

The poor and the displaced in Khartoum

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In Khartoum, as in many other cases of urban displacement, it is difficult to separate the elements of coercion in someone's decision to leave their home from other reasons (including economic ones) as migrants tend to settle among existing residents of slums and shanty towns. There are no visible barriers separating those displaced by conflict and/or generalised violence from other migrants. The protracted nature of displacement in Khartoum blurs this distinction even further and those defined as IDPs may no longer see themselves in this category. The absence of any system of IDP registration in Khartoum, the presence of a population that moved in a series of waves and for different reasons, and a large and not consistently tracked process of spontaneous return to South Sudan make it virtually impossible to put a figure on Khartoum displacement and to determine its trends. The 1-1.2 million IDPs still reported in official UN documents represents a conventional estimate rather than a firm statistic.

Several gaps are visible in the response to urban displacement in Khartoum. The attention of the international community is influenced by the geopolitics and the other emergencies in the country, and advocacy with the authorities, including on forced relocations, is largely left to a few protection/human rights actors. It is believed that in the poorest IDP and squatter areas of the capital, humanitarian indicators may be worse than in the serviced IDP camps of Darfur. The expulsion of international NGOs in March 2009 meant the discontinuation of essential activities in support of displaced and other poor communities in Khartoum which had contributed to a favourable protection environment.

Humanitarian assistance, however, seems increasingly inadequate in providing definitive responses to the challenges of urban displacement and poverty in Khartoum. The chances of mobilising substantial funds by tapping into humanitarian sources are almost negligible. Besides, more importantly, the Khartoum situation calls for development-oriented approaches as well as the increased presence of specialised actors, including in those areas still conventionally defined as IDP sites. Yet on the ground the gap left by relief has not been adequately filled by development assistance.

The situation in Khartoum needs to be tackled from a broader rights-based perspective, where the dimension of internal displacement is only one part of something more complex. This situation requires a renewed dialogue between the international community and state authorities on urban development, land management, pro-poor policies of housing support, access to services, income generation for protracted displaced and urban poor. It requires a renewed commitment by humanitarian and, especially, development actors to strengthen their field presence in the poor urban areas of Khartoum, to improve contacts and networking with the existing civil society and community structures and to support authorities in reaching out to the population. It also requires renewed efforts by donor governments to assist in the mobilisation of resources for longer-term structural interventions for Khartoum's urban poor, including IDPs.

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