

Rosalia and her family live in the burnt-out shell of a light aircraft at Bangui International Airport, Central African Republic. "We arrived here last week, I think this is the 10th day we have been here now at the airport," she told UNHCR. "We have some security here compared to back at our home," she said. UNHCR/S.Phelps, December 2013



## BRIEFING PAPER

# The domino effect: why a wide lens is needed to address displacement in central Africa

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The Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sudan and South Sudan represent four of the largest internal displacement crises not just in Africa, but in the world. Each country is characterised by extreme poverty and relatively porous borders, and they are, in many ways, inextricably linked to each other.

Despite the scale of displacement in central Africa, the four countries receive relatively little attention, whether from the media, in humanitarian and political discussions or from donors, especially compared with countries such as Syria, the Philippines and Afghanistan.

As of July 2014, CAR, DRC, South Sudan and Sudan hosted an estimated 7.15 million internally displaced people (IDPs), forced to flee their homes by conflict, violence and human rights violations including the intentional targeting of civilians and in some cases the use of displacement as a tactic of war. Both government forces and non-state armed groups have been guilty of such abuses. As of the end of 2013, the four countries were home to one in five IDPs worldwide and they currently host almost 55 per cent of all IDPs in sub-Saharan Africa.

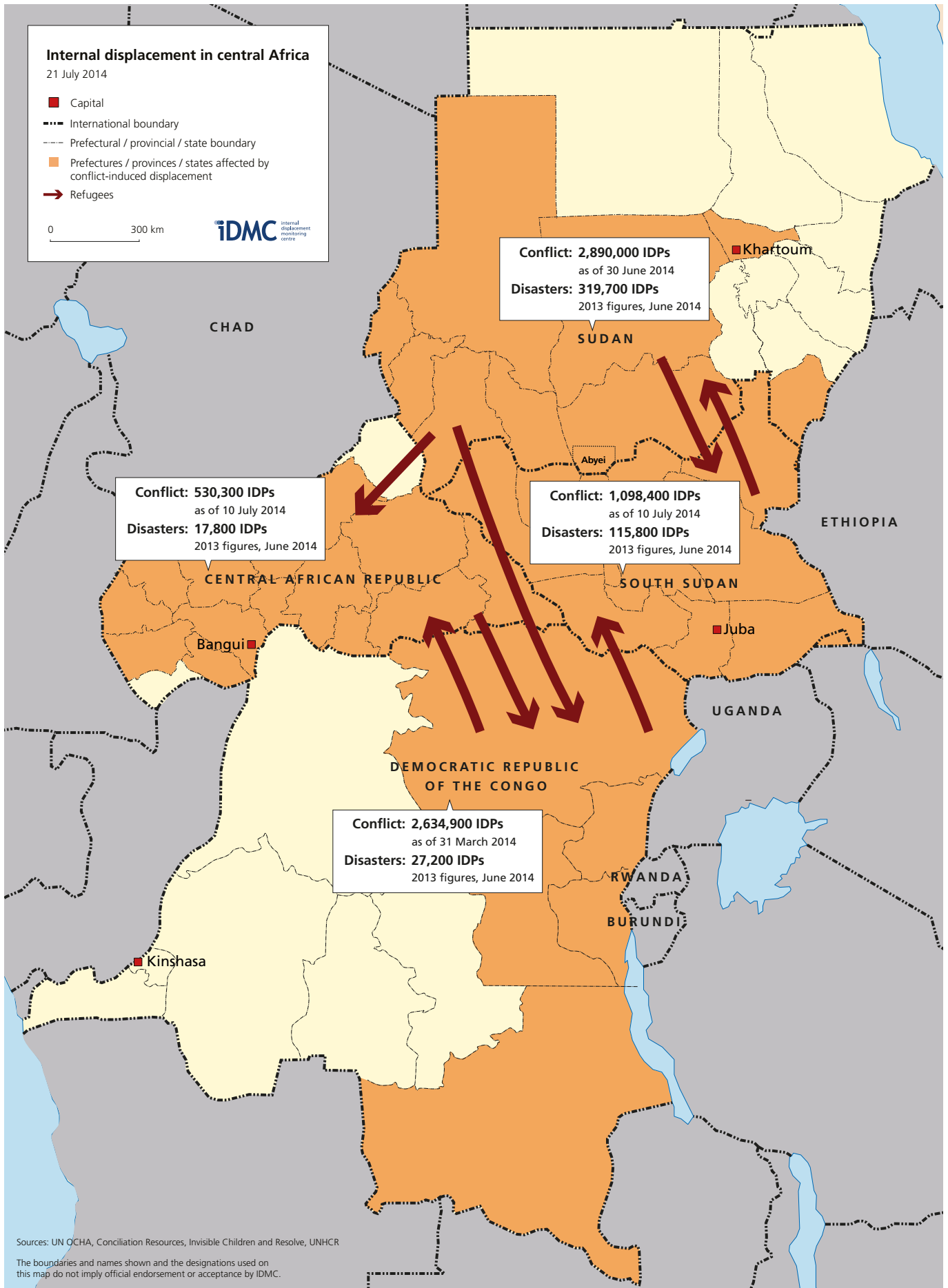
Displacement has been on the rise in all four countries in recent years, as people flee not only conflict, inter-communal violence and human rights violations, but also natural hazards and the disasters they cause. At least 1.5 million people were newly displaced in 2014 alone.

In South Sudan, 1.1 million people, or ten per cent of the population, have been displaced since 15 December 2013, and new displacement is likely to continue. Sudan currently hosts close to 2.9 million IDPs, and DRC was hosting 2.6 million as of March 2014. In CAR, conflict and violence associated with a political crisis that erupted in December 2012 forced nearly a million people to flee their homes. From around 50,000 in October 2012, the number of IDPs peaked at 958,000 in early 2014 and stood at 530,300 as of July 2014.

The displacement situation in all four countries is complex. Its causes are multiple and in many cases interrelated. In South Sudan, for example, some of the areas worst affected by flooding in 2013 were also hosting the highest numbers of people displaced by conflict and violence, meaning that both IDPs and their host communities have suffered combined impacts. The huge numbers of people newly displaced each year in the region add to the many already living in protracted displacement, putting further pressure on host communities and those trying

to address the needs of those affected. A comprehensive, flexible and carefully targeted response is clearly required if all IDPs are to receive the assistance and protection they

need in rebuilding their lives, especially given that all four governments have struggled to fulfil their primary responsibility in this sense, whether for lack of resources, capacity or will.



## Regional dynamics and the domino effect

Their contexts vary significantly, but all four countries are among the poorest in the world. Large sections of their populations live in extreme poverty, and underdevelopment is widespread. The UN Development Programme ranked DRC bottom alongside Niger in its human development index for 2013, with CAR 180<sup>th</sup> and Sudan 171<sup>st</sup>. South Sudan was not ranked. Security forces maintain little or no presence in the border areas of all four countries, leaving large sections of their frontiers lawless and porous to armed groups, and civilians unprotected.

The spill-over of conflicts into neighbouring countries has fuelled displacement throughout central Africa. Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) provides a case in point. It has been active in all four countries over the last five years and has displaced hundreds of thousands of people in CAR, DRC and South Sudan. During the second Sudanese civil war between 1983 and 2005, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) was active in north-eastern DRC, displacing thousands of people.

To complicate matters further, governments have supported armed groups in neighbouring countries, and such accusations have been a regular source of tension between Sudan and South Sudan in recent years. Mercenaries from one country have also fought with armed groups in others. The armed coalition Séléka, which took control of CAR's capital Bangui in March 2013, reportedly had large numbers of Sudanese and Chadian mercenaries in its ranks.

Population movements have also spilled across borders. Refugees taking flight, those returning and economic migrants have all put further pressure on already limited resources, services and social networks.

The failure of governments and the international community to protect IDPs in their own countries has made the situation worse. As of end of June 2014, there were as many as 384,600 refugees originating from CAR, DRC, Sudan and South Sudan in one of the other three countries. In countries already struggling or failing to meet the needs of their own IDPs, an influx of refugees threatens to cause a vicious cycle of population movements as resources wane and tensions rise across the region.

The situation is most complex in contested border areas. The dispute between Sudan and South Sudan over Abyei means that the status of people displaced in and from the area is unclear, because it is impossible to establish whether or not they have crossed an international border. Until the dispute is resolved, both governments and the international community should ensure that those affected have the same access to assistance and protection as other IDP and refugees in Sudan and South Sudan.

## Adequate funding needed across region

In the face of the immense needs of both IDPs and their host communities, the international humanitarian response in all four countries has been chronically underfunded. Co-ordination is also difficult, local capacities poor and access

restricted. Funding needs to be increased, and more evenly distributed across the region, without necessarily being managed at the regional level. South Sudan has so far received most attention. The humanitarian response plan for the country is 45 per cent funded, compared with 30 per cent in DRC, where donor fatigue may play a large part in the shortfall. There is also competition for funding and donor attention between the four countries as urgent humanitarian needs grow.

Protection is among the least funded activities. As of 9 July 2014, funding for protection stood at 23.8 per cent in South Sudan, 8.5 per cent in CAR, 6.5 per cent in DRC and 6.2 per cent in Sudan. Protection work contributes to the security of IDPs and host communities, and helps to ensure their dignity is upheld. Initiatives such as early warning systems, monitoring and the mapping of protection services can play an essential role, but only if properly funded. As in all crisis situations, however, much focus has been placed on life-saving assistance to the detriment of longer-term needs. More funding should be dedicated to addressing the causes of displacement and preparing for future crises, in order not to perpetuate short-term responses.

The timing of disbursements is also an issue. Financial needs are particularly high at the start of operations, and better funding is needed before, rather than during, the annual rainy season in Sudan, South Sudan and CAR so that organisations can prepare and pre-position aid. Donors, including the US, the UK, the EU, Canada, France and Norway, should provide more transparent, flexible and time-sensitive funding.

## Potential for cross-country learning

Given the limited funding available, the sharing of experiences in all four countries becomes all the more important in improving responses. Despite their different contexts, CAR, DRC, Sudan and South Sudan have enough issues in common that much could be learned from such sharing.

Existing legal frameworks offer an opportunity for shared learning. All four countries are parties to the Great Lakes Pact and its protocols, under which they are bound to incorporate the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement into national legislation. So far, however, only Sudan has adopted a national policy on IDPs' assistance and protection, and DRC is on the verge of doing so. Both frameworks may have their shortcomings, but the two countries have adapted international standards to their national context, and CAR and South Sudan could learn much from their approach.

International humanitarian organisations could also learn more from each other's experiences to avoid past mistakes, improve coordination and to respond and prepare more holistically. In CAR, Sudan and South Sudan, natural hazards are a recurring phenomenon that displaced at least 480,500 people in 2013 and affected thousands of others displaced by conflict and violence. Humanitarians in South Sudan could teach their counterparts in CAR and Sudan about the prepositioning aid for the rainy season, when much of the country becomes cut off. There are further opportunities for shared learning on insecurity, logistical challenges, bureaucratic impediments and government restrictions, all of which constitute major obstacles to reaching the most vulnerable people across the

region. In DRC and South Sudan, the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) has made humanitarian helicopters available, and these have helped to reach IDPs in extremely remote areas.

The UN has peacekeeping missions in all four countries. The protection of civilians lies at the core of their mandates, but there is insufficient guidance on the issue and its relationship with other areas of the missions' work, including stabilisation and supporting government forces. Countries contributing troops do not have a common understanding of the missions' mandates, which has hampered their ability to meet their objectives.

In DRC, Sudan and South Sudan, IDPs have sought refuge in or around UN bases, leading peacekeepers to focus their attention on the people in the immediate vicinity rather than addressing the origin of the protection threat. Sharing learning could help to devise practical guidance based on identifying what has and has not worked in such situations. In DRC and Sudan, the human rights components of peacekeeping missions and the protection work of the UN Refugee Agency and international NGOs aim to establish early warning mechanisms for human rights violations. Such initiatives may be equally applicable in CAR and South Sudan.

All four countries are complex in their own right, but they cannot be looked at in isolation because when one fails, it has a domino effect on the political, socio-economic and humanitarian situations in the others. A more regional perspective is needed, because responding to such dynamics through a single country lens risks simply shifting the burden from one country to another. The causes and consequences of displacement in any one country will be more easily resolved if they are considered and responded to as part of a problem concerning the wider region. Strengthening one country means strengthening the region as a whole, which demands broad and long-term commitments to enhancing stability and economic and social prospects.

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