

Return of qualified Sudanese

by Lindsay T McMahon

With the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005¹, the new Government of South Sudan began to call for the return of the millions of South Sudanese IDPs and refugees. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has developed a programme to help them do so.

The reintegration of so many Sudanese returning to still devastated areas in the South poses great challenges. Basic social services in



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South Sudan are wholly inadequate to meet the needs of the population, raising concerns for the wellbeing of residents and the growing number of those returning. The civil war's devastation of the South left few schools, health clinics or water and sanitation facilities intact, and few residents with the knowledge and experience to operate what facilities remain. The war decimated the South's agriculture base and left the region with virtually no productive activity. Trained and experienced civil servants, teachers, health workers, agricultural workers, vocational and skilled labour are all in short supply. Resident and returning Sudanese will continue to face severe difficulty in accessing essential services, including health and medical care, education, water and sanitation unless an adequate supply of qualified labour is available to meet growing demands for knowledge, expertise and experience.

Building on similar programmes successfully implemented in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Afghanistan,

IOM has developed the Return and Reintegration of Qualified Sudanese (RQS) programme. Starting in 2006 and continuing over an initial three-year programme period, this IOM programme – funded by DANIDA, the Danish government aid and development agency – is assisting public sector institutions and private enterprises in Sudan to meet critical human resource gaps by facilitating the permanent or temporary return and reintegration of Sudanese nationals who have the skills and expertise needed to deliver essential services, build capable institutions and encourage domestic and foreign investment in Sudan. To do this, RQS recruits skilled Sudanese who are eager

to return home from among the IDPs in northern Sudan, refugees in neighbouring countries and diaspora populations in the Gulf, Europe and North America. RQS collects details on the skills needed as well as the job vacancies that public and private sector employers in Sudan need to fill for sustained development. RQS then matches prospective candidates' qualifications with potential employers' requirements. Once candidates receive and have accepted a job offer, IOM facilitates candidates' return to their place of origin or employment in Sudan, and supports each returnee's reintegration through provision of a customised reintegration package and support services.

In its pilot phase, RQS focused on returning qualified teachers living in North Sudan as IDPs back to schools, many newly built, in the South Sudan states from which they had fled. Having successfully returned fifty teachers with their family members, and with several hundred more registered and

preparing for return, RQS is now expanding to meet severe human resource deficiencies identified in health, agriculture and infrastructure. RQS will seek to strengthen Sudan's private sector development by placing qualified Sudanese in private sector enterprises and by supporting entrepreneurial Sudanese who wish to return to Sudan to start up independent ventures.

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1. See FMR24 www.fmreview.org/sudan.htm

Sudanese refugees greet family and friends they have not seen in some cases for 20 years.

I am from Eastern Equatoria, from Lopaw payam in Torit county. I came to Khartoum in 1996. I was eleven years old at the time. I had the chance to go to school in Khartoum and later studied to become a pre-school teacher. I also did teacher training courses in community development, physical education, child protection, early childhood development, music and movement and a variety of other subjects. I am going to fly back to Torit via Juba with members of my family. Apart from teaching, I see myself assisting in improving pre-school education in the Torit area, because early childhood learning is very important. I have experience. I have already been involved in setting up a school in the El Salaam camp for internally displaced persons near Khartoum, where we live. I can help. I have the teaching material and the know-how and also the experience with getting funds from NGOs. I can do my share to improve the situation in Torit. I keep telling my colleagues in the camps in Khartoum: "What are you still doing here? Let's go and build up something for future generations in our home areas."

Luca George Kidi