

DISPLACEMENT IN WEST TIMOR:

Displaced “new citizens” in need of better integration and livelihood assistance

March 2009

Summary of main issues

In early 2009, nearly ten years after being displaced from Timor-Leste, thousands of people remain living in camps located near the border with East Timor and around Kupang, the province capital. In a province where 30 per cent of residents live below the poverty line and where resources and economic opportunities are scarce, the presence of the displaced, who are now considered as “new citizens” by the state having lost both their IDP and refugee status, is reported to create tensions with local communities, mainly linked to land disputes and economic competition. The main issues affecting the displaced are lack of access to land, poor integration with local communities, very poor living conditions, high unemployment level, lack of access to education and unresolved compensation issues. The government's priority remains the closing of the remaining camps and it is therefore discouraging any assistance.

Background and causes

Following the UN-sponsored referendum on East Timor in 1999, between 250,000 and 280,000 people were relocated to neighboring West Timor province (UNCHR, 6 April 2000, p.4). While some people fled voluntarily, others were coerced into doing so by militias and the Indonesian military. By 2003, most had been assisted by UNHCR to return to East Timor, but tens of thousands remained unwilling to return and opted to stay in West Timor, living mainly in Belu and Timor Tengah Utara (TTU) districts and near Kupang, the province capital. Most of them are members of the militias and their family as well as Indonesian civil servants. Thousands of displaced people have been assisted to move to resettlement camps since 2003, but many remain unwilling to move there. The displaced from East Timor were first considered by the government as IDPs when they crossed into West Timor in 1999. Following Timor-Leste's independence in 2002 they became refugees. Since 2006, they have lost the refugee status and become "new citizens".

IDP population figures

As of early 2009, it is believed that several thousands of "new citizens" (former IDPs/refugees) continue to live in camps both in Belu districts and near Kupang under very difficult conditions and with little assistance (West Australian, 26 July 2008). No reliable data exists on the number and needs of these groups. In 2008, CARE identified 2,500 IDP households, or roughly 12,500 individuals, in need of reintegration assistance in both Kupang and Belu district (CARE, 6 May 2008, p.14). In 2006, estimates on the number people still in need of relocation and assistance ranged from 4,200 families, or 20,000 people, to 100,000 people (Li, December 2007; UCA News, 2 October 2006; ICG, 4 May 2006, p.2; EC, 2006; Kompas, 21 March 2006; UNDP, 2005, p. 15).

Basic necessities of life

Most of the displaced are reported to have very limited resources and poor access to public facilities (UNDP, 2005, p. 46; UCA News, 2 October 2006; EC, 2006; Li, December 2007). At least 2,000 people have been living in Noelbaki camp near Kupang for the past ten years. The camp has not seen any recent improvements as the government discourages any support from international agencies. It is reported to lack even the most basic services, including electricity or running water (The Age, 28 July 2008). Shelter and infrastructure improvement initiatives undertaken by INGOs such as CARE have also been reportedly hampered by the IDPs' limited access to natural resources compared to local community members, regular changes in the government's IDP policy as well as the high mobility of IDPs who frequently move out of the camp in search of income opportunities (CARE, 6 May 2008, pp.10-11).

In the past years, West Timor has faced a food security crisis that has led to the deterioration of the health and nutrition status of most residents with 90 per cent of all households reported as food insecure (CWS, CARE, HKI, April 2008, p.3). Nutrition surveys conducted during 2007 and 2008 have shown extremely high level of malnutrition throughout the province. Acute malnutrition affected 13 per cent of children under five while the level of chronic malnutrition reached 60 per cent. The malnutrition is caused by poor access to food due to poverty, poor hygienic and sanitary environment and access to water, multiple infections and lack of care for women and children (UNICEF, June 2008). There is no specific data on the nutritional status of the displaced but they are likely to be worse off than the general population given their weaker social networks, their lack of access to land and their limited livelihood opportunities.

Documentation and citizenship

From IDP in 1999, the displaced became refugees in 2002 (when East Timor became independent) and finally "new citizens" in 2003 when they were offered the choice to return to East Timor or become Indonesian citizens. Often marginalised as "new citizens" and excluded from local social support systems, many are reportedly too poor to register for the identity cards which are needed to receive social assistance from the authorities (Li, December 2007).

Access to land, work and livelihood opportunities

Access to land is very limited for the displaced, most of whom are farmers. This represents one of the major obstacles for sustainable living with little alternative livelihood opportunities available. The majority of the 2,000 displaced living in Noelbaki camp near Kupang has no access to land. The displaced have little or no source of income (The Age, 28 July 2008). Many displaced were reported to make a living either by working on land owned by communities or by the government or by renting if from local landlords. Others engaged in the informal sector (UNDP, 2005, p.14). Lack of access to land ownership is also reported as a major challenge to recovery in resettlement sites (West Australian, 26 July 2008, UCA News, 2 October 2006). From 1999 to 2005, many displaced households were resettled in more permanent housing, mainly within West Timor (UNDP, 2005, p.46). However, many former refugees remain unwilling to move to resettlement sites often situated far away from towns where job opportunities are scarce and where access to health services is reportedly very limited (CARE, August 2007, p. 8).

In a region with scarce resources and extremely high poverty and unemployment levels, the presence of displaced persons is a constant source of tension with local communities as they occupy land owned by the community or its members and compete with them on the job market. The displaced living in camps or villages near the border with East Timor or near the capital Kupang are reportedly poorly integrated with local communities because of strong cultural differences, in particular in Kupang, as well as because of land disputes (CARE, August 2007, pp. 5-6).

Even when the displaced have been able to legally buy land they have struggled to get land certificates proving their ownership of the land. Challenges faced by the displaced in getting the certificates have been as a result of lack of proper documents proving land transactions, lack of ID cards or unclarity of the status of land when it is bought on credit and payments have not been completed. Another major obstacle identified has been the the difficulty in determining land boundaries when land had been bought in groups (CARE, 6 May 2008, p. 8).

National and international response

In response to the displacement crisis in 1999, a wide range of actors cooperated to immediately provide emergency assistance to the displaced, including the central government, the NTT provincial and district government and the military and the police. While support was provided to meet the humanitarian needs of the displaced, assistance was also offered to repatriate those willing to return. Despite efforts by the government and international agencies to promote peace-building activities and resolve conflict between the displaced and their host community, many of the contentious issues such as land disputes and competition for resources have not been addressed and tensions have remained (UNDP, 2005, p. 55).

Former IDP/refugees have been protesting sometimes violently against what they consider to be insufficient funding provided by the government. Government's assistance to former IDP/refugees

ended in 2005 when their status was removed, but many complain of not having received anything (Kompas, 21 March 2006). A social integration assistance fund was set up in 2005, but it only benefited those who agreed to resettle and integrate with local communities. Many also failed to register in time and were left aside. In 2008, some 2,000 former refugee families were still demanding assistance from the government to rebuild their lives. However, according to the head of the provincial Social Services Office, they were not entitled to assistance through the fund because they had failed to register with the authorities in time and because they had not chosen to integrate locally (Jakarta Post, 2 April 2008).



International hum. presence in West Timor, OCHA, Sept. 2008

In the past years, a number of international aid agencies have been assisting the displaced in West Timor, including Oxfam GB, Church World Service (CWS) and CARE. Between 2005 and 2007, CARE conducted a programme entitled PULIH (Provide Uprooted people with access to Livelihood and Health Recovery) addressing the needs of thousands of former IDPs and host communities. Building on traditional customs to help the integration of the displaced, CARE's programme sought to improve access to land, shelter, public facility, asset and income generating skills.

CARE has also facilitated land certification to try to reduce the number land disputes (CARE, 7 December 2007). In the past two years, CARE's has also conducted a SENSE (Support for Empowerment of Non-Integrated IDPs to improve Settlement and Economy Project) program. The programme targeted 3,000 households living in Belu and Kupang district, including both ex-IDPs/refugees and host communities (CARE, 6 May 2008, p. 1). Between 2006 and 2007, Oxfam GB, supported by the EC, conducted a programme to help 2,000 displaced families resettle and build transitional shelters in areas with improved access to safe water and sanitation and increased food and income security.

Other international agencies present in West Timor focus on food security, preparedness and development. They include ACF, Save the Children (UK and US), UNICEF and Helen Keller International (OCHA, 1 September 2008).

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About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org.