination and funding: return of IDPs in the Congo

by Tim Morris

A pilot project to return IDPs by river transport has highlighted the scale of the task of return and reintegration of the Democratic Republic of Congo's estimated 2.3m IDPs.

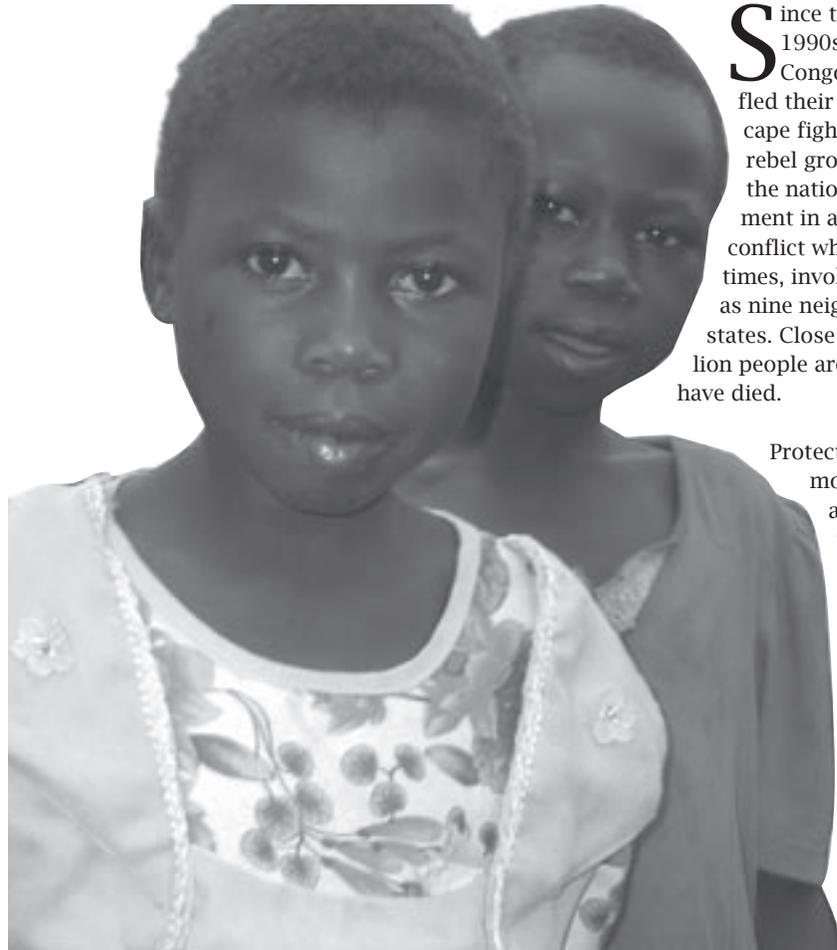
Since the mid-1990s millions of Congolese have fled their homes to escape fighting between rebel groups and the national government in a complex conflict which has, at times, involved as many as nine neighbouring states. Close to four million people are thought to have died.

Protecting those most at risk and helping to reintegrate those already returning to the more stable parts of the country is no easy task, as

a recent report by Mark Cutts and Anne-Marie Linde of OCHA's Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division (IDD) makes clear.

The fact that 90% of the displaced in the DRC live with host families rather than in camps makes it difficult to gain an accurate picture of their number and location. Indeed, a detailed survey of IDPs is well overdue. While some provinces have been relatively calm over the last three years, much of the eastern part of the country remains volatile and insecure, with sporadic clashes among armed groups. Widespread human rights violations continue with almost total impunity, including killing, rape, sexual exploitation, abduction, forcible conscription of children, looting, plundering of crops, illegal taxation and general harassment of civilian populations. Unpaid government troops are responsible for many of the crimes. Ethnic clashes, the presence of foreign troops, illegal exploitation of natural resources (gold, coltan and diamonds) and smuggling of goods and weapons all add to the violence. There is no functioning judicial system in much of eastern DRC. The

Young girls at an IDP camp, DRC.



slow pace of disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration (DDRRR) programmes have led in some areas to the remobilisation of militias.

Troops from the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC)¹ have helped stabilise the situation in some places. However, with only 16,000 troops (UNMIL in Liberia has 15,000 in a country a twentieth the size of the DRC), it remains seriously constrained despite having a Chapter VII mandate (authorising 'peace enforcement', not simply 'peace keeping').

Some 900,000 IDPs have returned to their places of origin since the end of 2003, the great majority with little or no assistance. Some of the 380,000 Congolese refugees living in nine neighbouring countries are also coming home. An estimated 25,000 have returned on their own initiative to South Kivu, Katanga and Equateur provinces since 2003. UNHCR has assisted 12,000 returnees to return from camps in Tanzania over the last year.

The IDD report insists that if returns are to be safe and sustainable, a clear strategy and close collaboration between a wide range of government authorities and humanitarian and development actors are needed. Likewise, it says the UN must urgently assist the DRC government to develop a national return and reintegration framework and to adopt national legislation on IDPs consistent with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

On 19 May 2005 a barge belonging to the Congolese navy left the capital,

Kinshasa. It carried some 1,600 IDPs who had been living for up to nine years in camps or with host families to destinations along the Congo River. On the one hand, the barge served as a powerful illustration of the willingness of many of the DRC's displaced people to return to their places of origin if assisted to do so. On the other hand, it drew attention to the need for close cooperation between government authorities and the multiplicity of humanitarian and development actors in the country. In particular, it highlighted the need for rehabilitation and reconstruction work in areas of return.

So far, because of security concerns, logistical problems and the reluctance of donors to invest in post-conflict reconstruction activities, there has been only minimal investment in areas of return. This is particularly true in the more remote parts of the country, where logistical constraints are enormous. As the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Ross Mountain, constantly reminds people, "You have to imagine a country the size of Western Europe, but without roads".

The Transitional Government established in June 2003 continues to struggle to affirm its authority in much of the eastern part of the country, making it hard for the international community to work with local counterparts. The proliferation of ministries in Kinshasa (more than 50 were created in order to allow all parties to obtain government posts) has complicated coordination arrangements. Return and reintegration activities are handled by at least four different ministries.

To facilitate more spontaneous returns there is a need for a substantial increase in recovery activities. The IDD report says these should include a focus on: establishment of rule of law and functioning judicial systems; repair or construction of health, education and water facilities; rehabilitation of essential infrastructure such as roads, railways and bridges; and labour-intensive public works, to encourage IDPs and ex-combatants to return. OCHA, UNDP, UNHCR, the World Bank and donors must develop closer links in order to coordinate DDRRR programmes. Only where development actors are unwilling or unable to act quickly enough should humanitarian actors step in to fill the gap.

Donors must ensure that both humanitarian and longer-term development programmes in the DRC are adequately funded. So far, this has not been the case. The 2005 Humanitarian Appeal for the DRC of \$201m was only 43% funded by late August, in spite of the fact that the DRC is a pilot country for the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative.² Donors must realise that support for IDP and refugee returns will not only help provide durable solutions for displaced people but also contribute to the consolidation of peace in the DRC.

Tim Morris is one of the FMR editors. For the full IDD report, see www.reliefweb.int/idp/docs/reports/2005/DRC%20mission%20report%2012-20%20May%202005.pdf

1. www.monuc.org

2. www.reliefweb.int/ghd/CAP_Pilots.html;



FMR has published two previous supplements on IDPs:

Researching Internal Displacement: State of the Art (report of conference held in Trondheim, Norway, 7-8 February 2003)

Response Strategies of the Internally Displaced: Changing the Humanitarian Lens (report of conference held in Oslo, Norway, 9 November 2001)

Both reports are available at www.fmreview.org/mags1.htm
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