“Durable Solutions for Displacement in Central Sahel: Engaging local authorities for advancing urban service provision”

Side Event in preparation to the ministerial round table on the Central Sahel
Report from the session 13 October 2020

Speakers

- **Aziz Ahmed Diallo**, Deputy-Mayor of Dori, Burkina Faso;
- **Walter Kälin**, Professor, University of Bern, Switzerland, Advisor to the High-Level Panel for Internal Displacement and former representative of the United Nations Secretary General for the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons;
- **Benoit Moreno**, Senior Coordinator of Inter-Agency Relations, UNHCR, Niger;
- **Daria Fane**, Head of the regional team for Foreign Policy Instruments (IcSP) - West Africa & Lake Chad, European Union;

Discussions

The objective of the session was to highlight the role of local actors for durable solutions to displacement in the Central Sahel, highlighting their role for the provision of basic urban services. Panellists, including local and international experts and UN agencies, shared their perspectives and experiences, including insights on challenges, lessons learned and good practices. With many displaced seeking refuge in urban areas, local authorities are in the forefront of crisis response and often, the rapid influx of additional people put strains on already scarce resources, with cities and towns in the Sahel having doubled in population and expansion over the last months.

It is therefore important to define long-term solutions that benefit the host populations, as it has also been observed that people displaced by conflict can remain so for an average of two decades, hence the need to integrate them locally. This necessarily requires good urban planning and effective management of the territory in a crisis situation, in particular by continuing to provide basic services such as water, sanitation, energy, schools, health centres, waste management as well as by creating income opportunities, thus contributing to the improvement of social cohesion, especially between displaced populations and host populations. In addition, these movements also lead to strong pressures on natural resources (e.g. land, water, wood ...) which have social, economic and environmental implications.

The session started with the intervention of **Mr. Aziz Ahmed Diallo**, deputy mayor of the city of Dori, located in the Sahel region in northern Burkina Faso. Dori is currently hosting thousands of displaced people and therefore faces many challenges that affect, among others, issues related to access to land and natural resources, basic infrastructure and services, as well as the issue of social cohesion. Services related to education and health are also particularly affected, as indicated by the 2,512 schools closed in Burkina Faso due to the security situation. A large number of IDPs also seek refuge in public buildings. Regarding health, the capacities of health posts had to be strengthened to cope with the massive influx of populations, in particular worsened by the current situation of COVID-19.
The situation presented by the deputy-mayor of Dori was completed by a theoretical framework presented by Professor Walter Kälín, based on his recent experiences in Africa and more particularly in Somalia. The return of internally displaced persons can only end if the IDPs have the opportunity to return to a peaceful situation, the possibility to rebuild their homes and have sufficient means of subsistence. On the other hand, for IDPs who do not return, a lasting solution through local integration in the place where they have found refuge, needs to be found. To achieve this, there is a need for a safe and secure environment in physical terms, but also in material terms, such as a household with security of tenure, livelihood or income that allow them to become self-sufficient and to have legal security.

Local authorities can have a role in these four areas:

1. Safeguard and strengthen social cohesion between IDPs and the host communities;
2. Guarantee access for all IDPs to urban services;
3. Provide living space for IDPs or otherwise assist them in finding housing where they are protected from eviction;
4. Ensure that IDPs, as citizens, can participate in public affairs.

Furthermore, while local authorities generally cannot create jobs for IDPs, they can, for example, facilitate access to markets for small businesses, creating environments favorable to the development of local economies.

This approach to strengthening urban services at the local level was presented in a practical way by Mr. Benoit Moreno, UNHCR representative in Niger, from the "SEED" project (Energy and Environmental Support to the Diffa region) funded by the European Commission (IcSP). Taking into account the environmental challenges linked to wood cutting and the energy demands of the Diffa region, amplified by the arrival of Nigerian refugees, UNHCR has set up a mechanism for access to local, sustainable and safe domestic gas, in partnership with the private sector and local authorities. Minimizing the "humanitarian footprint" as much as possible, the project placed local authorities and technical services at the center of the implementation, facilitating the direct relationship between the customer and the supplier. After three years of establishment, the results are rather positive since the price of gas in Diffa is comparable to the price of Niamey, 80% of the infrastructures are still functional and new private suppliers have set up in the region, thus increasing by 8,000 households the number of customers.

This sustainable solution implemented contributed to lower household energy expenditure, reduce the wood cutting and is easily replicable in the sub-region. As stated by Ms. Daria Fane, these are the types of initiatives that the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) of the European Commission seeks to fund. Developed to support rapid and flexible responses in crisis situations, the instrument promotes stabilization in the Sahel region through interventions focused on long-term development and governance. Building on national plans and dynamics, the instrument also seeks to promote national cohesion through local approaches focused on local communities.

It is within this framework that UN-Habitat is setting up the Sustainable Solutions project in Burkina Faso, notably in the municipality of Dori, but also in three other municipalities in the region (Kaya, Kongoussi and Tougouri) also funded by the IcSP of the European Commission. The project emphasizes the need to strengthen local capacities to cope with the crisis which is strongly affecting the country today, and to adopt a participatory and inclusive approach that directly involves the host communities as well IDPs as
those displaced by the conflict. This project contains components of participatory planning, capacity building and urban services, as well as construction of community infrastructure and housing for displaced populations and host communities. This project also aims to promote a pilot initiative in the region, that could be replicated in neighboring countries.

Thus, projects and funding mechanisms exist in the sub-region to implement sustainable solutions at the local level, but efforts remain to be made. There is a need to strengthen the role of local authorities as frontline actors, facilitating their access to the necessary institutional powers, capacities and resources, while holding them accountable, to promote planning methods and community actions that strengthen the cohesion and that have the capacity to create 'win-win' situations for IDPs and host communities.

Conclusions

- Local authorities are at the forefront of the response to the crisis, and their capacities, skills and resources need to be strengthened, while acknowledging their ownerships and fostering their accountability.
- A participatory and inclusive approach that directly involves local communities, both host communities and those displaced by the conflict, can strengthen social cohesion, and integrated urban and territorial planning process can be one means to foster the inclusion.
- For advancing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus as a response to the crisis, investments must not solemnly focus on protection and humanitarian aid, but result in a stronger trans-sectoral coordination and in a multi-scaled governance approaches for development planning of infrastructure and urban services, for a long-term sustainable development and peace.
- Enhancing local capacities must include environmental, gender and livelihood opportunities, and the ability to include the actors (i.e. private sector, local and national authorities, technical services…) in participatory processes.
- Finally, sustainable solutions need a strong political will for inclusive processes and integrated approaches (multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder) for planning, financing and policy development.


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