REPORT ON VIRTUAL EVENT “IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT AND CLIMATE CHANGE - NEEDS AND PERSPECTIVES OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE IN MALI WHEN RAIN TURNS TO DUST”

Aim of the side event

Leading up to the Ministerial Roundtable on the Central Sahel, the Danish Red Cross, together with partners, hosted a side event on 14 October 2020 highlighting the impact of climate change and conflict, with a focus on the needs and perspectives of internally displaced people in Mali.

As noted in the ICRC’s recent publication *When Rain Turns to Dust*, climate disruption affects conflict-affected populations across the Sahel and will do so increasingly. The convergence of climate and conflict risks further worsen food and economic insecurity, health disparities, and limits access to essential services, while weakening the capacity of governments, institutions and societies to provide support. The impact is wide-ranging and far-reaching; shaping new mobility patterns and access to resources on a continental scale.

The past 10 years have witnessed an increase in the size, scope, and complexity of internal displacement. The growing trend of urban internal displacement and resulting vulnerabilities also requires further attention. At the same time the humanitarian sector is increasingly challenged in ensuring affected populations’ access to protection and basic humanitarian services – both in their places of origin and during displacement.

In Mali, the impact of conflict and climate change on internally displaced people is severe. Not only are people forced to displace due to violence and conflict, many also convey a deep sense of loss and disorientation, as people feel that they can no longer recognise their environment nor feel equipped to deal with the climate hazards that are an unending threat.

At the side event, the findings of the ICRC report, an ongoing study by Danish Institute for International Studies in Mali, perspectives of affected communities and operational experiences formed the basis of a panel discussion on how the humanitarian sector, authorities and the international donor community can best support affected communities in adjusting and adapting to these cumulative risks, and ensure their continued access to protection, basic services and longer-term solutions.

The panel included ICRC, by Mr. Zakaria Maiga, Operations Coordinator for the Sahel; Mali Red Cross by Mr. Nouhoum Maiga, Head of Programmes and Projects Region, The displaced community in Bamako represented by Mr. Kola Cissé; Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), who due to illness was represented by Fabrice Vandeputte, Country Manager, Danish Red Cross; and the Danish Embassy in Mali represented by H.E. Ambassador, Rolf Holmboe.
Main points of discussion

During the presentations and discussion the following main points were highlighted:

- **Multifaceted causes of displacement and needs requires awareness of how needs are interlinked.**
  
  The situation in Mali causing the growing movements of internally displaced people is multifaceted and includes effects of climate change such as flooding and land degradation, loss of livestock, political instability and inter-communal and other violent conflicts. Directly asked, all IDPs interviewed for the DIIS study state that violence, such as burning of villages, attacks, assassinations of family members, is however the main reasons for fleeing. In addition, the Covid-19 outbreak has influenced the assistance to displaced persons as resources are being prioritised for Covid-19 responses rather than for tackling issues of internal displacement.

  To be able to flee people have sold their last belongings, including the livestock they depend on for their livelihood, or obtained help from family members sometimes abroad in other African countries, which illustrates the importance of migration for social security for many in this region. When displaced, the lack of access to free health clinics causes maternal health issues as well as the fact that children born in displacement often do not have birth certificates. The lack of birth certificates means they cannot access schools, and for those that may have access, language barriers hinder them in participating in the classes. In addition to general risks of violence and exploitation, lack of security during the night in camps, such as the Faladie camp in Bamako, puts women and children even more at risk.

  However, it is not only IDPs who are facing a wide range of insecurities. People left behind in the conflict affected areas, because they ‘did not find the route’ are typically those with nothing left to sell. It was raised during discussions how crucial it is to not forget about the fact that many are forced to stay in places affected by conflict and hit by climate shocks as they face movement restrictions or have no means to flee. Humanitarian assistance should not be limited to IDPs but should also take into account host communities and people who are prevented from moving or fleeing.

- **There is a need for engaging more directly with communities displaced by conflict and climate change effects to better understand their short- and longer-term needs and to adapt strategies for supporting them.**

  One of the main social factors affecting the needs of the IDPS is the fact that people arriving in the informal camps come from different communities and are often facing issues of language barriers as they do not speak the local languages near and in Bamako. In addition, people have lost livestock and social networks which put them in precarious situations.

  To address some of the social issues, there is need to provide language and other support for children and youth to facilitate their continued education. Moreover, there is a need for identifying and estimating the goods and livestock that people have lost to be able to compensate them and facilitate their temporary situation as well as their return to their areas of origin, when possible.

  Malnutrition, hunger, malaria, and maternal health are among the prevailing issues that need to be addressed, as well as their psychosocial wellbeing given their conflict- and flight-related experiences and their current uncertain situation. However, in general the displaced communities do not have the resources to access health facilities which calls for action in establishing free health care services such as local health clinics and mobile clinics, including provision of mental health care and psychosocial support.

  Food insecurity is reflected in the high prevalence of malnutrition and hunger. IDPs are dependent on humanitarian aid in the form of food and cash distribution, but this is only responding to their immediate needs. Given the situation, there is need to integrate a long-term perspective in supporting the displaced communities’ food security, and support resilience building, also with a view to future return to the place of origin. Skills building, income generating activities and compensation for lost livestock may have a positive effect on the resilience of IDPs, as may climate adaptation techniques.
Preliminary findings from the still ongoing study by DIIS shows that the majority of IDPs in the Faladie camp in Bamako do not wish to move to other camps as they aspire to return to their area of origin when possible. They all wish for peace, disarmament of militias and reconstruction of their villages, houses, and livelihoods, enabling them to return. No one expressed wish or incentives to migrate and no one has the resources to do so as they live in complete poverty, lacking food, shelter, clothes, etc.). As such, addressing the effect on climate change for them, would include the immediate securing of their temporary shelters and access to water, services, etc., and the longer-term climate adaptation skills that are relevant for their return. While climate change is rarely related to the reason for fleeing, it is making their situation more precarious, and contributing to the escalation in conflicts in central Mali, causing growing displacement with significant impact on available resources for both the displaced and the host communities.

Almost all of the IDPs mention corruption and nepotism by camp administration as a major obstacle for access to aid, hence the governance aspect is crucial to attend to. Support is required to address their immediate situation, and build their capacity and resilience, with a view to future return. This finding was echoed throughout the side event as panellists brought up their recommendations for how the humanitarian sector, authorities and the international donor community can best support affected communities in adjusting and adapting to the cumulative risks, and ensure their continued access to protection, basic services and longer-term solutions.

The role of civil society organisations and especially women’s organisations was raised in the questions from the audience. It was argued that women’s organisations are present in camps where it is common that they facilitate trainings and income generating activities, but it is also clear they can play a bigger role. However, also civil society organisations face issues of access to resources and material, which complicates their activities.

- **The increasing challenges faced by the humanitarian sector in ensuring access to protection and basic humanitarian services.**

  Two of the main points raised throughout the side event is the need for prioritising longer term solutions to build resilience and prepare for return, as well as not only consider IDPs in responses, and increase focus on the needs of host communities and of those left behind who are not able to flee conflict affected areas.

  The current situation in Mali with the convergence of climate and conflict risks, requires special attention to the involvement of organisations and institutions. The humanitarian sector is increasingly challenged in ensuring affected populations’ access to protection and basic services in some areas due to movement restrictions and/or lack of respect for the humanitarian mandate. While the complex situation in Mali requires addressing humanitarian, development and peace-building needs, and an understanding of how these dimensions are at interplay, the sensitivities surrounding stabilisation and peace-building efforts in support of the State presents a real risk to the humanitarian and development actors on the ground. This has to form part of the considerations on the interlinkages between humanitarian, development and peace actors when designing holistic and integrated programme interventions.

  Currently, one of the biggest challenges for organisations and institutions providing aid is lack of access to resources and affected communities. With the current situation of political instability and contested state authority, mixed with escalating conflicts between pastoralists and farmers, many organisations are challenged on their neutrality and impartiality when having to engage with different parties to get access to populations in affected areas. This is causing a low number of active organisations responding to needs, limited access to affected communities and issues of transporting resources.

**Main recommendations**

The recommendations from the panellists to the Ministerial Roundtable and beyond were:

- Humanitarian organisations and other actors must work directly/consult the IDPs to be able to better understand and respond more efficiently to their needs;
- A stronger focus on longer-term assistance is needed in order to build the IDPs resilience and to prepare for return such as assistance in climate change adaptation and preparedness;
While responding to the needs of IDPs, humanitarian actors and stakeholders must consider the intersection between conflict and climate risks; IDP sites offer a unique opportunity to access rural Malian Ethnic groups, to understand their needs and work with them on solutions;

- All actors must work together in an integrated, coordinated, and sustained way through a nexus approach, considering the role of humanitarian, development, and peace actors, respecting each other’s roles and constraints to achieve sustained results;

- In the process of responding to Covid-19, the humanitarian sector and institutions must not forget about the other issues that stem from the conflict in Mali which are mainly malnutrition, hunger, and lack of shelter. In doing that, a holistic approach must be implemented in order to not only respond to the needs of IDPs but also those who are forced to remain in conflict affected areas and who have lost their livelihoods in the process.

Organisers of the side event

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