

## Repeated displacement in eastern DRC

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**For the vast majority of those affected by conflict, displacement is often seen as the only option in an attempt to find safety. The provision of some basic assistance in places to which people flee makes this process slightly easier but in the absence of state-led protection multiple displacement has become a defining feature of the Kivu conflict. This has implications for both the humanitarian and the development response.**

For most of the tens of thousands of Congolese who have been displaced by violence since November 2012, it was not the first time, and almost certainly not the last, that they have had to flee their homes. Most were already in IDP camps or hosted by family, friends and even strangers, and many of those who are acting as host communities have already themselves fled their homes at some stage.

In eastern DRC, the majority of an estimated 2.6 million IDPs have been in a state of protracted and multiple displacement for many years.<sup>1</sup> While some were displaced in the Masisi area in North Kivu as early as 1993, mass movements started as a spill-over from the Rwandan genocide in 1994 and the first Congo war in 1996. Today, almost 20 years after people in the Kivus started to flee conflict, the numbers of IDPs are rising across the east of the country. And without the state's ability to find or impose political solutions to address the causes of insecurity, civilians continue to suffer violence and abuse by armed perpetrators. Meanwhile, assistance needs to be delivered in a way that takes into account how multiple displacement during protracted conflict affects people's resilience and their ability to protect themselves as well as what particular vulnerabilities and needs arise from this situation.

### Coping in the face of continued insecurity

A Norwegian Refugee Council assessment found in one place that nearly 65% of respondents had been displaced two or more times in the last seven months and 37% at least three times or more. Other data shows that displaced families can themselves become hosts; a 2008 UNICEF/CARE study found cases where, having taken refuge in abandoned

settlements, IDPs subsequently became hosts themselves to IDPs arriving later.

Some community leaders have expressed concern over the presence of IDPs, claiming they were responsible for food insecurity and even for bringing instability and weapons to the community. Whereas traditionally in DRC IDPs have chosen to be hosted in communities rather than camps, recent years have seen a shift towards camp settlements for many reasons; among these are a simple lack of safe places to flee to as insecurity becomes more generalised and the de facto control of areas shifts from one armed actor to another. However, even camps can be unsafe and may become places to flee from; the fighting in November 2012 saw a camp of over 50,000 people on the outskirts of Goma town empty within a few hours as people fled in anticipation of attacks.

The lack of basic security in places of refuge frequently forces people to move again. This is apparent in statements by affected populations themselves who recognise that while flight is the only viable protection strategy available to them, it will not guarantee their safety. In the absence of physical security or rule of law provided by the state, further strains on social cohesion stem from the broader instability that has seen communities resort to using local defence militia which are typically established along village – and therefore frequently ethnic – lines.

### Protecting and assisting where the state does not

The areas of the DRC affected by multiple displacement are those where a chronic absence of state institutions and services on the one hand and ongoing violence by

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a multiplicity of actors on the other have coexisted for years. As a result, in DRC the provision of any sort of protection focuses overwhelmingly on physical protection through MONUSCO peacekeepers, with limited thinking about alternatives or complementary civilian action. This reflects the reality that the state is unable to provide this protection, leaving the necessity for assistance responses to the needs of IDPs also to external actors. This is unlikely to change for some time. In such conditions, aid is provided by humanitarian actors in a manner that fails to address the causes of people's vulnerabilities.

International human rights law provides a framework on durable solutions from the outset and highlights the importance of engaging with longer-term dynamics of resilience while responding to humanitarian 'peaks' in the case of prolonged insecurity such as that in eastern DRC. The issue is the extent to which the Congolese state is able to fulfill its obligations in this respect. DRC has ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981) which provides a comprehensive human rights framework applicable to situations of internal displacement.<sup>2</sup>

While DRC is not a signatory to the recently-ratified African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention)<sup>3</sup>, it is a signatory to the 2006 Great Lakes Pact whose Protocol on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons requires the state to integrate the Guiding Principles into domestic legislation. This is intended to create a framework for state structures and external actors alike to, among other things, have greater respect for legally applicable principles on the part of the state – which in this case would, crucially, mean systematically promoting rule of law in the eastern provinces. It also provides a basis for a possible national IDP policy whose aim would be to draw together all relevant actors – government, humanitarian and development.

The IASC Framework for Durable Solutions for IDPs<sup>4</sup> provides some technical advice as

to how this may be implemented and, at the political level, the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States<sup>5</sup> includes a focus on new ways to support, country-led and -owned transitions based on one vision, one plan and inclusive and participatory dialogue that bridges the humanitarian/development divide. Yet there remains a gap in practical guidance – and no agreement amongst relevant actors – on how precisely such a duality of aid can be achieved safely in contexts of chronic state fragility and insecurity. Existing structures for coordination, funding and prioritisation of interventions do not lend themselves to supporting such an approach.

This, together with the fact that the Congolese state will not be able to play its part, leaves humanitarian actors confronted with a series of questions about the changing vulnerability of people with each wave of displacement, their mechanisms for coping with repeated displacement and how assistance can help to build, or at least maintain, individual and community resilience in the face of repeated displacement. We need to be asking ourselves how we can protect rights and provide aid according to needs throughout the various stages of displacement, and in a way that strengthens IDPs' ability to cope with the impact of displacement in the absence of state capacity. Similarly, development actors need to adapt their interventions in a context of extreme fragility to better connect with life-saving interventions over the long term.

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1. By multiple displacement, we refer to a type of protracted or long-term displacement during which people are forced to move repeatedly from successive sites of refuge.

2. <http://tinyurl.com/AfricanCharter>

3. <http://tinyurl.com/Kampala-Convention-En>

4. <http://tinyurl.com/IASC-IDPs-Framework>

5. [www.g7plus.org/new-deal-document](http://www.g7plus.org/new-deal-document)

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