

Between protracted and crisis displacement Policy responses to Somali displacement



Credit: UNHCR / E. Hockstein

Workshop report

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Aims

Two decades after the collapse of the Somali Republic, the country's regions still suffer chronic political uncertainty, violence and high levels of displacement. Since 2006, protracted displacements that began in the 1990s have been overlaid by new crises associated with severe drought, political violence and governance failures. The current situation, which involves both internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees, is widely acknowledged as among the worst in the world, both in terms of the number of people affected and the extent of their humanitarian and protection needs.

The aim of the workshop¹ was to facilitate discussion about *current and future policy responses*. To do so, it drew on an overview of global policy on protracted displacement² and a case study from Somalia.³ Both pieces of research were carried out earlier this year by Oxford University's Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) in collaboration with the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). Their work was funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While policymakers grapple with emergency responses to the current crisis, longer-term approaches are often neglected. The workshop deliberately focused on *longer-term strategies* that aim towards more durable solutions and address the protracted nature of much displacement.

The event brought together *international organisations* including donors, UN agencies, human rights groups and NGOs in a relatively small forum to explore how their actions and advocacy contribute to addressing Somali displacement. Twenty-five people participated, and Chatham House rules were observed to encourage a free exchange of ideas.⁴

This report provides a brief overview of the themes explored and goes on to present the main outcomes of the workshop, laying out proposals for policy development.

This report was written by Dr Anna Lindley and Martina Caterina.

Themes

Introduction

The workshop began with a global overview of protracted displacement situations, which highlighted a widespread lack of adequate asylum protection and explored obstacles to the traditional durable solutions of return, resettlement (including settlement elsewhere in the country for IDPs) and local integration. It pointed both to similarities and contrasts between displacement in Somalia and in other countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and focused on the links between protracted displacement and continuing crises of governance in regions of origin.

Dynamics of displacement

Following an outline of historical displacement trends in Somalia and key features of the current phase, discussion focused on the 'home-orientated' policy approaches to the prevention of displacement and return of IDPs and refugees. Prevention of displacement is a tricky concept. Efforts to tackle the intolerable situations from which people flee are vital, but any attempt to restrict asylum at a regional level and contain people within the country of origin puts civilians in further danger. On the subject of return, discussion focused on the absolute necessity of ensuring any process is voluntary, and the need for a cautious approach, to understand displaced people's perspectives and to carefully monitor any returns that do take place.

Internal displacement

International and Somali concepts of integration were explored, and three key influences on IDPs' ability to settle and coexist with local communities were identified – Somali social and clan relations, macro-political authorities and international aid. There was also discussion about how best to work with Somaliland and Puntland on IDPs' rights in a context of growing securitisation, and the importance of recognising and building on Somali socio-cultural resources for integration.

Refugee displacement

In light of the long-term presence and marginalisation of refugees in Kenya, pathways towards 'positive participation' in society were discussed. Particular emphasis was placed on trying to establish a partial or gradual process by which refugees are granted fuller legal status; on the scope for supporting the wider development of Kenya's impoverished North Eastern Province in ways that are sensitive to refugees; and on the need to consolidate and defend progress made in recent years on urban refugees' rights in the light of recent events.

Mobility

The limited scope of official resettlement processes given the scale of regional displacement, and their unintended outcomes were explored. Overall, support was expressed for resettlement as a vital protection tool. Mobility and migration play a vital role in the responses of refugees and IDPs to their situations. Discussion focused on how facilitating mobility in various guises can represent a durable or at least enduring solution to displacement. A typology of post-flight mobility was explored, and it was underlined

that migration is often a culturally-embedded practice, especially seasonal circular mobility across largely artificial borders. Related issues, such as distinguishing between mobility as a livelihood or development strategy as opposed to forced migration, were considered.

Ways forward

Discussion focused on a series of avenues for policy development outlined below.

Policy development proposals

Displacement issues are closely related to events in south-central Somalia, and it was emphasised that the stabilisation of the territory should remain a major goal. Meanwhile, in its focus on the issues raised by the intertwining of the current crisis with protracted displacement, the study and the workshop identified several long-term strategies that are worth further exploration.⁵

Putting Somali socio-cultural resources at the centre of debates on settlement of IDPs

Many impoverished communities have not only tolerated but helped in the settlement of unusually large numbers of displaced people. They have drawn on traditional and Islamic principles relating to the treatment of guests and the vulnerable; the popular Sufi brotherhoods which link people of different clans and origins; the ideology of *Somalinimo*; and a broader Islamist 'awakening' which emphasises unity across clans. Diaspora charity and business philanthropy play an increasingly important role in the response to displacement within south-central Somalia. Amid the many accounts of abuses and exploitation of IDPs, it is important for international organisations to recognise that there are also impressive socio-cultural resources that have been, and can continue to be mobilised.

Identify best practices and approaches to working with Somali political authorities on IDPs' rights

The responses of the Transitional Federal Government and Al Shabaab to the very large numbers of displaced people in areas under their control are a cause for serious concern. There are important questions about how to improve their treatment of IDPs, and how and where international organisations might exert leverage. The more established authorities in Puntland and Somaliland have tolerated significant settlement of displaced southerners, but they too have sometimes taken ambivalent or hostile attitudes. It would be good to review the effectiveness of the current ways of working with these authorities to promote IDPs' welfare and rights within the context of the protection cluster and IDP task forces.

Link displaced people with wider livelihoods programming

There remains a strong case for targeted humanitarian assistance, particularly to the recently displaced. There are concerns, however, that in some circumstances international aid specifically targeting the displaced works against longer-term integration by separating them from their host populations and vesting a range of interests in maintaining that divide. This might be addressed by including displaced people within the scope of programmes aimed at improving the livelihood opportunities of the poor generally in Somaliland and Puntland.

Induce gradual or partial pathways to fuller legal status for refugees

Given the scale and the nature of the current situation, the naturalisation of a large number of Somali refugees is certainly not feasible politically for the Kenyan government. That said, a large proportion of the refugees have already spent many years and in some cases their whole lives in Kenya, and they are there to stay. Legal integration is too often framed as an all-or-nothing question, but a partial or gradual approach merits

further exploration. Such an approach might involve identifying eligible subgroups, defining pathways towards eventual improved legal status, and making work permits and movement passes more easily available.

Implement a long-term vision for the Dadaab refugee camp

Given the long-established nature and scale of the camp, many suggest that the best approach would be to work towards a situation where the complex eventually operates more like a municipal centre under government administration, with UNHCR and ministries cooperating on service provision for the whole community, and a greater degree of economic openness allowed. This would clearly need to be a long-term process, integrated into wider development planning for the North Eastern Province, and would involve a range of government and other organisations.

Facilitate the mobility of refugees

This requires a radical rethink of international attitudes, so that unlocking protracted displacement is not associated with stopping movement but with facilitating displaced people's access to rights. International organisations should encourage regional states to liberalise their approach to migration, particularly in post-conflict settings where it may also help to foster recovery in communities of origin. Possibilities to explore include:

- Increased availability of Convention travel documents
- Ensuring that refugee populations are included in discussions on the East African Community's initiatives on freedom of movement
- The issuing of work or residency permits that recognise de facto integration alongside citizenship of refugees' country of origin (as happened under a 2007 Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) initiative for refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone)
- Encouraging developed nations to open up regular migration routes for refugees and 'repatriates' beyond standard resettlement programmes.
- Support programmes for IDPs which recognise that internal displacement may occur alongside other forms of development-induced migration, and are tailored to reflect the likely permanence of rural–urban flows.

Focus on community relations

Serious concerns have been expressed about the current public discourse in Kenya, which emphasises links between the refugee population and Al Shabaab, piracy and profiteering in the informal economy. Until now there has been no major community-level backlash against refugees, but there are fears this could happen. At the same time, there is a long-standing history of Kenyan openness, economic cooperation and reasonably harmonious urban coexistence. There are risks in focusing on community relations, but there are also opportunities. There is scope for local organisations to open up spaces for dialogue in ways that defuse rather than fuel tensions; to mainstream community relations in any grassroots interventions with refugees; and to develop a concerted public relations strategy that counters some of the crude negative images and associations in circulation.

Investigate the environmental dimensions of displacement

There is a need to better understand how environmental issues contribute to displacement, both in terms of the current drought and famine and the longer-term pressures of climate change on rural livelihoods; how the environmental dimension fits into current normative frameworks for displacement and national practices in the region; and how this shapes the views of displaced people on the possibilities and preconditions for voluntary return.

Cultivate a regional perspective

Regional politics, particularly the Ethiopian, Ugandan and Kenyan military incursions, have been an increasingly prominent feature of the conflict in Somalia. Somali displacement now affects the whole Horn and East Africa region, with deteriorating conditions reported across the region. Many now emphasise the need to take a more regional perspective on migration trends and policy. There is a growing consensus that much may be gained from greater coordination of regional responses.

Endnotes

1. The workshop was chaired by Eric Demers (NRC); organised by Anna Lindley, Martina Caterina, Nina M. Birkeland and Nuur Mohamud Sheekh (IDMC) and H elo ise Ruaudel (RSC); and included research-based contributions from Anna Lindley (SOAS/RSC) and Katy Long (LSE/RSC). Many thanks to Nuur Mohamed Sheekh (NRC), Roel Debruyne (DRC), and Bruce Grundison (High Commission of Canada) who acted as discussants.
2. ‘Permanent crisis? Unlocking the protracted displacement of refugees and internally displaced persons’, available at: www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/publications/rsc-reports/Unlocking-protracted-displacement-policy-overview.pdf
3. ‘Unlocking protracted displacement: Somali displacement case study’, available at: www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/publications/working-papers-folder_contents/RSCworkingpaper79.pdf
4. www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chathamhouserule
5. These points are in no particular order.