HIV/AIDS rates are likely to rise: stigmatisation of returnees could add to tensions. Returning populations may bring about the impetus for positive social changes. Yet such changes may be seen as foreign impositions and thus be ill-received. The return of displaced people will inevitably bring about profound changes that are likely to raise tensions amidst the confluence of changed identities and social values.

Projections of return numbers drawn up for planning purposes are useful but arguably flawed and there is reason to question assumptions about the scale and timing of anticipated returns. The two main constraints on return identified by a survey carried out by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – lack of money and of transport – are unlikely to be quickly overcome.

Reintegration is a lop-sided concept, the emphasis firmly on the returnees: the fluid category of the displaced needing to be absorbed by the static, somehow sponge-like host community. Stayees’ perceptions of returnees have not received sufficient attention either in academic or policy circles. Yet it is crucial to understand their expectations and concerns in order to aid the reintegration of displaced people.

If people in receiving communities see tangible benefits of a peace for which they have waited so long, then return and reintegration will be that much simpler. This will particularly be the case if benefits are felt before the population starts to significantly increase and if the ground is prepared in advance for returnees. However, on current trends, this seems unlikely to happen.

Our research indicates the need for:

- massive external investment in infrastructure
- recognising that homecomings are never straightforward
- abandoning simple categorisations
- supporting local authorities and civil society to develop an environment in which peace is sustained
- providing formal and non-formal educational opportunities for all
- remaining aware of potential for localised conflicts to flare up and have wider ramifications
- ensuring adequate protection for all and ensuring that all displaced people are afforded the choice of if and when to return

shedding the idea that ‘return’ means an end to movement: many retain transnational social and economic links which are vital components of livelihood strategies.

Graham Wood is Head of Policy at Ockenden International. Jake Phelan is an independent consultant. Emails: graham.wood@ockenden.org.uk, jakephelan@hotmail.com.

This article is a summary of their January 2006 report, An Uncertain Return, online at www.ockenden.org.uk/temp/UncertainReturnPDF1.pdf

For latest information on Sudan, see www.reliefweb.int


Sudan: uncertain prospects

Khartoum’s refusal to allow Jan Egeland, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, to visit Darfur – and the expulsion of the Norwegian Refugee Council from the troubled region – is further evidence of efforts by the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) to contain international engagement in Sudan.

The Darfur conflict erupted in early 2003 when the Sudanese Liberation Movement/Army and the smaller Justice and Equality Movement took up arms against the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum. The NCP responded by backing Arab militia known as the Janjaweed. Humanitarian workers estimate that more than 180,000 people have been killed in the violence and nearly two million forced to flee their homes.

Even before Egeland was denied permission to visit Khartoum or Darfur in April 2006, the long-awaited transfer of peace-keeping responsibility in Darfur from the African Union to the UN appeared to be on permanent hold. The 7000-strong African Mission in Sudan (AMIS) has lacked the resources to halt a steady deterioration of the security situation and widespread banditry and human rights abuses from all combatants. UNICEF estimates that in North and West Darfur around half a million people in need of humanitarian assistance cannot
be reached due to ongoing conflict. Insecurity and lack of funding has constrained the expansion of humanitarian programmes into remote and rural areas, potentially exacerbating the ‘pull-effect’ of camps for displaced people as rural communities abandon their villages.

Egeland described the situation as an “eerie reminder” of 2004, when aid workers were denied access at the point when the situation in Darfur was at its worst. “This is symptomatic of the everyday problems my colleagues face in Darfur, trying to feed nearly three million Darfuris to whom we are a lifeline,” he said.

In a grim assessment the International Crisis Group notes that the NCP has kept the international community at bay over Darfur by facilitating increased chaos on the ground and promoting divisions within the rebels which have brought peace talks in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, to a standstill. It is similarly containing international engagement with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) by selectively implementing elements of the agreement without allowing for any weakening of its grip on power – particularly control of oil revenues – or fundamental change in the way the country is governed. The international community has remained largely silent.

Heavy on monitoring but weak on follow-through, the international community – particularly the key countries involved in the negotiation of the CPA – has not yet embraced its role as a guarantor of the CPA, and continues to lack a consistent, coordinated approach to hold the parties, particularly the NCP, to their respective commitments.¹

On his return from Sudan, Egeland noted that the international community seems “to be slacking on this last leg of the marathon to bring peace and security and prosperity to the biggest country of Africa … I have seen a waning interest in Sudan this year … this is really the moment of truth for international compassion and solidarity with Sudan,” he said.

Tim Morris is Co-Editor of Forced Migration Review. Email: fmr@qeh.ox.ac.uk

For more information on Sudan, see FMR24 [www.fmreview.org/FM-Rpdfs/FMR24/FMR24full.pdf]

¹ [www.crisisgroup.org/home/getfile.cfm?id=2289&tid=4055&type=pdf&l=1]