

The role of governance and research

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Forced migration is not new to DRC but its extent and its consequences are still shocking. Good governance and research must play a stronger role if life is to improve for the citizens of DRC.

Forced migration is one of the phenomena which have made the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) famous for all the wrong reasons. This is because of the sheer size of the populations affected by it, the contexts underlying it and its inhuman nature. Millions of Congolese have been repeatedly forced to leave their homes to flee the sound of marching boots, or because some catastrophe has stripped them of everything, or simply because they have no choice other than to leave. All we can do here is provide a brief summary of one of the factors behind these forced migrations: political crises and wars.

Political crises and wars

These are certainly the reason behind the majority of forced migrations in DRC. The first political crises followed swiftly on the heels of independence: the Force Publique mutiny (July 1960), the Katanga secession (1960-63), the Kasai secession (August 1960). Then came the various wars of liberation, often classified as rebellions by the ruling governments of the day: the

Mulele rebellion in Kwilu in 1964, the Lumumbist rebellion in the east of the country, the two Shaba wars (1977 and 1978), the First Congo War of the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo (AFDL) in 1996, the so-called wars of aggression from 1998 to 2003 by the RCD (Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie), the MLC (Mouvement de Libération du Congo) and others, and the CNDP rebellion headed by Laurent Nkunda. The most recent wars have forced the displacement of up to 3.4 million people, according to OCHA estimates. This is a vast number – more, in fact, than the entire population of some African countries. The provinces in the east of the country alone (North Kivu, South Kivu, Northern Katanga, Maniema) have seen some 1.4 million persons displaced.

But why did these people flee, when it was the soldiers who were supposed to be fighting? The answer is that the Forces Armées Zaïroises (FAZ), known today as the Forces Armées de la République

Démocratique du Congo (FARDC), were and are incapable of protecting the people against ‘aggressors’. Instead, they themselves at times persecute the very people they are supposed to be protecting. So, the civilian populations flee to save themselves from killing, sexual violence and all manner of cruelty. They are often the target of reprisals if there is the slightest suspicion – even if not justified – that they have been sheltering soldiers from the other side of the conflict, or simply been close to them, or for no reason at all. Their homes are burned, their belongings stolen. Young people are forced to carry loads or are press-ganged into the armies. As for the girls and women, they are subjected to horrific sexual violence. UNICEF reports that it cared for 37,000 victims of sexual violence in 2007, and MSF says that it took care of 2,800 victims of sexual violence in the first quarter of 2009 alone. So they flee but they are never completely safe because the new places to which they flee are often also infested with soldiers, whether ‘aggressors’ or FARDC. So they leave again, without really knowing where they are going, with nothing more than the barest essentials that they can carry.



They walk for tens, hundreds of kilometres, in rain or sun, leaving behind at the roadside those who cannot keep up. The strongest often end up in refugee camps, tented villages where promiscuity, disease, rape and all kinds of ills associated with their precarious situation await them. They are keen to return home to their villages but cannot return until they can be sure that the soldiers are no longer there. This is a real humanitarian drama, recognised as such by the international community, although that same community is unable, or perhaps unwilling, to prevent it.

Is there a solution?

Forced migrations are often unforeseeable. It is only after the event that humanitarian organisations, rather than the government, can try to manage the consequences. Forced migrants lose almost everything, and have to rebuild their lives from nothing. They have urgent needs: access to drinking water, accommodation, healthcare, education for their children. A number of institutions have developed programmes to help them but their needs remain much greater than the aid on offer. UNICEF, for example, introduced a programme for family and community rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflicts in 2006. This included identification, temporary care, family reunification, and socio-economic and educational rehabilitation – but only 10% of

children have benefitted from the initiative. There are many difficulties in providing aid to displaced Congolese because of the sheer size of the country, problems with access to refugee sites and obstacles to access imposed by the military.

So what is the solution? Surely the solution lies in prevention and good governance. Forced migration is caused by or for political, economic and environmental reasons. It is therefore possible to avoid it if we know its causes. Even natural disasters can be predicted. To achieve this, we need monitoring and studies which will raise the alarm and invite the government to take whatever precautions are necessary to avoid the causes or manage the consequences. However, this demands good governance – a responsible government which puts the population's concerns at the heart of its actions, which promotes conditions of non-war, non-aggression, a peaceful life for its people. And also a government which adheres to the October 2009 Convention for the Protection and Assistance of IDPs in Africa (the Kampala Convention). This is all the more important since DRC never adopted nor implemented its own National Population Policy document, the first draft of which was drawn up back in ... 1988!

This is where the role of research lies, because we believe that there can be no good governance without

the enlightenment provided by research. Research should help to raise the alarm, allocate responsibilities, assess damage and propose solutions. Unfortunately, research in general and research on migration in particular seems to suffer from a kind of embargo on the part of the Congolese government. There is no finance for research. There are no highly regarded scientific reviews to report on the phenomena observed. There are no scientific conferences to discuss these phenomena. There is no study on a national scale to obtain statistics on levels, trends and characteristics of migration at national level. Even the work carried out by universities on migration in DRC is not well known – indeed, it is rather loftily ignored. A similar lack of interest in supporting Congolese research seems to be present in the wider international community as well. As a result, relatively little is known about Congolese migration and little is being done to manage it better, despite the fact that it is one of the major aspects that characterise Congolese life.

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No peace of mind

Stories of displacement in the Democratic Republic of Congo

This photo, taken by Adrian Arbib, is included in an exhibition of photographs brought together by the Refugee Studies Centre to complement this issue of FMR. The exhibition runs from 1-14 December at the University Church of St Mary the Virgin in Oxford and is also online at:

<http://www.forcedmigration.org/photos/no-peace-of-mind/>

The exhibition showcases images from professional photographers and field practitioners illustrating the effects of the lengthy conflict in DRC on individuals and communities, and the different aspects of forced displacement.

Please feel free to use the online exhibition to highlight the issues at stake in DRC, and to share it with others.

Mugunga IDP camp
Adrian Arbib www.arbib.com

