

# IDPs and urban planning in Khartoum

by Agnès de Geoffroy

*Urban planning policies – which have led to demolition of IDP housing in and around Khartoum – highlight the need for Sudan to adopt specific IDP legislation and to find durable solutions for those displaced southerners who do not want to leave Khartoum.*

**T**ragic recent events have drawn attention to the neglected issue of IDP settlements in the Khartoum metropolis, now home to five million people. In May 2005 Sudanese security forces arrived in the squatter area of Soba-Aradi, 30km south of Khartoum. Their attempts to demolish IDPs' shelters and load people onto trucks led to clashes which resulted in the deaths of 15 policemen and an unknown number of IDPs, including children.

An estimated 325,000 IDPs live in four official IDP camps, established in 1991, with an additional population of at least 1.5 million IDPs scattered in unauthorised squatter settlements. Mobility between settlements, whether as a result of forcible relocation by the government or voluntary movement, is high. Most IDPs were primarily displaced by conflict in the south and the Nuba Mountains or by drought in the mid 1980s. They are discriminated against and have

unequal access to jobs, education and basic services.

The official IDP camps were established outside urban boundaries but the pace of urban growth is so great that the camps are now integrated into the outskirts of the city. Providing water and electricity is an enormous challenge which the state has not addressed. In squatter areas and in IDP camps only a handful of residents have electricity, provided by privately-owned generators. Water is generally obtained from wells drilled by NGOs and managed by community-based organisations. Water is a major household expense, especially for those living far from wells.

During the 1990s international NGOs were active in the camps, providing

water, sanitation, health and food. However, due to an improvement of the situation in camps, acute needs in other parts of the country and restrictions on access by NGOs, most agencies withdrew from Greater Khartoum, generally handing over projects to national or community-based agencies. Most of the international NGOs still working in camps and in squatter areas run projects through local agencies. Local NGOs often have limited capacities and resources and struggle to meet needs in areas where the government shows little commitment to providing assistance.

For decades urban planning in Greater Khartoum has been associated with violations of human rights. Demolitions and relocations have driven the poorest to the furthest peripheries of the city. In the case of IDP camps, residents have been given a temporary usufructuary (usage) access to land while in the squatter areas land has usually been squatted and illegally subdivided. Although some resist, IDPs mostly submit to urban planning decisions in the hope of eventually getting land ownership in subsequent plot allocations. Most know little about plot prices and official criteria of plot allocation. Rumours abound and some families move into the IDP camps before the demolitions and establish a *racuba* - a shelter made of branches, plastic sheets and cardboard - in the hope of getting access to legal title. Their hopes are often dashed in an untransparent and corrupt system which privileges wealthier people.

Evictions have intensified in recent years - at the same time as the

government and SPLM have worked towards peace. Of the estimated 665,000 IDPs who have had their homes demolished and been forcibly relocated since 1989, more than half have been moved since 2004. There is a clear strategy to relocate people to north-western Khartoum where soils are less fertile and the water table deeper. Investor interest in Soba-Aradi has pushed up plot prices. There are rumours that demolitions in Shikane are designed to assist the plans of Saudi Arabian investors.

The Global IDP Project has noted that when IDPs are moved, schools, health clinics and latrines have been destroyed. No alternative shelter is provided for IDPs who may be given notice of demolition or may simply be awoken by the arrival of trucks come to remove them. Many evicted IDPs have been excluded from accessing a plot, especially those who have lost identification documents, female-headed households, those who arrived in Khartoum after 1996 and those who could not afford to pay for a new plot. The government has no policy to address the needs of IDPs whose houses have been demolished and who are not eligible for a new plot.<sup>1</sup>

### Advocacy

International and national agencies have attempted to change the practices of the Khartoum State government. A Khartoum State Interagency Coalition - led by Fellowship for African Relief (FAR) following an initiative started by Enfants du Monde, Droits de l'Homme and supported by the UN - has denounced government methods and petitioned the Ministry of Planning.

The Coalition and human rights agencies are calling for:

- a clearer timeframe of when particular areas are to be re-zoned and when health, water, electricity and other services are to be provided
- greater transparency and equity in allocating plots
- guarantees that repatriation and return of IDPs will be of a totally voluntary nature
- rejection of the definition of IDP used by the government: agencies are concerned by a statement from the Ministry of Planning and Public Utilities that "the terminology of 'displaced people' is no longer appropriate to identify those people who are presently living in the camps".

Tensions are high between the Khartoum State government and INGOs. International concerns in the aftermath of the incidents in Soba-Aradi were dismissed as unfounded. Although government intentions to provide services to resettled people may be well-intentioned, often the only result is neatly demarcated streets and nothing more. There is a clear economic incentive for the government to sell land occupied by IDPs. Nevertheless, in these times of transition, the government may be interested in controlling the southern population by keeping large numbers of them in Khartoum. For their part, the SPLM is keenly interested in having people resettle in the South in order to increase its political base in the build-up to the referendum on whether the South should become independent. Managing the issue of displaced people who wish to stay in Khartoum will be a complex challenge and must become an integral part of national reconciliation processes.

*Racubas in IDP camp, Omdurman.*

**Agnès de Geoffroy is a part-time consultant on IDP-related issues and a research worker with the Groupe Urgence Réhabilitation Développement (URD).<sup>2</sup> She is completing a doctorate at the University of Paris 8, comparing urban integration of IDPs in Bogotá and Khartoum. Email: [agnes@degeoffroy.com](mailto:agnes@degeoffroy.com)**

1. [www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/IdpProjectDb/idpSurvey.nsf/wViewCountries/C2D3EBD8BAE2E279C1256E550059AEBD](http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/IdpProjectDb/idpSurvey.nsf/wViewCountries/C2D3EBD8BAE2E279C1256E550059AEBD)  
2. [www.urd.org](http://www.urd.org)

