Ministerial roundtable on the Central Sahel 2020

Report from the side-event on
“The importance of a nexus approach to displacement in the Central Sahel”

Thursday, 15 October 2020

Panelists:

H.E. Mr. Rasmus Prehn, Minister for Development Cooperation, Denmark
H.E. Mr. Ousséné Compaoré, Minister of Security, Burkina Faso
Hon. Musa Ecweru, State Minister for Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Refugees, Uganda
Mr. Raouf Mazou, Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, UNHCR
Mr. Franck Bousquet, Senior Director, Fragility, Conflict, Violence & Forced Displacement, the World Bank
Moderator: Mr. Obi Anyadike, Senior Africa Editor, The New Humanitarian

The aim of the side-event co-hosted by Denmark and the World Bank was to stimulate political thinking and leadership in and among the displacement-affected states in the Central Sahel and their development partners on the need to promote durable solutions to displacement through long-term nexus approaches. Under the overall leadership of affected governments, such approaches would need to ensure collaboration, coherence and complementarity across humanitarian, development and peace actions. They should collectively ensure coverage of immediate humanitarian and protection needs while focusing on supporting partnerships with and help build the capacity of relevant stakeholders, including national and local authorities, civil society and community structures. The side event drew on experiences from development-led approaches to displacement in Uganda and Kenya as well as global evidence summarized in a recent study funded by Denmark entitled: Keeping the promise: The role of bilateral development partners in responding to forced displacement.

Overall messages from the panel discussion

The panel was unified in its interpretation of the lessons learned in tackling displacement outside the Sahel as well as how these lessons could be applied to address the displacement situation in the Central Sahel. All acknowledged that a traditional humanitarian approach does not work and that the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) sets out the parameters for the future approach to displacement situations, which would include a much stronger involvement of development actors than in the past.

While a traditional approach to a region as fragile as the Central Sahel would normally be to focus only on lifesaving humanitarian assistance, the panel agreed on a fundamentally different approach. Particularly in view of the extreme fragility in the Central Sahel, it was agreed that time was ripe, overdue in fact, for taking a predominantly development-focused approach supported by security provision and lifesaving efforts as needed. That would also avoid a focus only on unsustainable parallel humanitarian assistance. The panel agreed that this would be fully in line with the GCR and an example of how to operationalize its vision. Furthermore, there appeared to be consensus on the following:

- The need for country ownership and leadership in dealing with displacement. That would mean that all assistance should go through national systems in order to avoid the creation of costly and unsustainable parallel structures, except when needed in extreme emergencies to save lives.

- Displacement-affected states should provide services of security, education, health, water/sanitation and economic stimulus as part of their national development plans in and to displacement-affected communities, benefiting both the displaced and their hosts. This will promote trust and drive people to achieve self-reliance rather than being passive recipients of humanitarian aid. It is critical that bilateral and international development partners support these efforts.
The need to focus on development and the provision of services and economic opportunities for displaced and host communities from the very beginning of a displacement situation. This will help prevent further escalation of the crisis and reduce poverty and tension in displacement-affected communities.

More development partners need to start using an HDP approach in their support to displacement-affected countries before the essential burden and responsibility sharing can be achieved.

The need to work towards regional approaches to displacement, as root causes and solutions to displacement are regionally interconnected and lessons to build on exist.

Special consideration should be given to including displacement challenges in urban economic, infrastructure and service delivery planning as most displaced today are gravitating towards urban centres.

Building on existing partnerships, multilateral and bilateral development partners need to improve their collaboration at the country level for a more coherent engagement with displacement-affected states.

**Summary of the panel discussion**

Rasmus Prehn, Minister for Development Cooperation, Denmark, started by emphasising the importance of making use of hard-earned lessons from other countries when tackling the serious displacement crisis in the Central Sahel. They all show that there is a need for a response, which is sustainable and locally led. He noted that solutions lie in allowing displaced people and their host communities to be part of - and contribute to - local social and economic development that benefits all. Costly parallel systems in response to humanitarian needs, which are by their very nature unsustainable, should be avoided.

Ousséni Compaoré, Minister of Security, Burkina Faso, outlined the current displacement crisis in Burkina Faso and the strategy and action of his government when it comes to providing security on the ground. He noted that the government’s strategy of providing security to restart normal living conditions and boost economic activities, community peace, cohesion and resilience was important to solutions.

Musa Ecweru, State Minister for Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Refugees, Uganda, described his country’s progressive and inclusive refugee policy and efforts to solve its own IDP situation. He referred to the Kampala Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, and noted the need to include IDPs in national development plans. He also noted that Uganda treated refugees as their own citizens and called on other government leaders to do the same, recognizing this as a moral obligation. He outlined Uganda’s inclusive refugee policy towards the 1.4 million refugees, Uganda is currently hosting. The policy allows refugees to live like nationals in settlements and cities and to achieve self-reliance and dignity through allocation of land for cultivation, access to jobs, trade and education.

Franck Bousquet, Senior Director, Fragility, Conflict, Violence & Forced Displacement, World Bank, emphasised that supporting forcibly displaced people, as well as host communities is a critical development challenge. The World Bank is working with partners across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus by providing financing, supporting governments in strengthening policies and institutions and providing analytical work. In regard to financing, under IDA19 2.2 billion USD is available for this purpose over the next three years. This comes on top of the 1.8 million USD the Bank has invested through 35 operations across 14 refugee-hosting countries in the last three years under IDA18.

Raouf Mazou, Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, UNHCR, noted that displacement crises - new or protracted – should be assessed from the point of view of the socio-economic impact on countries of asylum, as well as from the perspective of the implications on the country of origin. The latter suffer dire socio-economic consequences when a significant number of their people are in exile. The support of development actors and International Financial Institutions is critical and requires the inclusion of refugees in national plans from the outset, the development of integrated multi-year plans and the necessary funding for these plans. Key in this is a strong collaboration between development and humanitarian actors for more sustainable solutions as exemplified by the approach used by local authorities in Kenya’s Turkana County.
for the Kalobeyei refugee settlement. He also noted the need to include urban refugees – whose plight is exacerbated by COVID-19.

**How to move forward in regard to displacement in the central Sahel**

Ousséné Compaoré, Burkina Faso, emphasized that people have a security need and an economic need. The Burkina Faso government's policy is that displaced persons should not passively be waiting for help. They should be part of the economic mix, through the provision of security, development investments and service delivery, so the displaced can become part of the economic activities in the displacement-affected communities. He also emphasized the central importance of country leadership and ownership as well as active engagement and participation of local communities. This was critical to ensure that investments are relevant and effective. It was also key that multilateral and bilateral development partners supported the government's leadership in achieving action on the ground.

Musa Ecweru, Uganda, underlined that the GCR is very clear on what is needed. He outlined Uganda’s approach to operationalizing the GCR through a robust implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). Uganda’s costed sector work plans for its refugee response are part of its national plan and budget and the nexus approach is working. He advised governments in the Sahel to adopt a similar nexus approach to displacement. While grateful to the World Bank and Denmark, he appealed to development partners more broadly for support. He noted that poverty compounds the problems of displacement. In his view, the development approach should therefore have started yesterday. A nexus approach in the Sahel would be extremely timely, but everything rises and falls with leadership. Government leadership needs to ensure that all move in the same direction with development partners as critical actors. The HDP nexus approach needs to be implemented concurrently and supported by development partners. He also stressed the need to address the particular challenges of urban refugees.

Raouf Mazou, UNHCR, noted that while funding is needed for det acute humanitarian emergency in the Sahel, it was important to invest in a manner, which helps both hosts and IDPs. Lack of development and access to resources is one of the causes of conflict, and funding should be used to invest in developing local communities. He also referred to the importance of a regional approach and referred to the Bamako Conclusions from September 2019 where ministers and government representatives from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger reaffirmed their commitments to protect civilians in a context of counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel. The conclusions highlighted the need for greater access of displaced persons to civil status documents, identity documents and nationality to prevent statelessness, but also to access education, jobs, housing or healthcare. Since the majority of displaced persons in the Sahel are IDPs, the local inclusion approach will differ from the one adopted in the Horn of Africa. However, it will still be about inclusion rather than building parallel humanitarian systems.

Franck Bousquet, the World Bank, emphasized that addressing the displacement challenges in the Sahel is a key priority for the World Bank and one in which partnerships across the HDP nexus are more important than ever. In partnership with humanitarian, peace and security actors, the World Bank has supported the G5 Sahel and the Sahel Alliance by investing in prevention; continuing to mitigate the impacts of displacement and helping countries in the region mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 in displacement-affected communities.

Rasmus Prehn, Denmark, concluded that there appeared to be agreement that lessons learned from East Africa and elsewhere can inspire ways to address challenges and find sustainable solutions to displacement in the Central Sahel. The minister drew several conclusions from the discussions. Firstly, that displaced people must be part of - and contribute to - social and economic development together with local communities. Secondly, he noted that host governments must lead the response to displacement in their countries. If the capacity is not there, development partners should help build it, not take over the leadership or build parallel systems - except when required to save lives. Thirdly, development partners should ensure that displacement is a priority in development cooperation with displacement-affected states. Finally, he underscored the need to place women and girls at the centre of all efforts.

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A video of the side-event can be watched [here](#) by using the password: CentralSahel2020
More on the High-Level Humanitarian Event on the Central Sahel can be found [here](#).