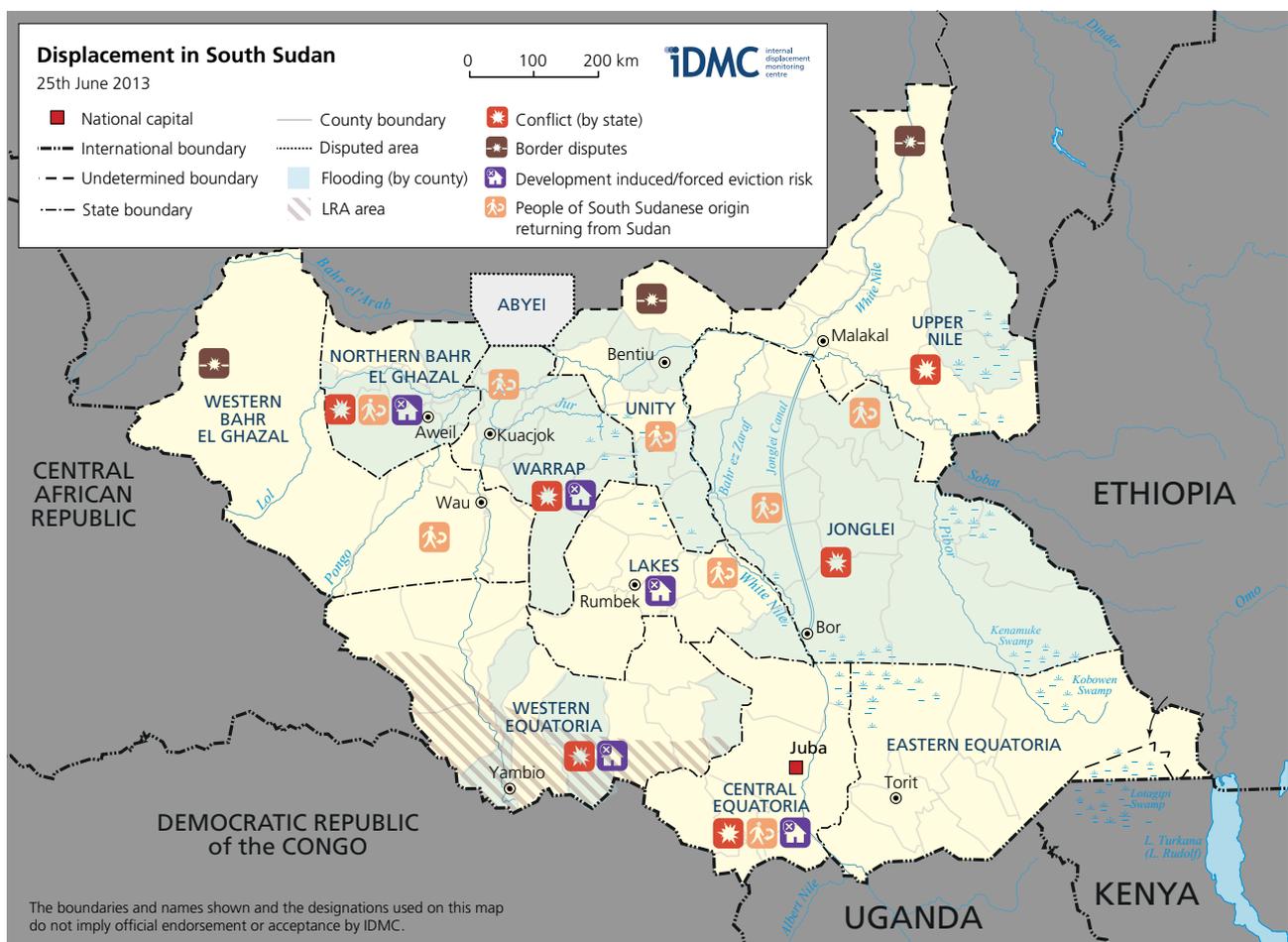


9 July 2013

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN SOUTH SUDAN: Out of crisis, an opportunity?

Two years after South Sudan's independence, the scale and seriousness of the country's internal displacement situation is often under-reported. The recent violence in Jonglei state has brought the issue to the fore, at least as far as that particular state is concerned, but it has also highlighted the many challenges involved in responding to complex and often entrenched displacement dynamics. The UN estimates that around 11,000 people were internally displaced in Jonglei by violence during the first five months of 2013. In June, however, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which operates in the state, suggested that as many as 120,000 had fled wide-ranging human rights abuses committed by all parties to the conflict, including the South Sudanese army. It also warned that the true figure could be much higher. Recognising that figures based on the number of 'assisted and verified' displaced fail to indicate the full scale, the UN has recently sought to estimate conflict-induced displacement in Jonglei based on resident population figures compared to current population levels in key towns.



Given that official figures are used for planning and fundraising, the challenges in reaching credible estimates have considerable implications for humanitarian response. Similar issues arise in responding to internal displacement across South Sudan, where it is not only internal conflict that causes displacement. Development projects, land grabs, border clashes with Sudan, attacks by the Uganda-based Lord's Resistance Army, natural hazards such as seasonal flooding and even the "failed" return of people displaced during the Sudanese civil war all contribute to the displacement of vulnerable populations. The official displacement figures, however, do not always reflect the full range of primary or secondary displacement caused, while humanitarian structures and funding cycles promote responses based on mandates and policy priorities rather than a comprehensive understanding of displacement. In addition, and since individual displaced groups are not tracked following their initial displacement, the numbers are collected on a cumulative basis, and only within each calendar year, which makes it impossible to ascertain the duration of such displacements or the level of secondary or repeated displacement. The gaps that result, and the broader gaps between the humanitarian and development sectors, are hardly conducive to long-term recovery and development.

Durable solutions start before displacement

Normative frameworks increasingly outline the importance of a comprehensive response to displacement, and in Africa the last decade has seen the entry into force of the Great Lakes Pact, which contains protocols on displacement, and the Kampala Convention. Drawing on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the two instruments clearly define roles and responsibilities across all phases of displacement: preparation and prevention, including issues around land-grabbing and development; emergency response

to support those fleeing both conflict and natural disasters; and recovery, helping communities affected to address the vulnerabilities caused by their displacement. On the practical level, lessons learned from the famines in east Africa and the Sahel region point to the need for greater investment in building communities' resilience, and in doing so bridging the gap between reactive humanitarian response and longer-term development interventions. This is particularly important in situations of chronic instability and repeated or protracted displacement. If years of dependence on humanitarian aid are to be avoided, the response must not only address immediate needs but also build, or 'build back better' in contexts of extreme fragility and poverty. All too often, durable solutions are elusive because the causes of displacement remain unaddressed after the initial humanitarian response. Indeed, when the humanitarians leave, communities affected by displacement can find themselves more rather than less vulnerable. As such, internal displacement is often indicative of the broader structural challenges inherent in bringing together the humanitarian response and development planning. At the same time, it also offers a number of entry points for doing just that. A comprehensive analysis of the multiples causes of internal displacement in South Sudan would provide a platform for common understanding between the government and the humanitarian and development communities. It would shape priorities for response across the board and help to improve understanding of what durable solutions might look like.

It would also inform the humanitarian response to emergency needs, and help the development sector to integrate displacement into all aspects of its programming. Any such integration should involve engagement with national policies and legal frameworks, traditional and formal justice mechanisms and the rule of law, and support for the national authorities in their application. It should include development interventions that aim to reduce the risk of violence between com-

munities over resources, and address seasonal natural hazard risks through disaster risk reduction and preparedness programming. It should also engage in urbanisation processes as both a potential cause of, and solution to displacement, and it should help in understanding the crucial links between long-term poverty and underdevelopment and the causes of internal displacement. Above all, it should involve working with the national authorities and the humanitarian sector to develop more comprehensive tools for sustained data collection and analysis in order to address the considerable gaps in current data.

Donors have a particularly important role to play in promoting a comprehensive vision and response to displacement by ensuring that funding instruments support such an approach. They should also invest more heavily in building long-term relationships with the South Sudanese government based on the principles of the New Deal, and they should ensure that development partnerships are not influenced by political interests or changes in context.

The UN also has a crucial role to play in supporting the government in the development of a roadmap for such an approach and leading its implementation with sustained support from key partners.

Such an approach would challenge the traditional concept of a “linear transition” from humanitarian to development interventions. Instead it would recognise the value of a composite approach, in which sustained engagement aims to fundamentally address the multiple causes of displacement and obstacles to recovery, alongside dedicated capacity for humanitarian response during emergencies based on principled humanitarian action.

With the right support sustained, South Sudan could provide an opportunity to demonstrate to the world what support for durable solutions

to internal displacement, and with it long-term recovery and development, really look like.