

ETHIOPIA: ADDRESSING THE RIGHTS AND NEEDS OF PEOPLE DISPLACED BY CONFLICT



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Ethiopia: Addressing the rights and needs of people displaced by conflict

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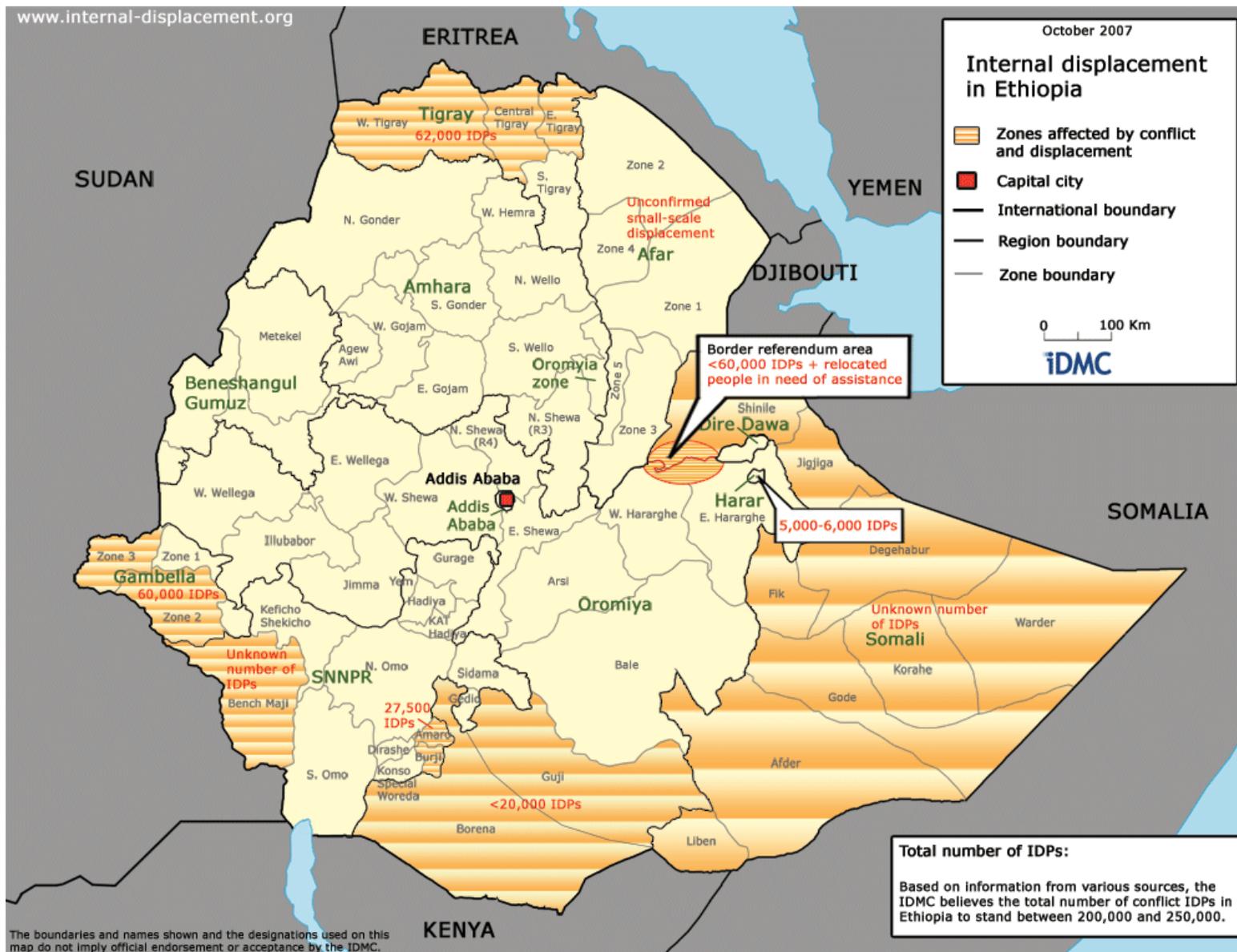
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Map of internal displacement in Ethiopia



Summary

Relatively little is known about the extent and nature of conflict-induced internal displacement in Ethiopia. Numerous small-scale conflicts and displacement situations receive little to no attention. The better-documented displacement situations are at times interpreted differently by United Nations agencies and the government of Ethiopia. Estimates by international organisations, referring to some 200,000 conflict-induced IDPs country-wide, are broadly in line with regional government estimates. However, with the exception of Tigray region, no estimated figures are given by the federal government. Recent reports of significant conflict-induced displacement in Somali region have thus far not been officially confirmed.

Ethiopia is politically organised in a system of ethnic federalism, under which the country is divided into ethnically-defined regions and zones. In almost all cases, the displacement was triggered by conflict between different ethnic groups over access to political power or scarce resources such as water and pastoral or agricultural land. There are several conflict-induced displacement situations in Ethiopia, the most important ones occurring in the administrative regions of Somali, Oromiya, Gambella and Tigray.

In Somali region, displacement resulted from fighting over scarce resources and the armed stand-off between the Ethiopian government and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). The report also describes the situation facing a group of Sheikash Somalis living in displacement near the city of Harar. Finally, a 2004 border referendum along the Somali-Oromiya regional border led to significant displacement among both the Somali and Oromo population.

In the areas of Guji and Borena in Oromiya region, displacement was triggered by resource scarcity, partially linked to a re-drawing of administrative borders. People in Gambella region have been displaced over many years, as significant migration into the region, partially across the border from Sudan, upset the region's ethnic balance. The report also reviews the situation in Tigray region, which hosts the IDPs remaining from the 1998-2000 border war with Eritrea, and summarises the conflict-induced displacement in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region and in Afar.

Most Ethiopians lead a very precarious rural existence in one of the most drought-prone countries in the world. People displaced by conflict within the country face particular problems where the government fails to recognise them as a specific group; as a consequence, they risk being excluded from humanitarian relief programmes and national food distribution schemes. As well as losing essential possessions in fleeing their homes, IDPs may thus experience discrimination in terms of access to land, clean water and sanitation and basic services such as schools and healthcare. The exclusion of IDPs from decisions concerning their situation is also a major protection issue which compounds their vulnerability. Violence against women and girls, generally widespread in Ethiopia, is acknowledged to further affect displaced groups.

Since the mid-1980s, when Ethiopia was affected by one of the worst famines in its history, international humanitarian involvement has been significant. Most of it focuses on food aid, as does the national response to humanitarian crises. This traditional concentration on gradual-onset, drought-related crises has in the past been an obstacle to effective response to sudden disease outbreaks and floods. Following the 2006 floods that affected over 600,000 people, there have been efforts to make the national and international crisis response system more flexible.

In May 2007, the humanitarian system's "cluster" response to emergency situations was implemented in Ethiopia, following a year of consensus building between the government, the UN and NGOs. As of September 2007, UN agencies and NGOs were applying the cluster approach in their operations, whereas the government had yet to embrace the approach fully. UNHCR facilitated the protection cluster, addressing protection issues in conflict-induced displacement situations, along with more general protection issues. The government had generally endorsed the cluster approach, but was still in the process of selecting a lead department to link with protection cluster partners. Government recognition of conflict-induced displacement is crucial to ensure the protection of all IDP populations and their effective incorporation into the overall national and international responses to ongoing and future natural disasters and conflicts.

Background

A heritage of autocracy and natural disasters

Ethiopia is one of the world's poorest countries. Throughout its history, it has suffered from recurring droughts and floods and related famines. It is also characterised by a long history of centralised state power, culminating in military rule under the Marxist Dergue government led by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam from 1974 to 1991. The 1985 famine brought international attention to Ethiopia, and triggered a huge response to support millions of starving Ethiopians.

The famine brought to the fore the ruthless demographic engineering of the Dergue government. While at times restricting aid agencies' access to the worst-affected northern regions of Tigray and Wollo, the government initiated a large-scale resettlement programme, moving some 600,000 people from the famine-stricken northern highlands to the more fertile south-western lowlands of Gambella and Oromiya regions. Following a shortage of volunteers for the programme, the regime forcibly assembled and transported highland peasant farmers. Tens of thousands of them died either in transit or on arrival, as they were unable to make a living in the different climate, and were susceptible to malaria. The government also implemented a "villagisation" policy, which was intended to eventually cluster some ten million peasants in socialist rural centres. The living and working conditions of these centres were later described as resembling those of forced labour camps.

Both resettlement and villagisation had a terrible impact on the social fabric of the affected populations. Both were presented internationally as development programmes and supported by donor governments. Both programmes, however, also had political objectives, in particular to curb popular support to rebel movements in Tigray, Eritrea and Oromiya regions. Many resettled people were in fact subsequently recruited into the government armed forces, as this offered the only way out of their miserable situation.¹

Natural disasters such as floods and drought have caused recurring displacement. The most recent waves of drought-related displacement occurred in 2000 and 2003, mainly in eastern regions. Massive flood-induced displacement occurred in November 2006. Ethiopia was also affected by the August 2007 floods.

Besides natural disasters and internal inter-ethnic or separatist conflicts, international conflicts have also long affected the Ethiopian population. Somalia's invasion of the Ogaden (today's Somali region) in 1977, and the 1998-2000 border war with Eritrea triggered significant internal displacement, the latter conflict alone forcing around 300,000 people to flee their homes.

¹ Sandra Steingraber, "Resettlement and Villagization - Tools of Militarization in South West Ethiopia", Cultural Survival Quarterly, Issue 11.4, 31 December 1987.

The EPRDF and ethnic federalism

During the 1980s, and not least as a consequence of the poor official response to the drought, regional opposition movements gained momentum while socialist-bloc support for the Dergue dried up. In 1991, a number of those opposition groups, led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), toppled the government. The new ruling coalition of parties joined as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), under the central control of the TPLF, which maintains alliances with the ruling regional parties.

In an attempt to decentralise the rigid system it had inherited from the Dergue period, and in order to avoid secessionist movements, notably in the regions of Somali and Oromiya, the EPRDF engaged in a major reform process from 1991. Nine *kilil* or administrative regions were created and divided into zones, which were often named after the majority ethnic group. Each zone was further sub-divided into *woredas* (district councils) composed of a number of *kebele* (local councils) in urban neighbourhoods, or of peasant associations in rural areas. While many of those entities had already existed under the Dergue, the EPRDF's devolution processes vested them with some degree of political and administrative autonomy.

The *woreda* is the focus of administrative and political action in the federal system. It is crucial to control a *woreda* to exercise political influence and to have a say in the centrally-steered taxation and distribution of funds and resources, including land, food aid, employment and documentation.

District and local authorities are generally either directly affiliated with, or allied to, the EPRDF, although the situation changed somewhat following the elections of May and November 2005, when opposition parties increased their representation in the national parliament from 12 seats to 172 and also in local government.² The elections were marked by violent suppression of widespread protests against alleged vote-rigging by the EPRDF, and possibly led to the displacement of thousands of people.³

The government's reaction to the protests led several donors to divert financial support away from direct budgetary support to the central government, instead directly funding NGOs or local government bodies through the "Protection of Basic Services" mechanism.⁴ While donor governments have stopped aid transfer on several occasions in the past, such disruptions have never been sustained, consistent or coordinated.

The system of ethnic federalism, dividing Ethiopia into ethnically defined regions and zones, and channelling access to power and resources according to ethnic criteria, is quite unique in the world; it lends the strong central government a federalist face in a country which is home

² US Department of State, 6 March 2007; HRW, 13 January 2006; ENC, 24 July 2005.

There are two main opposition coalitions, divided internally and widely considered at this point to have no chance of acceding to power. The CUD (Coalition for Unity and Democracy, or Kinjit), is Amhara-dominated and based in the north. The UEDF (United Ethiopian Democratic Forces, *Hibrat*), represents southern constituencies.

³ Human Rights Watch, 13 January 2006; ENC, 24 July 2005.

⁴ IRIN, 14 November 2005.

to approximately 80 different ethnicities. However, none of the administrative regions is ethnically homogenous, and the increasing migration of people within Ethiopia in recent years due to famine, economic hardship, resettlement and urbanisation has made the principle of ethnically-distinct zones increasingly difficult to realise and to sustain.

Competition for access to local and regional power structures appears to be increasing. Underlying this competition is a general scarcity of resources, including land, water, food and work opportunities. In a number of regions, older and more recent localised resource-based conflicts have taken on a more ethnic character, further encouraging the activities of armed secessionist movements such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF).⁵ Other groups, like the Somali Sheikash clan, strive for access to political representation.

Displacement-specific humanitarian and protection challenges

In a context of widespread poverty, where millions among a total population of 74 million people struggle to access sufficient food and clean water, healthcare, education and livelihoods, focusing on some 200,000 people displaced by conflict may seem surprising, all the more so since conflict-displacement is but one of the many forms of involuntary internal migration or displacement, whether caused by large-scale government resettlement, economic hardship, natural disaster, internal conflict or international war, all of which feature as an intrinsic part of Ethiopia's history.

However, people forced to flee their homes due to conflict face a number of specific protection challenges. They therefore need a specific and consistent humanitarian response and, where possible, a political process towards finding a solution to their plight. Conflict-induced internal displacement is a continuing phenomenon in numerous areas of the country, which could take on larger dimensions in crisis situations.

Access to land

Inter-ethnic rivalry, the main cause of conflict-induced displacement in Ethiopia, is often based on competition for scarce resources, in particular land and water. A large part of Ethiopia's population in the south and east is pastoralist, and over the past few years, existing tensions among pastoralist societies, and between pastoralists and agricultural or agro-pastoralist societies have intensified. The examples of the Nuer-Anyuak conflict in Gambella, of cattle raiding in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR), and of the Afar-Issa conflict in Afar region are discussed below.

Land in Ethiopia is government-owned, and the government allocates user rights, including for resettlement, while private ownership is limited. According to the government, this practice of government ownership has prevented uncontrolled urban migration, since peasants are

⁵ USDS, 6 March 2007: Armed confrontation between the two liberation fronts and government forces continues to occur, but no reliable figures indicate the number of civilian, rebel and government forces deaths.

reluctant to lose existing land rights by migrating to towns.⁶ However, the practice may create tensions, particularly among pastoralist societies, when official land-use designation may not necessarily correspond with people's historic sense of land ownership. Varying tax systems between administrative regions impede the pastoralists' freedom to trade,⁷ which further accentuates tensions.

The arrival of significant numbers of IDPs in an area allocated to a particular group of people may also threaten to disrupt land use. This is exemplified in the case of Sheikash IDPs arriving in Raaso which is discussed below. Allocating land to groups of IDPs for resettlement is similarly complex.⁸

Access to food, water and services

Up to ten per cent of Ethiopia's population is considered chronically or temporarily food-insecure, and the majority of people live below the poverty line. In such a situation, droughts, floods and conflict situations have devastating long-term effects on fragile livelihoods. Malnutrition rates are high in many parts of the country and the lack of nutritious food affects the growth of half of all children.⁹

According to the 2007 Joint Humanitarian Appeal, a total of 8.6 million people are in need of assistance, of whom 1.3 million qualify for emergency food assistance, mostly in Somali and Oromiya regions, and 7.3 million are included in the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP).¹⁰ The PSNP, introduced in 2005, is a pillar of the government's food security strategy and is supported by both the highest levels of government and the international donor community. The



A displaced woman in Karamile, near Dire Dawa, angry about the lack of available food

⁶ Samson Mulugeta, "Ethiopia's plan to rapidly move millions to fertile ground to avoid starvation could harm more than it will help; an unsettling resettlement", *Newsday*, 15 December 2004.

⁷ Interview, Ethiopia, February 2007.

⁸ See for example p.19, on the situation of Oromo IDP resettlement in Mieso town.

⁹ Overview on the Unicef Ethiopia website: www.unicef.org/ethiopia/overview.html.

¹⁰ Government of Ethiopia and Humanitarian Partners: 2007 Humanitarian Appeal for Ethiopia, 12 February 2007, p.4.

programme, which aims to help food-insecure populations build a sustainable livelihood over the course of three to five years, is relatively inflexible and has yet to be effectively implemented among migrating populations.¹¹

Unrecognised groups of IDPs often remain excluded from emergency food service schemes, and they often lack the crucial support of regional officials. *Woreda* and *Kebele* officials have great influence on the distribution of goods and services which they can request in writing from the central government's Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA). The discrimination which may ensue, added to the lack of traditional coping mechanisms such as family ties, means that IDPs often suffer from lack of food and water. This has been a reported problem in Borena and in the Somali/Oromiya post-referendum displacement situation in Afder, Liben and Shinile zones. Drought-displaced people in Somali region have in the past been officially considered to be locally integrated after five years and have been taken off the assistance beneficiary list, even though they have had little chance of returning home.¹²

Newly displaced populations have found it difficult to access the PSNP resources. In past years, inhabitants of a *woreda* only received access to food aid after being resident for three years; and *woredas* that had not been under the PSNP when it was introduced in 2004, because they did not need assistance at the time, have not been able to join the programme at a later stage.

Provision of food aid has in some cases had adverse consequences on communities hosting displaced groups, disrupted agrarian populations' livelihoods and forced them to leave their home areas.¹³ Because of chronic food shortages, the diversion of food aid to militias, rebel groups and local food markets – where it depresses food prices paid to farmers – appears to be significant, in particular in Somali region. It was also suggested to IDMC that where food aid had not been distributed, the conflicting parties had had an additional incentive to engage in peace negotiations (as in one of the Somali-Oromiya border referendum situations described below).¹⁴

Health

IDP camps and settlements often lack access to clean water and sanitation, and their inhabitants are at particular risk of water-borne diseases and conditions such as acute watery diarrhoea (AWD). Only an estimated 38 per cent of Ethiopians, and as few as 13 per cent in some rural areas, have access to clean water, while community health education is rare. AWD is currently widespread in numerous regions, including Oromiya, SNNPR, Afar, Amhara, Somali and Harar. Since April 2006, almost 200 *woredas* countrywide have reported AWD cases, and between 65 and 70 *woredas* reported cases in mid-2007. The condition spreads in

¹¹ The PSNP has not been implemented in Somali region, due in part to the difficulty in designing an appropriate programme for pastoralist communities. Source: Interview, Ethiopia, February 2007.

¹² UN OCHA, 18 April 2005; 3 May 2005, cited in the IDMC Ethiopia overview of May 2005.

¹³ The Anyuak in Gambella were affected by food aid in this way: see ZOA, Assessment of the Situation of Internally Displaced Persons in Gambella region, 3 October 2006, p.7.

¹⁴ Interview, Ethiopia, February 2007.

particular during the rainy season when the drinking water and sanitation situation is often worst.¹⁵

Protection of women and children

Gender-based violence, including abduction of girls, early forced marriage and female genital mutilation, is a major barrier to the protection of women, including those internally displaced, throughout Ethiopia, partly due to a social structure which gives women little status. It contributes to extremely high rates of women's health problems and maternal mortality. However, most women whose rights have been violated avoid seeking legal help, particularly in rural areas.

The protection of women and girls and of children in general, is included as a cross-cutting issue in the 2007 Humanitarian Appeal for Ethiopia, which recognises that such social inequalities can be reinforced in humanitarian situations.¹⁶ Displacement as a result of conflict is one such humanitarian situation; it can therefore be presumed that gender-based violence, and the health hazards which result from it, increase in displacement situations, due to increased stress and vulnerability of the displaced. While some studies are available on gender-based violence in Sudanese refugee camps in Gambella region,¹⁷ very little is known about the phenomenon among IDPs.

Many children do not attend school or only follow primary education. Child labour is widespread, with 40 per cent of children working before the age of six to support the family,¹⁸ and school drop-out rates are accordingly high.¹⁹ This pattern has also been encountered in the IDP sites visited, particularly in Somali region, where child labour is culturally acceptable among the Somali population. In Fafen and Hartisheik camps, children were being "hired out" to local people to herd their animals or to do household chores. In the absence of available information on access to education in situations of conflict-induced displacement, it appears that the majority of IDP children do not go to school, mostly because they need to help provide for the family.

Protection during return and reintegration

Conditions in return areas must be conducive to sustainable return and reintegration. In Ethiopia, return processes have at times been difficult because of the problem of finding suitable land for the displaced to settle, but there have also been situations, for example that of Mieso on the Somali-Oromiya border, in which IDPs were not sufficiently consulted about

¹⁵ UN OCHA Ethiopia Humanitarian Bulletins, www.ocha-eth.org.

¹⁶ Government of Ethiopia and Humanitarian Partners: 2007 Humanitarian Appeal for Ethiopia, 12 February 2007, p.14.

¹⁷ UNFPA has released a report on a gender-based violence (GBV) assessment conducted in a number of refugee camps in February and March 2007. A broader project aims to improve knowledge, attitudes and practices on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health for over 14,000 refugees and approximately 14,000 people living in the surrounding host communities. Source: UN OCHA, Weekly Humanitarian Update, 23 April 2007.

¹⁸ ILO report from 2001, cited by USDS, 6 March 2007.

¹⁹ UNICEF indicators: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ethiopia_statistics.html#26.

their return or resettlement. Where their return was successful, reintegration has in some cases been difficult because there have not been enough resources to sustain the increase in population; this was the case with the return of drought-displaced IDPs from Hartisheik and Fafen camps to their homes in Degehabur zone in Somali region. As documentation is essential in Ethiopia to access health care and other social services, a durable solution for IDPs necessarily includes providing them with new documentation, where it has been lost during displacement.

Return must always be voluntary. In Gambella, doubts were raised about whether the return of thousands of Itanyi Nuer during April and May 2007 was in fact voluntary.

Natural disasters as a cause of displacement

While this report mainly focuses on conflict-induced displacement, the dimension of displacement due to natural disasters cannot be seen as a completely separate issue. As a result of these natural hazards, the culture of sharing scarce resources is often being tested to its limits and resource-triggered conflicts are on the rise.²⁰ Furthermore, the distinction between economic migration and displacement due to natural disasters is often hazy. Where people need to leave their homes in search of food and work, there clearly is an element of involuntariness involved.²¹ Large-scale resettlement programmes intending to manage food scarcity must also be seen in this context of very complex interactions of different population movements (see in more detail below, under *Resettlement Programmes and Economic Migration*).

People directly displaced by natural disasters are often assisted better than conflict IDPs. Their main problems, such as successful reintegration and reconstruction of livelihoods, are to a large extent due to a gap between humanitarian and development assistance.

Ethiopia's south and east, particularly Somali and South Oromiya regions, and increasingly Afar region, are chronically food-insecure and regularly affected by drought and floods. As of mid-2007, parts of Ethiopia (particularly in Oromiya region) had received below-average rainfall and were facing shortages of water and pasture land. Then, during August and September, Amhara, Afar, Gambella, SNNPR, Somali, Tigray and Oromiya regions were hit by floods, affecting over 220,000 people and leading, according to UN OCHA, to the displacement to temporary shelters of over 70,000 people.²²

These floods hit the country less than a year after the devastating floods of 2006, which had

²⁰ Oxfam, February 2005; UN OCHA, Pastoralist Communication Initiative, 2007.

²¹ For example, WFP reported that more than 65 households have left Chenaksen woreda in East Hararghe zone in early 2007, searching for work and food. As of March 2007, further migration was expected, unless food was provided immediately. See: UN OCHA Ethiopia, Humanitarian Bulletin, 26 March 2007.

²² UN OCHA Ethiopia, Relief Bulletin, 24 September 2007; UN OCHA Ethiopia, Focus on Ethiopia, 14 September 2007.

temporarily displaced some 600,000 people.²³ Most of them returned home within weeks, with the notable exception of some 4,000 flood-displaced people in Dire Dawa, whose original dwellings were too close to the river bed, and who were awaiting government-built housing in a camp set up for them.²⁴ Less than half of them were able to move to their new homes in the course of 2007, while the others continued to wait for new housing.²⁵



A sanitary block at the Dire Dawa camp for people displaced by flooding

Most IDPs displaced by the 2000 and 2003 droughts in Somali Region have returned to their areas of origin, with the exception of the Fafen and Hartisheik camp residents. Because not all return movements proved economically sustainable, the reintegration of the returnees remains challenging, despite exceptionally good rains in 2007. The current activities of the Ethiopian army in parts of Somali region further seriously impact on their opportunities for trade and access to food and water (see below).

Difficulties in identifying and counting IDPs

In the absence of a national definition of IDPs and policy for their protection, the Ethiopian government does not officially recognise all conflict-induced situations of internal displacement. There has never been a country-wide IDP assessment. However, the 2007 Humanitarian Appeal for Ethiopia, written in collaboration with the government, includes as vulnerable groups “populations affected by natural disasters such as prolonged drought, flooding and other shocks, as well as by localised conflicts, [as well as] women, children under

²³ DPPA Flood Impact Assessment, 2007, expected to be published on the DPPA website: www.dppc.gov.et.

²⁴ The living conditions of the Dire Dawa IDPs, visited in February 2007, were good, and social services well organised and accessible to all.

²⁵ “Flood survivors struggle one year on”, IRIN, 28 August 2007.

five, youth, adolescents, the elderly and emergency induced displacements.”²⁶ Certain displacement situations, such as in Tigray and in Gambella following the conflict of early 2007 (both described below) were recognised as such by the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA). Nevertheless, some disagreement persists between the Ethiopian government and the international community on who may be defined as an IDP and at what point a person ceases to be displaced (as for example in the Borena-Guji displacement situation below).

Displacement figures from various international agencies indicate a total of some 200,000 conflict-induced IDPs.²⁷ Those numbers should be considered only as best available estimates, as no concerted data collection has so far been carried out. Another complicating factor is the general absence of information with regard to return movements. Regional government figures corroborate the estimates for Gambella and Tigray regions and the Somali border referendum displacement. The federal government has only confirmed the displacement figures for Tigray region.

According to current estimates, some 60,000 people remain displaced by the 2004 border referendum along the Somali-Oromiya regional border. This number includes Somali and Oromo IDPs. There are no numbers available with regard to the displacement in Somali region due to the 2007 clashes between the military and the ONLF.

As at September 2007, an estimated 20,000 people in Borena and Guji zones (Oromiya region), 60,000 in Gambella region and 62,000 in Tigray remained displaced. No estimates are available on displacement in Afar, or in SNNPR, although informal information suggests that there are between 25,000 and 30,000 IDPs in SNNPR.²⁸

Regional situations of conflict-induced displacement

Somali region

The dry, eastern Ethiopian Somali region, officially known as Somali National Regional State and also known as Ogaden after the region’s majority clan, is mainly inhabited by ethnic Somali pastoralists and agro-pastoralists whose main income stems from trading in livestock and commercial goods. It is a very poor region, beset by natural disasters and conflict. The most recent droughts of 2000, 2003 and 2006 had significant impact on pastoralist livelihoods, while the floods in 2006 also covered sizeable parts of Somali region. Though the rains in 2006 were considered to be the best in decades and substantially reduced the need for general food aid to the region, the current insecurities counteract to a large extent this positive development.

²⁶ Government of Ethiopia and Humanitarian Partners: 2007 Humanitarian Appeal for Ethiopia, 12 February 2007, p.12, emphasis added.

²⁷ Number based on 2007 estimates by various international sources.

²⁸ Interview, Ethiopia, February 2007.

The regional boundary between the neighbouring Somali and Oromiya regions has remained unsettled for a long time, giving rise to conflict-induced displacement following a 2004 border referendum (see below in the section on Oromiya region). Overall regional displacement and return figures are not available. Insecurity and the poor prospects of rebuilding livelihoods are believed to be the main reason for people not returning, although it appears that most victims of the drought and flooding had returned by mid-2007, with the exception of some population groups described below.

Armed confrontation between the Ethiopian army and the ONLF

Somali region, besides being one of the poorest and least developed in Ethiopia, is also impacted by a long-standing conflict between separatist groups and the government. The currently most prominent rebel group, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), was established in 1984 as a political movement and turned to armed opposition in 1994, alleging that the federal government had reneged on its promises of political participation and regional autonomy for the Somali region.

Since the beginning of 2007, Somali region has become more insecure due to the conflict in Somalia. As arms have entered the region from various sources including Somalia, the ONLF has become more active, and bomb attacks in Degehabur zone in April 2007 have prompted an armed response by the army, which has since severely restricted humanitarian and commercial access to Fiq, Warder, Korahay, Gode and Degehabur zones, all inhabited by the Ogaden clan.²⁹

In late July 2007, the Ethiopian government ejected the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) from Somali region, announcing that the organisation had sided with opposition forces and collaborated with western media to paint a false picture of the situation there.³⁰ A few weeks later, Médecins sans Frontières had to leave the region for security reasons and were not allowed to return.³¹

Several international NGOs and UN agencies have expressed grave concern regarding the humanitarian and protection situation in the conflict-affected zones. An unknown number of people have been forced to flee their homes while villages are said to have been burned, wells sealed and livestock confiscated.³² It is also said that the Ogadeni population is being forced to relocate to designated safe areas. If the conflict continues, more people could be displaced. Although both parties to the fighting deny targeting civilians, a UN assessment mission to Somali region in September 2007 found evidence of serious human rights violations

²⁹ UN OCHA, Report on the findings from the UN humanitarian assessment mission to the Somali region, September 2007, p.7

³⁰ Reuters Foundation, 25 July 2007: "Ethiopian Region Says Red Cross Warned Repeatedly".

³¹ MSF press release, 4 August 2007.

³² New York Times, 18 June 2007: "In Ethiopia, Fear and Cries of Army Brutality"; International Herald Tribune, 21 July 2007: "Ethiopia Is Said to Block Food to Rebel Region".

committed against the civilian population. The mission report spoke of an “alarming” protection situation, without providing further detail.³³

Despite some food aid reaching the zones under military control during the months of July and August, the situation regarding food security, nutrition and health remained of great concern and was expected to worsen if access to the region and people’s freedom to trade remained limited. Medical supplies were lacking, while poor sanitary conditions increased the occurrence of acute watery diarrhoea in many places.³⁴ In late October 2007, the Ethiopian government and the UN agreed on modalities to cooperate in delivering the much-needed humanitarian aid to the affected population.³⁵

Besides limited humanitarian access, the most pressing issue facing the civilian population was the trade blockade, in place since May 2007, in reaction to the increased ONLF activities. The blockade affected pastoralists’ livelihoods, reducing their opportunities to sell livestock and increasing food prices.³⁶ On top of this, the prevalence of landmines endangers people’s lives and has further impacts on trading and on humanitarian aid delivery.³⁷

Because of a very effective information embargo imposed by the army in the regions where it operated, much of the information available was based on assumptions or was not officially confirmed. International diplomatic attempts to stop the violence and ensure humanitarian access to the affected zones were ongoing as at September 2007, but had so far not been effective in enabling better protection of civilians.

The Sheikash clan: displaced pastoralists in search of political representation³⁸

The Sheikash are a Somali clan of some 200,000 pastoralists. Traditionally unarmed, the Sheikash were reportedly armed by the government to fight against the ONLF, but there is no clear evidence to support this claim.³⁹ Ensuing animosities with the Ogaden clan forced them to flee to Fafen IDP camp and to Raaso, in Afder zone, from 2000 onwards. The case of the Sheikash furthermore exemplifies the importance of access to political power. Traditionally without a clear territory of their own, and facing the growing importance of regional political representation to ensure access to land and resources, a group of roughly 1,200 Sheikash households set up camp in 2006 some 22 kilometres outside Harar, just over the border from Somali region into Hararghe zone of Oromiya region. According to the camp elder, they had fled Degehabur zone in Garbo district, Somali region, in 2000, due to tensions with the Ogaden clan. As the camp elder expressed it, they and the Ogaden “used to drink from the same river” and intermarriage was common. But as tensions rose, he said the Ogaden began to

³³ UN OCHA, op. cit., September 2007, p.6.

³⁴ UN OCHA, op. cit., September 2007, p.5, 6; UN OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin, 23 July 2007.

³⁵ UN OCHA, 18 October 2007.

³⁶ Chatham House: Conflict in the Ogaden and its regional implications, 31 August 2007.

³⁷ UN OCHA, op. cit, September 2007, p.5.

³⁸ Some of the information in this section is based on a visit to the Sheikash camp outside Harar in February 2007.

³⁹ Interview, Ethiopia, February 2007; see also International Herald Tribune, 21 July 2007: “Ethiopia Is Said to Block Food to Rebel Region”.

fill their wells and burn their houses. In 2006, this group of IDPs left Fafen because of lack of food and other assistance. They were surviving through their cattle, by having their children herd cattle for others, and through inter-family and diaspora assistance. Direct government assistance was rare and irregular.



Displaced Sheikash pastoralists' camp near Harar, on the border of Oromiya and Somali regions

In moving across a regional border, the Sheikash have made their plight more visible, by involving two regions in the search for a solution. However, the group's demand to move to Raaso could cause new tensions. Raaso was traditionally inhabited by the Fiq Omar, a small Ogaden sub-clan. The trend for the Sheikash to move from Garbo to Raaso already led some of the Fiq Omar to leave parts of Raaso to the Sheikash. But the prospect of more Sheikash moving in raised fears among Raaso's inhabitants of a changing local balance of power. According to one observer, in spring of 2007, the chance for a peaceful settlement of tensions in Raaso was slim, and a solution for the Sheikash' search of land and political representation remote.⁴⁰

Return of drought-displaced people from Fafen and Hartisheik camps

Fafen camp, a few kilometres off the road from Fafen town, hosted tens of thousands of Somali refugees and, from 2000, thousands of Ethiopians displaced by drought. They also settled in a camp at the nearby town of Hartisheik. Within the framework of the UNDP-sponsored Regional Recovery Programme, and in collaboration with the Somali regional

⁴⁰ Interview, Ethiopia, February 2007.

government, the UN country team assessed in 2005 the possibilities of the return and reintegration of some 5,600 drought-displaced people from Hartisheik and Fafen camps to their places of origin in Degehabur zone. By February 2006, this goal was considered to have been met.⁴¹ However, some people who were involved in the process felt that the assessment of the final resettlement destination, the sensitisation of the local population in the return areas, and the follow-up to the return process had not been as rigorous as they should have been. The return areas are very dry, and it is not certain that all returnees will be able to rebuild a livelihood. Although it was seen as a pilot of a longer-term assistance-recovery-development programme, the follow-up remained inadequate, partially because of lack of funding, and it was felt that there was a risk of the international community only delivering aid, without collaborating with local authorities to eventually hand over responsibility for local development.⁴² As a result, many of those who had returned to their home place moved again, unable to build a livelihood there. In particular Hartisheik camp has become attractive as a trading centre and as a place offering some work opportunities.⁴³

Most inhabitants of the Hartisheik IDP camp were Ogaden from Fiq and Gode. While some were relying on support from the diaspora or clan ties in and around Hartisheik, many others were struggling to survive. While 20 litres of water cost 1.5 birr (about \$0.16), garbage collection could earn a child an average of ten birr per week, a woman washing clothes in the village could earn four to five birr on a good day. Many children contributed to earning money, instead of going to school. The camp inhabitants said they needed food, water and healthcare. Food distribution was rare and irregular, but, as several people stressed, the relationship with the local population was good.

At the time of the IDMC visit to Fafen camp, in February 2007, only a couple of hundred Ogadeni from Gode remained. They were not included in the UNDP / UN country team resettlement programme because of the poor security situation in Gode. As of September 2007, the repatriation had still not taken place due to fighting in their home area.⁴⁴ There appeared to be mounting tensions between the remaining IDPs and the local population who wanted to claim their land back. Some Sheikash also remained in the camp. The IDPs survive on occasional work, with access to health care mostly unaffordable. While they said they had access to drinking water, food aid only reached them occasionally and unpredictably, with months between deliveries.

Oromiya region

Oromiya was incorporated into the Ethiopian state (then Abyssinia) at the beginning of the twentieth century. The subjugation of the Oromo included resettlement and villagisation during the Dergue years; of the resistance groups that emerged, the most active today is the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).

⁴¹ UNCT, February 2006.

⁴² Interview, Ethiopia, February 2007.

⁴³ Email from UN agency, August 2007.

⁴⁴ Interview, Ethiopia, May 2007.

The two most significant displacement situations in Oromiya resulted from the 2004 regional border referendum and the conflict between the Borena, Guji and Gabra clans in south Oromiya.

Displacement of Somali and Oromo on the Somali-Oromiya border⁴⁵

Clashes along the Oromiya-Somali regional border have recurred over the past few years. In December 2003, a conflict over land rights led to the displacement of almost 20,000 people.⁴⁶ A border referendum conducted in October 2004 along parts of the regional border between Oromiya and Somali to determine the preference for administrative status of border *kebeles* served only to raise levels of violence between the two ethnic groups instead of providing clarity. It forced an estimated 80,000 people on either side of the border to leave their homes during the last months of 2004 and at the beginning of 2005. The result was essentially a division of ethnicities along the regional border.⁴⁷ Their return seemed unfeasible, as neither side appeared to want to risk losing power in the 2007 regional elections. However, while the Oromo and Somali no longer lived in the same village, they did trade, the Oromo cultivating Qat and selling it to the Somali. According to one source, the interruption of the Qat trade and lack of external aid have forced the communities to settle at least some of their differences.⁴⁸

It is not clear how many of the 80,000 people displaced in both regions have returned since 2005, or how many are still in need of assistance. While the federal government does not publish any numbers, there may be as many as 50,000 remaining, including 15,000 in need of emergency food assistance in camps in Afder zone.⁴⁹

The small town of Mieso, on the railway connecting Addis Ababa and Djibouti, received over 38,000 Oromo IDPs after the October 2004 referendum, according to local officials. When international assistance ceased in early 2005, some 3,000 IDPs remained. In July 2005, new conflicts between the Oromo and Somali in the Mieso area of West Hararghe were reported and more families fled to Mieso. As of 2007, the displaced people have largely integrated locally or resettled, and the IDP camp no longer exists. But according to an unpublished 2007 assessment of the border referendum displacement between Awash and Erer Gota, some 5,000 to 6,000 displaced Oromo households remain in need of some kind of assistance in order to settle elsewhere in the country. While the displaced Oromo received some assistance, the Somali displaced appeared to remain largely unrecorded and unassisted.⁵⁰

Mieso's IDPs felt that a lack of consultation had affected the assistance they had received; 800 houses had been built for them by the regional government on the outskirts of Mieso, but they were perceived as being dangerously close to the regional Somali border. In 2007, fewer than

⁴⁵ Some of the information in this section is based on a visit to Mieso in February 2007.

⁴⁶ UN OCHA Ethiopia, May 2004.

⁴⁷ Interview, Ethiopia, February 2007.

⁴⁸ Interview, Ethiopia, February 2007.

⁴⁹ Number based on 2007 estimates by various UN sources; unpublished document, August 2007.

⁵⁰ Interview, Ethiopia, February 2007.

1,000 people lived in these constructions, which consisted of stick walls and a corrugated roof, but no doors. The settlement was without sanitation, and a resettlement allowance paid to some of the displaced was used mostly to finish the walls and install doors. Current livelihoods were firewood collection, work in local house construction, livestock keeping or begging. People said that small loans would be sufficient for them to start a small business and to profit from trading opportunities along the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway. But their appeal to the *woreda* officials for financial aid had not been successful.



Resident of a camp for IDPs in Karamile, Oromiya region

Not far from Mieso, on the outskirts of the small town of Karamile, around 200 Oromo IDPs who had left Erer Gota in Somali region during the months following the border referendum lived in small round huts. Food aid distribution by the *woreda* administration was irregular. This food insecurity had particular impact on small children and breastfeeding mothers. The camp's water came from an unprotected source. While most children went to the local school, healthcare was out of reach for most camp residents. These farmers and traders had left their homes because they felt harassed by the Somali population. As of July 2007, the IDPs had not received any substantive humanitarian assistance.

Borena and Guji zones: ethnic conflicts over zonal borders

Between 2005 and 2007, the two zones of Borena and Guji were particularly affected by conflict-induced displacement. In 2005, ethnic conflicts between the Gabra and the Guji clans, and between the Gabra and the Borena, displaced over 40,000 people. Many of these people remained displaced, and as local authorities did not consider them eligible for emergency food

distribution and other basic services and protection, they remained in a very precarious situation.⁵¹

The Borena are pastoralists, the Guji agro-pastoralists who occupy fertile land. In 2006, following changes to the Borena and Guji zonal borders, Guji and Borena leaders started making land claims and counter-claims, which erupted eventually in violent clashes on 30 May 2006, causing up to 150 deaths and forcing some 120,000 people to leave their homes and move to areas where their ethnicities were predominant.⁵² Rumours of gold having been found in the region also increased existing land-use tensions between the two groups. Assistance was brought in by a number of international agencies and NGOs but one report, speaking of a severe disruption of livelihoods, warned of signs of undernourishment and illness due to the harsh living conditions in displacement.⁵³ Regional and local officials, in collaboration with clan elders, eventually brokered a ceasefire and a resource-sharing agreement in July 2006.⁵⁴ The government reported that all the displaced people had returned.

Despite that agreement, clan conflict in Borena zone between the Borena and Gabra flared up again at the beginning of 2007, causing deaths and displacing an unknown number of people. A UN inter-agency team visited Borena and Guji zones in March 2007 to assess the humanitarian impact of the clashes on displaced populations in Arero, Moyale, and Dire *woredas* in Borena zone, and Shakiso *woreda* in Guji zone.⁵⁵ Estimates in 2007 by international organisations speak of some 20,000 people still displaced.⁵⁶

Gambella region

In the remote south-western Gambella region, which borders on Sudan and was incorporated into the Ethiopian state around the beginning of the twentieth century, multiple ethnic conflicts have been ongoing for decades. Large-scale resettlement and migratory movements and large numbers of Sudanese refugees have continuously changed the ethnic map of Gambella over the last few decades. Under the Dergue and later, large numbers of “Highlanders” from the arid and overpopulated highlands were resettled in Gambella, in order to increase the country’s overall agricultural productivity and to mitigate food scarcity in the highlands. At the same time, Gambella’s own population was subjected to the Dergue’s “villagisation” policy. These exercises of large-scale social and economic restructuring, in addition to vigorous Nuer immigration and the later arrival of Sudanese Nuer refugees, reduced the Anyuak farmers, who had once made up around 80 per cent of the population of Gambella, to a minority.⁵⁷

⁵¹ UN OCHA, 3 January 2006.

⁵² Some sources set the actual number of displaced lower than 120,000, saying that local officials inflated numbers; other sources believe there were more than 120,000 displaced.

⁵³ Oxfam America: Rapid Public Health Assessment of IDPs Due to the Conflict in Southern Ethiopia, 6 July 2006.

⁵⁴ USDS, 6 March 2007, op. cit.

⁵⁵ UN OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin of 26 February 2007 and 2 April 2007.

⁵⁶ Number based on 2007 estimates by various international sources.

⁵⁷ ZOA op.cit, p.6; Sandra Steingraber, op. cit.

While the cohabitation of Anyuak, Nuer and Highlanders had been difficult from the outset, violent conflict broke out in 2000 and escalated in late 2003, increasingly involving the Ethiopian army. At least 15,000 people, mostly Anyuak, were forced to flee their homes in December 2003.⁵⁸ Since then, and particularly following counter-attacks by Anyuak against Highlanders, the army was reported to have committed widespread human rights violations against the Anyuak throughout the region, so far in a climate of almost total impunity.⁵⁹ In 2004 an independent inquiry commission was established to investigate the alleged killing, rape, and torture of hundreds of Anyuaks between December 2003 and May 2004. As a result of the commission's findings, six members of the army were arrested and placed on trial, but had not been convicted as at March 2007.⁶⁰

In late 2004, Gambella was re-organised into two ethnically defined zones: the Anyuak and the Nuer zones. Since then, tensions in the Nuer zone between the indigenous Jikany Nuer and the most recent Lou Nuer immigrants from Sudan have increased. In early January 2006, some 3,000 people had to flee their homes due to Nuer inter-clan clashes, and further thousands fled during raids of Nuer villages in March and April 2006, carried out by Nuer and Anyuak insurgent groups from neighbouring Sudan.⁶¹ In September 2006, approximately 45,000 persons were reportedly displaced from their homes in the Gambella region due to continued fighting between the region's three largest indigenous groups, the Anyuak, the Nuer, and the Mazinger.⁶²

The long-running civil war in southern Sudan was another contributing factor to the conflicts in Gambella, with heavily-armed insurgent groups spilling over into Gambella, using Nuer refugee camps in Itang as recruitment sites. The effects of their armament of Nuer populations and refugee camps were still felt in 2006.⁶³ The pastoralist Nuer have tended to push eastwards, in search of new grazing land including the rich alluvial plains and the fishing grounds of the Baro River.

After the situation stabilised briefly around the end of 2006, conflict re-erupted in 2007 with Sudanese Murle carrying out cross-border cattle raids on Ethiopian Anyuak and Jikany Nuer from Akobo *woreda*, killing and wounding dozens of people and displacing over 12,000 from some eight villages, while burning their belongings and huts.⁶⁴ The displaced people have found temporary shelter in Chentua, some six hours walking distance from their villages. Gambella's regional government requested assistance for the population affected by both conflict and flooding in six *woredas*, asking for food and non-food items, healthcare and seeds for the upcoming planting season.⁶⁵ However this assistance proved difficult to provide as the

⁵⁸ HRW, 24 March 2005; IRIN, 12 February 2004.

⁵⁹ UN CTE, 20 April 2005; HRW, 24 March 2005.

⁶⁰ USDS, op.cit. 6 March 2007.

⁶¹ Swisspeace, 1 June 2006, p.5; UNCT, February 2006.

⁶² USDS, 6 March 2007.

⁶³ ZOA field report, 3 October 2006, pp.6, 7; SALIGAD, A Proposal for a Preliminary Assessment of the Viability of Undertaking a Study on the Problem of Small Arms Trafficking in the Gambella Area; IRIN, 12 June 2007.

⁶⁴ Cattle raiding, itself an old tradition, has grown in scale and brutality, with raiders often well-armed.

⁶⁵ ZOA field report, op. cit.

lack of security was compounded by heavy rainfall and flooding.

The most recent displacement and return movements have not been quantified yet, but estimates speak of some 60,000 IDPs and recently returned IDPs in need of assistance or reintegration support.⁶⁶ Estimates in Gambella vary considerably, partly due to the fact that many people are pastoralists and thus move regularly, and also because of restricted access to parts of the region due to insecurity and difficult travel conditions during rainy seasons. The government was reportedly monitoring and sometimes limiting the passage of relief supplies and access by humanitarian organisations in 2006, arguing that it was doing so for the security of those travelling in the region.⁶⁷

Most IDPs live, and at times integrate permanently, in host communities as opposed to separate settlements or camps, putting great strain on them. Humanitarian aid to IDPs should address the development needs of the local population, as suggested, for example, by ZOA Refugee Care.⁶⁸ Insecurity and lack of livelihood prospects are believed to be the main reasons for people not returning home.

Access to healthcare is often minimal, and the spread of water-borne diseases and AWD is a serious recurring risk in the generally poor sanitary situations. The people displaced by the most recent violence were all in great need of food, water, shelter and healthcare.⁶⁹

Difficulties of return

In April 2007, an estimated 25,000 IDPs, including communities recently displaced by the Sudanese Murle incursion and others displaced by earlier conflicts, started returning voluntarily from Itang, Jikawo and Wantu *woredas* to their areas of origin in Tiergol and Akobo *woredas*. They were assisted by the regional government of Gambella, with some financial aid from the federal government.

These large movements, particularly at the onset of the rainy season, raised fears of disease outbreaks along transit routes, after thousands of returnees and their cattle became stranded somewhere along the road, in areas with no infrastructure or services to transport them further. After a request by the regional government, both regional authorities and UN agencies provided humanitarian assistance to the stranded and tried to bring them back to Itang. Some protection response was provided as well, including a response to gender-based violence, but UN agencies remained concerned about the Akobo returnees' security. These concerns centre on the fact that the Lou Nuer, who had displaced the Jikany Nuer, appear still to be living in the villages the Jikany were supposed to return to. As a result, a significant number of Jikany seem to have crossed the border into Sudan.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Number based on 2007 estimates by various international sources.

⁶⁷ USDS, 6 March 2007, op. cit.

⁶⁸ ZOA, op. cit. 3 October 2006, p.4.

⁶⁹ UN OCHA Ethiopia Humanitarian Bulletins of 16 April, 14 May, 21 May and 11 June 2007.

⁷⁰ Unpublished document, 29 May 2007.

There were also concerns that the return movements of the Jikany Nuer, displaced over the past seven years by the Lou Nuer, were not altogether voluntary. Although the lack of access makes a detailed assessment difficult, there are suggestions that the regional government wanted to return the Jikany Nuer to their villages before the population census to be held at the end of May 2007.⁷¹

Despite this environment of general insecurity, reconciliation efforts between the conflicting parties are still being pursued. As of mid-2007, local authorities and the UN have been successful in bringing representatives of the Lou and Jikany Nuer together for peace talks. Further conflict has so far been avoided and the Lou Nuer have agreed to move back to Sudan after harvesting the crops which they planted in the spring.⁷² While the reintegration process has continued, the August 2007 floods have limited the humanitarian access to Akobo and delayed the returnees' agricultural activities. According to OCHA Ethiopia, the Akobo returnees were expected to be in need of food aid for at least another 12 months.⁷³

Tigray and Afar regions

Border with Eritrea: 62,000 still displaced as stand-off continues

Despite a history of shared struggle to overthrow the Dergue dictatorship, tensions between the leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea – which regained its independence from Ethiopia after a 30-year armed conflict in 1993 – soared during the 1990s, escalating into all-out war between May 1998 and June 2000. The cause was a dispute over a particular section of their common border.

On the Ethiopian side, about 100,000 people were killed in the conflict and over 360,000 internally displaced, of whom 90 per cent were in the Tigray region and the rest in Afar region (GoE, 17 November 2000). Furthermore, Ethiopia deported tens of thousands of people identified as Eritreans, while Eritrea did the same to people identified as Ethiopians.

While most IDPs returned home after the June 2000 ceasefire, which was followed by the December 2000 Algiers Peace Agreement, an estimated 62,000 people remain displaced, in Tigray region, living mostly in host communities, with minimal external support.⁷⁴

Ethiopia's rejection of a border demarcation ruling, issued in April 2002 by the Permanent Court of Arbitration's Boundary Commission, caused renewed tensions between the two states. Ethiopia eventually accepted the ruling on 29 March 2007.⁷⁵ Active compliance with the border ruling is seen as the cornerstone of a long-term normalisation of relations between the two countries and the stabilisation of the region. However, border demarcation talks, held

⁷¹ Unpublished document, 29 May 2007.

⁷² UN OCHA Ethiopia, Humanitarian Bulletin, 11 June 2007; Email, July 2007.

⁷³ UN OCHA Ethiopia, Focus on Ethiopia for August 2007, 14 September 2007.

⁷⁴ Number based on estimates by various international sources.

⁷⁵ UNSC, 30 April 2007, op. cit. p.7.

in The Hague in early September 2007, collapsed under mutual accusations of non-collaboration.⁷⁶

The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), formed in 2000 to monitor the ceasefire, was reduced by 2007 from 4,200 to 1,700 troops, and its monitoring activities along the demilitarised 25-kilometre Temporary Security Zone remain severely restricted.⁷⁷ The border demarcation activity, interrupted in 2003, has not been resumed, and the Addis Ababa liaison office of the Boundary Commission closed on 31 January 2007.⁷⁸ At the same time, tensions continued to mount in connection with the Somalia crisis. In April 2007, Eritrea suspended its membership of the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), claiming that its interests were no longer represented.⁷⁹ At the end of June 2007, Ethiopia announced that it was increasing its troop presence along the border, to “repel any attack by Eritrea”.⁸⁰ Evidently, a renewed escalation of the border tensions could lead to significant new displacement in both countries.

In Tigray region and, to a somewhat lesser degree, in Afar region, insecurity and landmines in agrarian areas are the main concerns which prevent the remaining IDPs from returning home and becoming self-sufficient there. Landmines currently put at risk over 400,000 people living in the area bordering Eritrea, where most of the remaining two million mines from the 1998-2000 war were laid. Mines killed almost 600 people and wounded over 700 between 2001 and 2004, most of them in Tigray and Afar regions, and dozens of accidents are still reported each year. The government de-mining unit has continued to make some progress in surveying and de-mining of border areas, although UNMEE officials reported that new landmines were planted on both sides of the border with Eritrea during 2006. UNMEE itself has continued its de-mining efforts.⁸¹

Tensions between the Afar and the Issa

In Afar region, long-standing tensions between the Somali Issa clan and the Afar continue to trigger sporadic displacement, but very little is known about the numbers, living conditions and protection needs of the people displaced. The Issa appear to be seeking to expand their territory to the fertile area around the river Awash. Insecurity caused by the conflict makes access to displaced populations difficult, particularly as both the Afar and the Issa are well armed.⁸²

⁷⁶ AFP, 8 September 2007; AFP, 10 September 2007.

⁷⁷ UNSC, 30 April 2007, p.2.

⁷⁸ UNSC, 30 April 2007, p.5.

⁷⁹ Government of Eritrea: Eritrea suspends membership in IGAD, 21 April 2007.

⁸⁰ AFP, Ethiopia bolsters army in border dispute: Zenawi, 28 June 2007.

⁸¹ USDS, 6 March 2007; UNSC, 30 April 2007; IRIN, 18 April 2007.

⁸² SALIGAD, op. cit; Addis Fortune: Ethiopia: MoWR Alaydege Conflict Delay, 17 April 2007.

Southern Nation, Nationalities and Peoples region

Rising tensions among pastoralists in the fight for resources

In the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples region (SNNPR) along the south-western border with Kenya and Sudan, armed cattle raids are becoming more frequent.⁸³ The patterns of raiding and population displacement are complex, with population groups from all three countries crossing borders and displacing each other in turn, even though both the Kenyan and Ethiopian armies appear to have stationed troops along their borders.⁸⁴ In the remote grassland region there is no infrastructure, no active government institution, and no international community presence.

Entire *woreda* populations have been displaced, specifically from Surma and Dizi *woredas* in Bench Maji zone. As many as 50,000 Kenyan pastoralists are reported to have arrived at the end of 2006, displacing between 25,000 and 32,000 people.⁸⁵ As reported by UN-OCHA in Ethiopia, the DPPA dispatched 512 tonnes of various food commodities in February 2007 to 27,580 conflict-induced IDPs in Amaro and Burji *woredas*.⁸⁶

Resettlement programmes and economic migration

The current situations of conflict-induced internal displacement should be seen in the context of broader population movements, because economic migration and resettlement programmes also influence the composition and cohabitation of populations, as well as the stability of regions.

In early 2003, as part of its National Food Security Programme, the Ethiopian government launched a new resettlement programme, intending to resettle 2.2 million people, or 440,000 households, from the chronically food-insecure highlands to more fertile agricultural lowland areas within three years. The resettlement programme was planned for four regions: Tigray, Oromiya, Amhara and SNNPR, and implemented in three phases of 100,000, 150,000 and 190,000 households each. Potential resettlers were identified during awareness-raising campaigns at both the *woreda* and *kebele* levels, and host *woredas* were identified based on the availability of arable land. In an attempt to mitigate resentment by the host community and to ease the transition, basic infrastructure (such as health services, water supply, primary schools and roads) was to be established, and the people resettled were to receive an eight-month food ration.⁸⁷

⁸³ People are easily armed: According to one interviewee, one AK47 costs about one cow, which is very little, considering that one family owns thousands of cows. Interview, Ethiopia, February 2007.

⁸⁴ According to one interviewee, the Kenyan Turkana have displaced the Sudanese Toposa, who have displaced the Ethiopian Surma who have in turn displaced the Dizi. Interview, Ethiopia, February 2007.

⁸⁵ Interviews, Ethiopia, February 2007.

⁸⁶ UN OCHA Ethiopia, Humanitarian Bulletin, 26 February 2007.

⁸⁷ Email, May 2007.

The government suggested that the scheme was successful and mostly led to self-sufficiency, and that past failures had been due to uncontrolled self-resettlement.⁸⁸ Other reports suggest that resettlement was often experienced as a heavy burden. Critics said the programme did not always respect four core principles: the resettlement was not always voluntary, the land allocated was not always suitable for planting, host communities were not always properly consulted, and the resettlees were not always properly prepared. It was said that in certain cases the resettlement led to severe malnutrition, as the highlanders were not accustomed to the agricultural techniques required in the lowlands. A considerable number of resettled people eventually had to move on, this time unassisted.⁸⁹ As mentioned above, past resettlement programmes, particularly the large-scale resettlements under the Dergue government in the 1980s, were fraught with problems and caused widespread suffering.⁹⁰



Displaced family in an IDP camp in Karamile

One interviewee said that the radical changes in demographic equilibrium induced by resettlement programmes and economic migration should be taken into account more in federal planning. For example, Gambella's neighbour region to the north, Benishangul Gumuz, is confronted with similar demographic issues as Gambella. The region, fertile and sparsely populated, faces a looming crisis: in 1994, only 55 per cent of the inhabitants were indigenous, and since then, large numbers of people moving in from other regions have become a source of growing concern for the regional government. Informal resettlement and economic migration, including urban migration, could also have a destabilising effect. Development-related displacement could do the same, for example in Afar where a big dam for irrigation has reduced the land for the Afar people, or where the creation of national parks as tourist attractions has forced people out of their home area.⁹¹

⁸⁸ FAO/WFP, 24 February 2006; Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in an interview with the BBC, Talking Point, 19 January 2005.

⁸⁹ OCHA, 15 August 2005; Forum for Social Studies, 2005; The Reporter, 24 December 2005; UNCT, February 2006; Ethiopian Herald, 19 March 2006.

⁹⁰ For more detailed information on the Dergue resettlement programme, see Sandra Steingraber, *op. cit.*

⁹¹ Interview, Ethiopia, February 2007.

National response

As noted above, the Ethiopian government does not officially recognise conflict-induced displacement, but has included in the 2007 Humanitarian appeal “populations affected by ...localised conflicts”.⁹² It recognises, for example, the Tigray and the 2007 Gambella conflict-induced displacements.

Nevertheless, in the absence of a coherent national IDP policy, the national and international responses to internal conflict-induced displacement remain rather unpredictable. Many small-scale conflict situations are unrecognised, and not all conflict-displaced populations have received assistance and protection, or can rely on the assistance being consistent.

The DPPA is the main government institution responsible for humanitarian response to the emergency needs of people displaced by conflict and natural disasters, in collaboration with relevant ministries. It does not explicitly deal with IDP protection or policy issues. Its early-warning system, designed to respond to disaster-induced displacement, does not include conflict-induced displacement. IDPs are thus only included in the government response if they fall within a specific emergency response. In those cases, the DPPA works in close cooperation with regional governments, local NGOs and IDP committees, international and UN agencies such as UNICEF, UNHCR, IOM, ICRC and the World Food Programme, and international NGOs.⁹³ It is reported that the government is developing a policy to deal with inter-ethnic tension in the country, which may have some effect on the pattern of response to conflict-induced displacement.

Emergency response in displacement situations

Ethiopia’s disaster response has been developed mainly in response to the drought-induced famines to which the country is regularly exposed. It therefore follows a slow-onset crisis response pattern, which is in many ways inadequate for sudden-onset disaster response.

In the case of an emergency, the government’s first step is to have DPPA carry out an assessment. Upon receiving the results, the government may agree to provide an emergency response. The regional government can also request assistance, which must then be endorsed by the DPPA.

In reaction, particularly, to the 2006 nationwide flood disaster, modalities for quick-onset emergency response were being developed in the course of 2007. The process was led by the National Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. Until 2006, a general, country-wide assessment at the end of each year determined the emergency needs and resource allocation for the following year. As of 2007, the needs for food aid will be determined in more detailed, area-specific assessments.⁹⁴ Furthermore, the

⁹² Government of Ethiopia and Humanitarian Partners: 2007 Humanitarian Appeal for Ethiopia, 12 February 2007, p.12, emphasis added.

⁹³ UN OCHA, 24 May 2004, p.5.

⁹⁴ Government of Ethiopia and Humanitarian Partners, 2007 Humanitarian Appeal for Ethiopia, p. 12.

UN and DPPA were at this point in discussion over the need for standard assessment and response procedures for all partners.⁹⁵ These developments can be significant for situations of conflict-induced displacement where humanitarian aid and protection must be delivered quickly.

Traditional reconciliation mechanisms

Successful peace and reconciliation negotiations are crucial to finding solutions to conflict-induced displacement. The peoples of Ethiopia have been involved in conflicts for thousands of years and have developed traditional reconciliation procedures. Today, those traditional reconciliation mechanisms should lie at the heart of ongoing peace-building and recovery efforts. In a number of situations, reconciliation between conflicting parties has been successful in the absence of external diplomacy. The example of the Oromo and Somali groups resuming trade relations following the border referendum is a case in point. In a number of other peace building activities, such as in Gambella in 2007, the UN, NGOs and local authorities have been engaged as mediators.

Their impact, however, and the possibilities of traditional reconciliation generally remain limited because some of the main factors creating inequality and triggering conflict are rooted in the current justice and governance system, particularly affecting issues of land policy and land distribution. This situation keeps alive the possibility of further conflicts and displacement.

Civil society and IDP organisations

National civil society groups and NGOs are important actors in community work. Most civil society groups are organised in membership associations, typically for women or youth work. They do not, however, have a structural role in relief work, and apparently none work specifically with IDPs.⁹⁶ Most IDP groups are organised locally, and in every organised settlement, there are IDP committees interacting with local authorities.

Ethiopian civil society organisations have faced problems with the government when engaging in human rights advocacy, in particular where they have expressed criticism of government policies or actions. The government appeared to be developing a national NGO law in the course of 2007. The law's impact on civil society activities is as yet unclear. A potential champion of Ethiopia's IDPs might be the Ethiopian Human Rights Committee (EHRCO), an independent NGO which monitors human rights issues from its head quarters in Addis Ababa and some 15 small offices countrywide. However the organisation lacks the resources needed for the huge task encompassed within its remit. International funding to such organisations would be beneficial, although limitations to the freedom of expression would remain as an obstacle to active national advocacy on behalf of IDPs.

⁹⁵ Email correspondence, July 2007.

⁹⁶ Examples of local NGOs: Ogaden Welfare Development Association (OWDA), Mother and Child Development Institution (MCDI).

International response

The international response to IDPs is closely tied to the national response, in that international organisations, including UN agencies and NGOs, generally only operate in emergency situations that have been recognised and assessed by the government. ICRC is the exception, as it works independently of the government.

UN agencies and the humanitarian cluster approach

The UN response to conflict-induced internal displacement in Ethiopia is not provided by a single lead agency. The Ethiopia UN Country Team is led by a Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) supported by UN-OCHA, which ensures coordination between UN agencies and NGOs, and which is also responsible for implementing the humanitarian cluster approach. UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) are particularly active in emergency relief, with UNICEF focusing on child nutrition, health and education and WFP providing food aid in collaboration with DPPA. The World Health Organization has a large health programme, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization supports animal health and agricultural programmes. Unforeseen emergencies are often covered by emergency funds such as the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the Humanitarian Response Fund (HRF), to fill gaps between pledge and response.⁹⁷

In May 2007, the UN's humanitarian cluster approach, which aims to improve the emergency response in collaboration with the government, was formally launched after more than a year of discussion and consensus-building. While the Ethiopian government has endorsed the cluster approach in principle, it had not, as of September 2007, designated a lead department for the protection cluster or formally agreed to the terms of reference proposed for the cluster.

The protection cluster includes protection of populations displaced by conflict. It also aims to support the government in ongoing protection work, for example on behalf of refugees and people with HIV/AIDS. While UNHCR has committed to facilitating the protection cluster working group, it can only do so with the cooperation of the government, UNICEF, OHCHR, UN-OCHA and other partners of the humanitarian country team. The challenges are broader than the mandate and capacity of any single organisation, and the protection needs of people will be most effectively met by means of responsive and flexible government and inter-agency approaches, which are adapted to the realities on the ground. This is particularly important in the fields of new displacement and sexual and gender-based violence. It is understood that the government will maintain the lead role in emergency response, and will be supported by the protection cluster to provide protection to its citizens, including those displaced by conflict, and in accordance with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which are based on the relevant international humanitarian and human rights law.

Within the cluster approach, UNDP is the designated lead agency for bridging the relief-development gap. This role is of great importance in Ethiopia, where early recovery strategies

⁹⁷ Both funds supported IDP programmes in 2006. CERF finances a number of NGO programmes.

are not consistently implemented in emergency situations. As the budgets of both emergency funds continue to increase, the international community may need to consider early recovery more consistently, in order to create a balance between relief and recovery. UNDP's greater involvement in such early-stage initiatives could be a particularly important factor in ending the dependency of IDP populations who need to completely rebuild their lives and livelihoods. UNDP sees economic instability as the fundamental root cause of conflict and focuses on early recovery on the institutional level, to enable local, regional and national institutions to provide for their citizens themselves.⁹⁸

IOM has taken the responsibility to lead the cluster on camp management for natural disaster situations, while UNHCR will maintain the lead for camp coordination for IDPs displaced by conflict. The emergency shelter and non-food items cluster is led by UNICEF and IOM.

Assistance provided to IDPs living among the local population should, when possible, be combined with development aid to local populations, for example in terms of building infrastructure or providing basic social services. Ongoing attempts to provide assistance to refugees within community programmes, as explored by UNHCR, could well be applied more frequently in IDP situations.⁹⁹

Non-governmental organisations

There is a large community of international NGOs in Ethiopia, including CARE, IRC, Merlin, Concern, Goal, MSF, Oxfam, ZOA Refugee Care, World Vision, Save the Children UK and others. ICRC is also operational. Many of those NGOs have very large relief and development operations, but only a few have emergency response funds, and most need to raise funds for each specific emergency response, which adds to the slow response already dictated by the government's approach.

While in fact there are already several collaboration mechanisms between UN agencies and NGOs, the impending humanitarian reform cluster approach foresees closer collaboration, and coordination on a more equal footing. At the beginning of 2007, some NGOs expressed reservations about the cluster approach, fearing that the UN system would not be able to take on the required decisive leadership role. Other NGOs prefer to remain independent.

⁹⁸ Interview, Ethiopia, February 2007.

⁹⁹ Email, June 2007. Also, ZOA Refugee Care explicitly tries to provide about one quarter of its facilities to local populations, where they assist IDP populations in Gambella. See ZOA, *op. cit.*

Concluding remarks

Formal recognition of conflict-induced internal displacement is a necessary step towards an effective response to the affected populations, both for providing humanitarian assistance and protection, and for finding political solutions. For this it will be necessary to develop an IDP definition for the Ethiopian context. Given the complex nature of migration and displacement patterns in Ethiopia, conceptualising conflict-induced displacement and distinguishing it from other forms of migration will be challenging.

In signing the 2003 Khartoum Declaration on internal displacement in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) sub-region, the government has already made an important first step in recognising the problem of internal displacement and its primary responsibility for protecting and assisting IDPs. It thereby also committed to developing and adopting a national IDP policy.¹⁰⁰ Agreeing in principle to the UN cluster approach, and including “populations affected by localised conflicts” in the Humanitarian Appeal are other important and positive developments. The international organisations can assist the Ethiopian government in fulfilling its protection duty towards the internally displaced, for example by providing protection training and capacity building to ensure a comprehensive strategy on internal displacement.

While international engagement remains challenging in Ethiopia’s politically sensitive environment, it can make a significant contribution towards addressing the protection needs and respecting the rights of the conflict-induced displaced. It is positive that the government has agreed to engage with UN agencies and international NGOs on the cluster approach in emergency situations. When protection issues of both IDPs and local populations can be addressed in the same inclusive way, much will be gained in terms of an overall effective humanitarian response in Ethiopia and the respect of human rights, including towards its internally displaced population.

Internal displacement is one of the most important obstacles to the country’s political stability and development potential. Addressing the issue is timely: while, as of September 2007, some steps had been taken towards recognising conflict-induced displacement. But at the same time, new displacement was occurring in Somali region, which had still to be officially acknowledged. Greater international focus on internal displacement in Ethiopia should lead to dialogue with the government on the way forward to address the issue from a political, humanitarian and human rights perspective.

¹⁰⁰ Brookings, September 2003: IGAD Khartoum Declaration on IDPs.

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For more detailed information on the internal displacement situation in Ethiopia, please visit the [Ethiopia country page](#) on the IDMC's online IDP database. All documents referenced in this report are directly accessible on the [List of Sources](#) section.

About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

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

Through its work, the IDMC 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 IDMC website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org.

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