Reflections on State experiences in the IGAD region

Charles Obila and Ariadna Pop

State-to-State exchanges in 2019 focused attention on what more is needed if governments in the IGAD region are to respond more effectively to high levels of internal displacement.

Internal displacement is a major concern in the IGAD region. The population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) across this eight-country trading bloc[1] has risen significantly since 2014, mainly due to conflicts in South Sudan and Ethiopia. At the end of 2019, an estimated nearly eight million people were internally displaced in the region as a result of conflict and violence. In addition, an estimated 1,753,000 people were displaced by disasters, mostly in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia.[2]

Disasters caused by drought, floods and landslides are currently the main drivers of displacement in Djibouti, Kenya and Uganda. While disasters also displace people in Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, conflicts are the main drivers in those countries and the resulting internal displacement is largely protracted.

The African Union had declared 2019 to be the Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons. It was also the 50th anniversary of the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (OAU Convention on Refugees) and the 10th anniversary of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention).

It was fitting, therefore, that in October 2019 IGAD – in collaboration with the GP20 initiative and with the support of the Global Protection Cluster, the Government of Switzerland and the African Union Commission (AUC) – convened an exchange

of experiences in supporting resilience and durable solutions to internal displacement. The exchange was held under the framework of IGAD's Regional Consultative Process on Migration – an open platform to discuss and advance migration issues – and brought together over 100 government officials, representatives of national human rights institutions, experts, humanitarian practitioners, development actors and donors. This article reflects on some of the outcomes and lessons emerging from these discussions.

Importance of normative frameworks

IGAD convenes joint annual seminars on the Kampala Convention in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross, AUC and UN agencies. These serve as platforms to advocate for the ratification and implementation of the convention by IGAD Member States and for discussion of the tools and support systems available to help them achieve this goal. At the 2019 annual regional exchange, discussions were extended beyond the Kampala Convention to include early warning systems, peacebuilding, data collection, funding and approaches to durable solutions at both national and sub-national levels. The annual seminars and exchanges, in which Member States are encouraged to showcase their progress in addressing IDPs' protection and assistance needs, create an element of competition that works to exert a positive influence on Member States.

One of the most encouraging outcomes of the 2019 regional exchange was the general acceptance of the importance of adopting and implementing laws, policies and decrees addressing internal displacement. Normative frameworks help clarify government responsibilities, define responders' roles and increase the predictability of humanitarian and development action by institutionalising collaborative arrangements. They also define IDPs' rights and the measures to be taken to ensure they are fully protected. Accordingly, there was a dedicated session on law and policy at the exchange that facilitated the sharing of experiences on development and implementation of laws and policies on internal displacement.

IGAD Member States have adopted various approaches and are in different phases of developing frameworks to address the needs of IDPs in their countries. At the regional level, the Kampala Convention is the only legally binding regional instrument on internal displacement, and all IGAD Member States expressed their political commitment to advancing its aims. As of October 2019, Djibouti, South Sudan, Somalia and Uganda had ratified the Kampala Convention. Ethiopia, which had signed the Convention, has since ratified it. Kenya and Sudan are yet to sign.

Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda are also party to the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region; this includes a Protocol on the Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons as well as a Protocol on the Property Rights of Returning Persons. In addition, most IGAD Member States have national laws, policies or frameworks on internal displacement.

Besides the need to have appropriate policies and laws addressing internal displacement in place, however, members of the workshop agreed that ensuring their implementation is key. Challenges to implementation that were highlighted by IGAD Member States include security concerns, limited institutional capacity, lack of resources and land for allocation, donor fatigue, inadequate data on IDP and returnee profiles, limited commitment of government stakeholders, and limited access to technology which may assist in the prevention of displacement (for example for hazard risk assessment).

Efforts that have been made to address these implementation challenges include the 2017 Harare Plan of Action – the first action plan for the implementation of the Kampala Convention. In addition to establishing frameworks, its objectives are to promote and strengthen regional and national measures to prevent and eliminate the root causes of internal displacement and provide for durable solutions; to promote the obligations and responsibilities of States Parties; and to identify specific obligations, roles and responsibilities of armed groups,

non-State actors and other relevant actors including civil society organisations. Key progress on implementing the Harare Plan of Action includes the adoption of the 2018 AU Model Law on Internal Displacement[3] and the establishment of a Conference of States Parties to monitor and foster compliance among AU Member States.

At country level, Somalia and Ethiopia have established Durable Solutions Initiatives (DSIs) which aim to facilitate collective action and cooperation between the government authorities at national, regional and local levels and the international community (UN, international and national NGOs and donors). DSIs support political ownership and leadership at the highest level, ensure community engagement and connect the necessary humanitarian, development and peace actors to support durable solutions for IDPs at policy, legislative, institutional, planning and operational levels. The DSIs in Somalia and Ethiopia have facilitated the ratification of the Kampala Convention and the drafting of national and sub-national IDP policies. They have also promoted shared understanding and use of common methodological tools among different stakeholders.

Centrality of government and multi-stakeholder coordination

There was a general consensus that government leadership – essential in identifying, coordinating and implementing durable solutions to internal displacement – requires the designation of a government focal point. Designating a government focal point is important for clarifying institutional responsibilities and for increasing government accountability.[4] Government leadership is essential if coordination is to be effective both vertically (between national, sub-national and local levels) and horizontally (across relevant ministries and other institutions). All IGAD Member States undertake such coordination, though in different ways.

An example of particularly effective multi-stakeholder coordination can be found in Sudan, where national and local

government, national and local civil society, the private sector and the international community (including the UN, development banks, donors and international NGOs) engage in joint planning, programming and implementation through what are known as State Liaison Functions.

Joint activities encourage all parties to invest energy in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, including continued humanitarian assistance as well as multi-year investments in resilience. However, as the discussions revealed, the short-term nature of funding and the challenging fundraising context threaten the sustainability of the impact.

Sustainability of funding

The extent to which a government gives priority to funding for IDPs is an indication both of its level of awareness and of its commitment to IDPs. Stakeholders at the regional exchange stressed that governments need to allocate sufficient funding to support programmes to safeguard civilians against displacement, to assist and protect IDPs during displacement, and to create conditions that enable durable solutions.

The meeting established two key recommendations: first, ensure that adequate resources are made available through national and sub-national budgets and national development plans; and second, advocate for and mobilise additional flexible and multi-year funding for programmes across the continuum of internal displacement from prevention to durable solutions.

Availability of reliable data

Gathering good-quality data on IDPs and displacement-affected communities for durable solutions planning remains a challenge in the IGAD region. The data that are available are inadequate for several reasons.

First, the data currently collected on displacement are mainly tailored to informing humanitarian responses – and data systems are shaped accordingly. It was generally agreed that displacement data systems need to better address the

humanitarian–development–peace/
statebuilding nexus to help prevent
and address protracted displacement
and support sustainable (re)integration.
Participants stressed that it was critical to
transition to data systems that provide for
longitudinal and longer-term information
needs in order to better understand IDPs'
profiles and issues by using a multi-
stakeholder data system rather than the
current humanitarian driven, organisation-
based systems. This may for instance
require the integration of displacement
data into the national statistical system.

Second, at the operational level,
organisations conduct assessments for
their own rather than joint purposes,
using different methodologies and
producing data of varying quality.

Third, there is also a lack of joint tools
and harmonised processes to assess the
contribution of durable solutions programmes
and other broader collective outcomes.

Fourth, insofar as IDP data are largely
collected by NGOs and UN agencies, it
was pointed out that, since comparatively
few existing data are produced by
governments, the credibility of IDP statistics
is sometimes called into question and the
existing statistics rarely used or quoted.

Finally, data are rarely collected in
remote areas. The result is a fragmented
and incomplete understanding of
internal displacement, including of the
protection and assistance needs of IDPs.

Efforts are being undertaken in the
region to improve data availability and
usefulness. Ethiopia and Sudan, for example,
are coordinating with IOM's Displacement
Tracking Matrix to share and jointly compile
displacement data including multi-sectoral
seasonal assessments. Meanwhile, Somalia
is developing registration data for IDPs
in partnership with stakeholders, and has
included displacement indicators in its
National Development Plan III in line with
the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Conclusion
While the IGAD exchange in October 2019
provided a platform to share experiences
and expertise in supporting resilience and
durable solutions to internal displacement,
more effort is required to follow up with each
Member State on areas of implementation.
In particular, efforts need to focus on the
importance of adopting and implementing
laws, policies and decrees addressing
internal displacement; on establishing
government leadership and effective multi-
stakeholder coordination; on ensuring
the availability of adequate and flexible
funding resources; and on improving data
availability and usefulness. In addition,
stakeholders agreed to embrace a long-
term approach in addressing and resolving
internal displacement by integrating it into
national development plans and policies.
Their goals in doing so include helping IDPs
regain their productivity, establishing peace
dialogues to facilitate social cohesion, curbing
conflict by the introduction of improved
early warning mechanisms, anticipating and
mitigating the impact of natural hazards,
developing IDP integration mechanisms,
ensuring a focus on tenure security, and
supporting communities hosting IDPs.

Charles Obila *Charles.Obila@igad.int*
Migration Officer, IGAD
*https://igad.int/divisions/health-and-social-
development*

Ariadna Pop *ariadna.pop@eda.admin.ch*
Diplomatic Officer, Swiss Federal Department of
Foreign Affairs *bit.ly/SFDFA-HSD*

1. The eight members of IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on
Development) are Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia,
South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.

2. IDMC (2020) Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020
www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020

3. AU Model Law on Internal Displacement
www.refworld.org/docid/5afc3a494.html

4. Brookings Institute (2016) 'Assessing National Approaches to
Internal Displacement: Findings from 15 Countries' bit.ly/2011-Ch1