



A family outside their temporary shelter in Buporo camp for internally displaced people in North Kivu, DRC, December 2014. Photo: Eleanor Farmer/Oxfam

## ‘WE’RE HERE FOR AN INDEFINITE PERIOD’

### Prospects for local integration of internally displaced people in North Kivu, DRC

**In North Kivu, mechanisms for the local integration of internally displaced people in host communities have barely been explored, despite the potential they offer for improving the resilience of both displaced people and host communities. The authorities in DRC and international partners are failing to provide a long-term response to protracted displacement – overlooking existing survival strategies of displaced people and focusing on their return as the only available option. When preferred by affected people, local integration should receive adequate support from national and international actors.**

# SUMMARY

Internally displaced people in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are struggling to find long-term solutions to improve their resilience to shocks in a region that has been beset by armed conflict for more than 20 years. In many cases, returning to their places of origin is not a realistic solution in the short term, but so far it has been the preferred approach advocated by the provincial authorities in North Kivu. Local integration, on the other hand, could offer an alternative to displaced people, while strengthening social cohesion in a province which has been ripped apart by inter-ethnic conflict.

In August and September 2016, Oxfam partners undertook a survey among host communities and displaced people in Masisi and Lubero to gain a picture of the formal and informal mechanisms developed by displaced people to integrate into host communities. The main findings of the survey show that:

- The notion of 'displaced person' is closely linked to economic status; people who are financially independent cease to be considered as displaced persons by communities;
- Displaced people and host communities are in a situation of interdependence: displaced people need links with members of the community to survive, while community members obtain benefits by hosting displaced people;
- Despite tensions between displaced persons and host communities, displaced persons contribute to the development of host communities, particularly by attracting international aid and providing a workforce;
- The least vulnerable displaced people are those who have managed to integrate into the community; since women and young people have numerous social interactions with members of the community, they are considered to be the most integrated categories;
- Social interaction fosters economic opportunities; in Masisi, displaced people in camps are perceived more negatively than those living with host families. This has an impact on their chances of integrating.

To date, the authorities and international partners have responded to displacement by encouraging the return of displaced people, even though most of them do not actually return, mainly because of security reasons. However, positive examples of integration mechanisms have barely been explored. While the authorities in North Kivu have claimed their intention for years to gradually close the camps, the recent preparation of a strategy of durable solutions does demonstrate a desire to establish a long-term vision to respond to displacement.

Oxfam recommends that all actors in DRC actively support integration mechanisms where appropriate, in particular:

## **For the national and provincial authorities:**

1. The promotion of local integration by placing it at the centre of the strategy of durable solutions being developed in the country;
2. The strengthening of arrangements to consult host communities and displaced people, to better respect people's informed choices and also take into account existing survival mechanisms;

3. Support for interaction between host communities and displaced people as a way of fostering economic opportunities for both displaced people and host communities;
4. The preparation of local plans with solutions for each district, so that specific contexts are taken into account;
5. The implementation of the Kampala Convention for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons

**For UN agencies:**

6. Including and focusing on host communities in the planning of any response to displacement in order to improve the resilience of displaced persons in the long term and to avoid negative effects of classification;
7. Strengthening the link between humanitarian interventions and development programmes; a long-term cohesive and coherent vision on how to address protracted displacement must be adopted by both sectors and operationalized in programmes.

**For MONUSCO:**

8. Support for the search for long-term solutions through the Stabilization Support Unit (SSU), and making the links with existing initiatives.

**For International NGOs and donors:**

9. The promotion of programmes and interventions that support local integration as much as return, to allow displaced persons' to have a real choice about their future.



Buporo camp for displaced people, North Kivu, December 2014. Photo: Eleanor Farmer/Oxfam

# 1 INTRODUCTION

In twenty years of armed conflicts in eastern DRC, no long-term solutions for displaced persons have been found. Despite the defeat of the rebel group M23 in 2013, population movements continue at a steady rate in the province of North Kivu,<sup>1</sup> where a number of armed groups operate. The likelihood of further population displacement in the current climate of political instability cannot be ignored.

Although 80 percent of displaced people stay with host families, they are in a precarious position as they receive limited humanitarian assistance and have no real prospects for either integrating into the host community or returning to their place of origin. Indeed, only a minority make it back home,<sup>2</sup> with the majority of displaced people remaining vulnerable for prolonged periods in host communities, waiting for a hypothetical return.

In the context of North Kivu, the three official ways of reaching 'durable solutions for internally displaced persons', as defined by the Kampala Convention,<sup>3</sup> will turn out to be unsuitable and have limited results if they do not include the informal survival mechanisms developed by displaced people. The solutions must also be viewed in a flexible, non-exclusive manner in order to meet the needs of the populations – for example, it needs to be made clear to beneficiaries and the authorities that local integration does not necessarily preclude the right to return.

## **Box 1: What is a durable solution?**

According to the durable solutions conceptual framework developed by the IASC<sup>4</sup> and officially recognized by the Kampala Convention, a durable solution is achieved when people who have been displaced within their own countries attain a similar standard of living to non-displaced people and therefore no longer have needs or face discrimination related to their displacement. The three conventional ways of achieving this objective are:

1. returning to the place of origin;
2. local integration in the place of refuge;
3. resettlement elsewhere in the country.

This paper aims to influence the debate underway about solutions to displacement in the province of North Kivu. Research conducted in August and September 2016 by Oxfam partners in the Masisi and Lubero territories revealed that although the majority of displaced people wish to return eventually to their place of origin, the least vulnerable displaced people are those who manage to integrate into their host communities. While local integration is not a perfect solution, particularly given the limited support that displaced people have and the growing pressure on local resources, it does enable displaced people to strengthen their resilience without ruling out the possibility of a future return.

Focusing specifically on local integration mechanisms, this paper provides concrete suggestions for ways to strengthen those mechanisms; in particular by redefining the interventions of humanitarian and development actors and authorities to consider the needs of host communities. It also recommends

strengthening measures that promote interaction and social cohesion between displaced people and host communities in order to improve the economic opportunities for both populations. Although encouraging, the current response of the humanitarian community and the authorities could be better adapted, particularly by supporting and strengthening local integration initiatives in order to offer displaced people a real alternative.

## 2 THE DYNAMICS OF DISPLACEMENT IN DRC

Displacement encompasses many different realities in DRC. In December 2016, the country had 2.2 million internally displaced persons, a large proportion of them (40 percent) in the province of North Kivu.<sup>5</sup> Displacement varies according to the context: displacement in a camp or with a host family; in an urban or a rural setting; regularly moving between the place of origin and the place of refuge; successive displacements; displacement for a short or long period, and so on. In the province of North Kivu, approximately 80 percent of displaced people live with host families and 20 percent in official or makeshift camps.

### Box 2: Displacement in DRC

Research and data on displacement show that:

- A variety of push and pull factors prompt people to leave their homes,<sup>6</sup> including (i) individual and family security, (ii) economic opportunities and the ability to maintain a livelihood, and (iii) the strength of the social network;
- Survival strategies during displacement include:<sup>7</sup> humanitarian assistance, self-improvement, having multiple residences (which often involves separating the family) and diversification of livelihoods;
- Mobility is at the centre of survival strategies;
- Host families and displaced people have similar needs and often develop similar survival strategies;<sup>8</sup>
- Displacement has an impact on the distribution of roles within the family, often to the detriment of household cohesion.<sup>9</sup>

Although the vast majority of displaced people say they want to return home, only a minority actually do so.<sup>10</sup> Persistent violence and insecurity in the areas of return, land disputes and, in some cases, the trauma suffered by displaced people who have lost loved ones as they fled, are the main obstacles to returning; especially in Masisi, where land issues pose the biggest problem.<sup>11</sup> For some displaced people, successive displacements have taken them far from their place of origin, making it more difficult to return. Meanwhile, others regularly move back and forth between their home area and their place of refuge, to maintain access to their fields. In all of these cases, returning permanently is difficult and leaves people endlessly waiting for a better tomorrow.

Local integration is rarely considered as a solution by the authorities, and the programmes of international partners tend to favour return by focusing on return areas. However, little research has been carried out into the factors that facilitate local integration and positive examples. Relocation elsewhere in the country is also very poorly documented and is not often used as a means of survival by displaced people, who favour returning or informal integration.

In recent years, research done in North Kivu has mainly focused on the situation in displacement camps, the lack of assistance for host families, the humanitarian response and the survival mechanisms of displaced people. There is an emphasis on promoting return by the authorities, and the development and stabilization programmes of international partners focus long-term assistance on return areas. As a result, little research has been undertaken into informal mechanisms for the integration of displaced people, though numerous, with the host communities – whether they are living in camps or with families. A better understanding of these integration mechanisms is needed to identify those that the authorities and the humanitarian and development community can support with a view to strengthening the resilience of displaced people.

*‘The main humanitarian actor in DRC is the Congolese people’*

Thomas Dehermann-Roy, ECHO  
Great Lakes head of office

### 3 RESULTS OF THE SURVEY CONDUCTED IN MASISI AND LUBERO

In August and September 2016, Oxfam conducted a survey of displaced people and host communities in four communities in the Masisi territory and four communities in the Lubero territory in North Kivu. The objective was to gather data about the formal and informal survival mechanisms developed by displaced people through their interactions with the host communities. In each community, eight focus groups separating women and men, young people and adults, and displaced people and the host community were carried out, in addition to forty individual interviews (more than 600 people were consulted). The participants were selected according to criteria such as socio-professional category, ethnicity, duration of displacement (ranging from one month to nine years), location of displacement (camps, host families or their own houses) and age. The individual interviews were conducted with local authorities, representatives of the camps and displaced persons' committees, law enforcement agencies and religious authorities. The research aimed to capture the reality of experience in certain locations in North Kivu and does not claim to provide an exhaustive picture of the situation of displacement in DRC.

Masisi and Lubero have experienced waves of displacement for decades. In December 2016, there were 137,000 displaced people in Masisi and 327,000 in Lubero.<sup>12</sup> The context of displacement in Masisi is characterized by the presence of displacement camps and high levels of ethnic tension stemming from historic and land conflicts, particularly between displaced Hutu and population groups who consider themselves to be native to the region, such as the Hunde. In South Lubero, there are no displacement camps and all displaced people live with host families. Oxfam's research found that tensions between displaced people and host communities are not based on ethnicity in the investigated area – where the vast majority of displaced people are Nande, like the host families – but centre around the pressure on resources (space, food, water, etc.).

Despite the diversity of contexts, the survey showed that the displaced people who enjoy the best standard of living are those who have integrated with the host community. This is largely thanks to the fact that integration opens up access to economic opportunities, which in turn facilitates acceptance by the host population. The next section outlines the main results of the survey and the implications for integration prospects by defining the concept of 'displaced person', the central role of the host communities and the importance of the social network, especially for accessing economic opportunities.

## DEFINITION OF A DISPLACED PERSON IN NORTH KIVU

Because the term ‘displaced person’ encompasses many different realities in North Kivu, it is important to define how displaced persons perceive their own displacement, how they are perceived by the host communities and how this perception affects their integration.

The majority of displaced people and members of host communities define displacement as a socio-economic status. Displaced people are destitute because they have had to abandon all their possessions and have been left with no resources. This definition implies that the quality of being a displaced person is linked to vulnerability, rather than geographical location or ethnicity.

*‘We call someone a displaced person because of their socio-economic situation in the host village.’*

Young man from a host community, South Lubero

### Displaced people in a camp, versus in a host family

While most displaced people are hosted in families, there are 41 camps for displaced persons, located in Masisi territory.<sup>13</sup> Usually, camps host the most vulnerable people – those who don’t benefit from pre-existing social networks in the host community, either because they are from another ethnic group or because they come from far away, as a result of multiple displacements.

According to people Oxfam spoke to in Masisi, there is a marked difference between how the host communities view displaced people in camps and those in host families. Displaced people in host families are unanimously perceived as courageous workers, who are fighting for their survival and are trustworthy.

On the other hand, the communities describe displaced people in the camps as ‘freeloaders’ who are taking advantage of the humanitarian aid that they can access more readily when they are in a camp. Although the host communities recognize that the displaced people in the camps are poorer than those living with host families, they consider them to be the source of security problems, accusing them of being thieves and drunkards. Despite this ‘anti-camp’ rhetoric, some members of the communities do seem to acknowledge that not all displaced people are thieves, but rather condemn the use of the camps as a refuge by thieves and armed bandits.

*‘The displaced person living in the camp is considered as the real displaced person but the one in the village is not considered as such.’*

Young lady from a host community, Masisi

In addition, the fact that displaced people in camps will usually refer any disputes to the camp representative, who is a displaced person elected by the camp’s inhabitants, compounds the marginalization of camp dwellers by fuelling resentment in the communities. The unofficial existence of two parallel systems of justice – one for displaced people in camps and another for the host communities including the displaced people they host – and the role played by the camp representative, who is defending the interests of the displaced persons, is ambiguous. Although this situation results from the fact that the majority of displaced people do not have access to traditional justice in the host area where they feel discriminated against, it reinforces the perception of the camp as a lawless zone in the eyes of the host community.



If the ethnic factor can partly explain why communities are so distrustful of displaced people in camps, the bad use of the camp setting by others members of the community (who try to benefit from aid or use camps as a refuge from security forces) can add to the negative perception of the camps. Manipulation of identities for political gain by local leaders in a context of growing inter-community tensions within the North Kivu province can also contribute to fuelling stereotypes and anti-camps rhetoric.

This dichotomy between displaced people living in camps and those in host families has implications for the social integration of displaced people in the camp. As they are less connected to the host communities and are viewed as less trustworthy, they have less access to opportunities than displaced people living with host families, as the host communities play a fundamental role in processes of integration.

## A RELATIONSHIP OF DEPENDENCE WITH THE HOST COMMUNITY

Irrespective of their situation in the community (camp or host family), displaced people in both territories are very dependent on the host communities for their survival; whether for access to food, economic opportunities or access to land. This dependence partly explains the differences in the degree of integration of displaced people living with host families and those living in camps.

Throughout their displacement, the host communities play a central role in the survival of displaced people. In the first phase of displacement, displaced people are taken in and fed by host families. After a few days, they must contribute to the household in some way if they want to stay, usually by going to work in the fields with members of the host community. After some time, because they have access to economic opportunities through their host family, some manage to rent their own houses and a small minority even manage to buy plots of land.

Displaced people in camps, meanwhile, seem to be stuck in a precarious situation and rarely manage to move beyond the status of casual labourer. This can be explained by several factors. Living in a camp they are less able to develop a local network which would give them access to more opportunities. They are also stigmatized by the host population, who favour the displaced people they know, which further limits the camp-dwellers' access to employment.

### The role of interaction in integration

The groups who interact most with the host communities are also considered to be the most integrated by displaced people and host communities.

Thus, women are perceived by all respondents as being more integrated than men, thanks to daily activities such as collecting water, going to the market and so on, that enable them to expand their networks.

Young people also have more opportunities to interact with the host communities. Their urge to make friends with members of the host community is often cited as an advantage, as is joining football teams, which is a way of

*'Those living with host families comply with the orders of the local chiefs, while those living in the camps are in a separate republic.'*

Village chief, Masisi

*'For the first few days, the host families gave me food. After that, I started doing day work in the fields of the locals; that's how I feed myself now.'*

Displaced man, Masisi, living in his own house

*'Women are more integrated as they have greater contact during the day. They go and collect water, they accompany the others in the fields, they visit the neighbour to get fire. As a result, they integrate easily.'*

Displaced girl living with a host family, South Lubero

developing a friendship network, and therefore increasing their chances of accessing economic opportunities. This is illustrated by the case of a displaced young man living with a host family in South Lubero: 'I play football. I started playing with the other players here. They told me how I can adapt to life in the village as a displaced person. I currently have a job carrying water cans, which I found out about thanks to that conversation.'

## **Establishing a relationship of trust with the host community**

Displaced people are also dependent on locals to access credit, which is essential to start a business. Most occupations other than farming – for example, teaching, joinery, business activities – are inaccessible to displaced people, either because locals favour members of their community for such positions or due to a lack of funds (particularly for business activities). Displaced people also suffer from a general lack of trust from communities because some of them are presumed to not repay their debts when they move again and leave the community; because people fear they will be cheated, it is harder for a displaced person to gain the trust of local people. As they also lack the means to pay trade association membership fees, it makes them even more dependent on their relationships with members of the host community: without their friendship and trust, they are destined to remain in a precarious financial situation.

The longer the period of displacement in a given community, the more integration opportunities usually emerge, as gaining work (even as a day labourer) or credit (via a loan) essentially depend on the networks built and the ability to make oneself known and consequently trusted in the community. However, the duration of displacement has an ambiguous impact. While a longer term presence opens up opportunities within the community, it can also increase pressure on resources, thus heightening tensions between displaced people and host communities. This is especially true in South Lubero.

## **Benefits of hosting displaced persons**

The host community often benefits from the arrival of displaced people. Most members of the community Oxfam spoke to view hosting displaced people as a way of accessing humanitarian assistance.

The presence of additional labour (which is mainly used for working in the fields) and the increase in the number of customers for local traders are also perceived as advantages. However, the biggest benefit associated with hosting displaced people, particularly in Lubero, is the creation of social links; the opportunity to expand one's network. Indeed, the vast majority of host families say that they have taken in displaced people with the idea that if they themselves are displaced one day, they too will be taken in. This belief in the reciprocity of hosting can be defined as a long-term investment in a particularly volatile context, as all members of the communities surveyed said they had been displaced at some time. Therefore, hosting is a form of social security and a resilience mechanism.

The relationship of inter-dependence between displaced people and host communities illustrates the importance of establishing informal links, whether

*'When we arrived, we established relationships with the locals because it was important to do so. Now, if you come and ask for a bit of land, they can't refuse; it's the same if you want to borrow something. You can grow crops thanks to this friendship; I live thanks to this friendship.'*

Displaced young man living in a host family, Masisi

*'Humanitarian organizations are building a school here and that school will benefit the locals as the displaced people won't be able to take it away with them.'*

Local young man, Masisi

*'Being a displaced person isn't anyone's fault. It can happen to anyone. So, we have to take them in because tomorrow it could be our turn.'*

Young man from a host community, South Lubero

through shared tasks, as in the case of women, or recreational activities, like the young football players. However, the impact of these links is limited by the lack of economic opportunities within the communities.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCESS TO ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES IN INTEGRATION

In order to be able to promote local integration mechanisms, it is necessary to define the criteria of belonging to a community and how flexible those criteria are. According to the findings of the survey, having economic status (usually through land) is a decisive element in the feeling of belonging to the community. It explains in part why the majority of displaced people in South Lubero and Masisi, territories with few economic opportunities say they do not feel like members of their host communities.

### Land at the heart of belonging to a community

In the two territories surveyed, ownership of land (a field and/or plot) was cited as the most important criterion for becoming a member of a community; in practice, this favours men as women don't have the same purchasing power and are forbidden to own land according to some customs. Being able to support oneself (no longer being dependent on a host family) was cited as the second most important criterion. These priorities illustrate the role of land, considering that, in largely agricultural economies, access to fields is essential to establish a livelihood. For the majority of the people surveyed, the duration of displacement in a given host community also fosters belonging: the longer displaced people stay in a community, the greater their chances of securing access to land (farming their own plot of land) and therefore supporting themselves.

### Is ethnicity less important than economic status?

Ethnicity is a key criterion of belonging to and, therefore, integrating into a community. Indeed, host families almost only take in people of a similar ethnicity – especially in South Lubero, which favours the integration of those of the same ethnicity.

The situation in Masisi is similar for host families, although there is greater ethnic diversity within communities, largely due to the presence of displaced persons' camps. However, even living in a camp, people who belong to the same ethnic group as the local community seem to access opportunities more easily or, at least, to face less discrimination. Thus, the fact of sharing the same language or the same customs, which have sometimes been cited as factors of belonging to the community, can be considered a way of excluding other groups.

In some cases, a lack of economic opportunity appears to be more of a brake on integration than ethnicity, especially where access to land is not conditioned by ethnicity, as is the case in most investigated areas. Furthermore, displaced people sometimes have skills that are in short supply in the host community (teachers, nurses), which generates economic opportunities based on their qualifications, regardless of their ethnicity.

*'I consider the displaced person like my brother because I have to take in someone who is Nande, like me.'*

Man from a host community, South Lubero

# PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR LOCAL INTEGRATION

Most displaced people Oxfam spoke to expressed their wish to return to their place of origin, and cited the ongoing insecurity as preventing them from doing so. Nonetheless, a significant number of displaced people say they would like to stay in their current place of refuge. While there are various factors prompting people to want to stay (trauma in the place of origin, reluctance to start over again, etc.), the majority already have an occupation or property in the host community, leading to the belief that once a person owns something in the host community (either through a job, a house or a wedding), they are no longer considered as displaced and their willingness to leave again tends to decrease.

This illustrates the importance of creating conditions that favour integration – particularly by increasing economic opportunities, which result from increased social interactions between displaced people and host communities – in order to strengthen resilience and, ultimately, the choices available to displaced people.

However, there are also challenges to local integration which will need to be addressed, while supporting it as one of the ways to find long-term solutions.

1. **Land issues:** as already described, land has a primary role in the feeling of belonging to a community. Land is also at the heart of the conflict in North Kivu. Without effective land reform at the national level, communities will keep fighting and the economic opportunities will remain limited, threatening the chances of successful local integration.
2. **Availability of resources:** it is vital to be able to absorb economically displaced people wanting to integrate, in order to reduce the potential for tensions around the reduction of local resources.
3. **Ethnic issues:** because of historical and ongoing ethnic conflicts in some areas, local integration might not be an option for a lot of displaced people whose safety will not be guaranteed. However, despite this challenge, ethnicity should not be seen or used as a hurdle for local integration if chosen by displaced people. Instead, local integration could be promoted through dialogue between communities and used as an effective tool to decrease ethnic tensions by encouraging peaceful coexistence between communities.

*‘Starving to death or dying from war... it’s death either way. That’s why we’re going back home.’*

Displaced young women living in a host family, South Lubero

*‘Will I stay? For me, life has changed for the better. I could stay here for a long time.’*

Displaced man, Masisi, own house

## 4 ADDRESSING DISPLACEMENT

Most of the actors present in North Kivu are involved in the response to displacement, whether through humanitarian or military interventions, development programmes or political activities. However, they do not all have the same approach: depending on their mandates, they may address either the effects or the causes of displacement.

### **The responses of humanitarian and development actors**

The wide range of displacement circumstances and realities makes it very difficult to prepare appropriate humanitarian responses. Although approximately 64 percent of the beneficiaries of the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan for DRC are people affected by the issue of displacement,<sup>14</sup> the international community is struggling to strengthen the resilience of host communities and displaced people in a lasting way, to make them less vulnerable to each phase of displacement. The pattern of providing humanitarian aid for three months and then withdrawing it is not well adapted to the cyclical nature of displacement and cannot strengthen people's resilience in the long term. Moreover, humanitarian assistance covers only a tiny part of the needs, and particularly neglects host families<sup>15</sup> and urban areas.<sup>16</sup>

The inability to progress from emergency aid to transitional aid, the lack of coordination between humanitarian and development interventions, and the absence of a multi-sectoral approach are all obstacles to effectively addressing displacement.<sup>17</sup> In a situation where funds are steady but humanitarian needs keep growing, the humanitarian and development actors must rethink their approach for better efficiency. Emergency aid is still required but a better coordination between humanitarian and development interventions is necessary through for example the development of inter-agency mechanisms to better support analysis and programme planning among all actors involved in displacement.<sup>18</sup>

### **The response of MONUSCO**

Protection of civilians, including displaced persons, is at the core of MONUSCO's mandate. Since the movement of populations and conflict are closely tied in North Kivu, the mission is involved in the protection of displaced people and host communities, especially when tensions arise from the arrival of displaced people in a community. Because of that, MONUSCO tends to see displacement from the security and political perspectives.

Supported by the Stabilization Support Unit (SSU) of MONUSCO, the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (ISSSS) for eastern DRC includes a return, reintegration and economic recovery pillar, the aims of which include implementing 'early recovery and community development activities to facilitate the transition from emergency relief to development assistance'. The strategy defines priority areas in which projects would be implemented, without focusing particularly on displaced people or returnees but rather on the community as a whole. If the strategy is not focused on displaced persons, some of the pillars, goals and the mechanisms it implements at

community level, such as dialogue between communities, could be used to strengthen local integration for those who chose it.

## **The response of local and national authorities**

The DRC is signatory of the Kampala Convention for the protection and assistance for internally displaced persons, which states in its article 11 the responsibility of the state in the search for durable solutions. However, as in many other African countries, the Convention has not yet been translated into national law and thus is not implemented, which means the management of displacement by authorities can still be improved. The lack of a national body in charge of dealing with internal displacement (so far, the National Commission for Refugees (CNR) is the national body in charge of internal displacement) also weakens the collection of data, analysis and the formulation of a coherent and cohesive response to displacement.

In April 2016, in a context of the gradual closing of the displaced persons' camps in North Kivu, justified by the provincial government as a measure to end the insecurity, the provincial government prepared a strategy of durable solutions to address displacement. In parallel, a similar process was commenced at the national level with the preparation of a draft national strategy in July 2016. Although there appears to be a shift from focusing only on return to considering local integration at the provincial level, it is still unclear how the strategy will be used as a humanitarian and development tool rather than a political and security one.

More importantly, there is a general lack of consultation of displaced people and host communities for what would constitute a solution and what people would like to do. So far, the main tool used to discover people's will is the intention survey, which does not guarantee that people are able to make free and informed choices. Intention surveys only ask what displaced people would wish for in an ideal situation, without contextualising risks of return or challenges to local integration. Existing and informal survival mechanisms used by displaced people are also not taken into account in the strategies. In order to ensure the efficiency of the ways of reaching solutions to displacement, consultation mechanisms must be improved and extended, particularly to the drafting of the durable solutions strategy itself.

## 5 THE NEXT STEPS

Although the aim of the humanitarian community and the authorities to break the status quo and find a solution to displacement is encouraging, the focus so far on displaced people returning home to the detriment of initiatives to support their existing survival mechanisms, including informal integration, reduces the likelihood of finding real solutions to the issue.

In a situation of protracted conflict like the DRC, return is often not realistic at least for a long period of time (for security reasons, trauma or land issues) and people should be supported while being displaced, rather than having to wait indefinitely to return. The challenge is to ensure that the solutions proposed are adapted to the reality of the context and take into account the wishes and experiences of displaced people and host communities. In North Kivu, local integration, which is already taking place informally, has emerged as an underexploited means of strengthening the resilience of displaced people while potentially reinforcing social cohesion.



A woman carries a can full of clean water in Buporo camp, North Kivu, December 2014. Photo: Eleanor Farmer/Oxfam

## 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

While the national durable solutions strategy is still waiting for approval at the national level and the provincial strategy has started to be implemented, the following recommendations should be taken into account in order to improve the long-term response to displacement in the country, especially by strengthening local integration mechanisms.

**To the DRC national and provincial authorities:**

**1. Local integration should be at the centre of the national and provincial strategies for durable solutions, as one of the most viable solutions in the short to medium terms.**

Seeking solutions to displacement implies that displacement is a temporary state. However, the reality of the DRC context is much more complex than that. With the aim of improving the protection of displaced people, their access to services and respect for their rights, the authorities should support informal local integration initiatives already underway when it is the option chosen by displaced people.

**2. The government should strengthen its arrangements for consulting host communities and displaced people before implementing solutions, in order to ensure that those solutions are adapted to the context.**

To ensure the best chances of success for a strategy of solutions to displacement, the authorities should take the time to consult displaced people and host communities and include their existing survival mechanisms in local plans. Regional exchanges of experience with neighbouring countries facing similar situations with internally displaced persons or refugees, such as Uganda or Tanzania, should also be encouraged.

**3. Because interactions with host communities foster economic opportunities for displaced people, they should be supported and reinforced.**

The social network is central to the integration of displaced people, especially as it enables them to access economic opportunities. The interventions of the authorities and development actors should focus on setting up or strengthening programmes to improve harmonious coexistence and to fight discrimination and stereotypes. The specificity of social interactions based on gender should also be taken into account and the strengthening of social interactions should be accompanied by diversification of economic activities, which requires a long-term vision and long-term funding.

**4. Local displacement solution plans should be prepared for each district, taking into account the characteristics of each context and existing development strategies.**

The territories of Masisi and Lubero have different displacement situations. Any response to displacement should consider the specific characteristics of each district in order to provide a solution adapted to the reality of the situation of displaced people. Local authorities should play a long-term role in the integration



of displaced people by promoting a culture of respect and harmonious coexistence. Furthermore, because the response to displacement is closely linked to stabilization objectives,<sup>19</sup> any strategy should take into account existing initiatives for greater coherence and effectiveness.

**5. The Kampala Convention should be translated into national law and a national body in charge of managing internal displacement should be created.**

As a signatory to the Kampala Convention, government should use the Convention as the framework for managing internal displacement in DRC. It should create a national body in charge of collecting data, analyzing trends and looking for long-term solutions to displacement and improving the management of displacement by national and provincial authorities.

**To the Humanitarian Coordinator and UN agencies, especially UNDP and UNHCR:**

**6. Host families should be considered as beneficiaries of the durable solutions strategy, along with displaced people.**

The distinction that has been made for years between displaced people, host families, returnees and refugees has had adverse effects, such as heightened tension within communities between 'real' and 'fake' displaced people, and the stigmatization of displaced people living in camps. Many of the needs of the host communities and displaced people are similar and should be addressed simultaneously, which would require international funding to be less restrictive and prescriptive in terms of how it can be used. Targeting according to status rather than need should be avoided in humanitarian and/or development interventions.

**7. Humanitarian interventions and development programmes must be coordinated better in order to strengthen the resilience of displaced people and to ensure the coherence of the response to displacement.**

The solution to displacement cannot be purely humanitarian; rather, it requires effective cooperation between humanitarian programmes and development programmes. As indicated in the Durable Solutions preliminary operational guide,<sup>20</sup> the country's development plans should include consideration of durable solutions. Inter-agency mechanisms between humanitarian, development and peace and security actors should be developed.

**To MONUSCO:**

**8. The Stabilization Support Unit should lead MONUSCO's support to any durable solutions strategy.**

The search for long-term solutions to displacement is closely linked to and encompasses some of the stabilization goals, as stated in the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (ISSSS). Links should be made between existing initiatives of the SSU and how these initiatives could contribute to planned activities to reach solutions for displaced people (such as dialogue between communities). Other sections of MONUSCO should acknowledge that the search for solutions is primarily a humanitarian and development issue, rather than only a security one.

**To INGOs and donors:**

**9. Programmes which support local integration of displaced people should be promoted as much as programmes supporting return.**

People's choices are influenced by what is available to them and what resources they will have to support their choices. By supporting local integration opportunities as much as return programmes, INGOs and donors would provide displaced people with a real and informed choice by giving them credible alternatives.

# NOTES

- 1 There were 423,000 newly displaced people in 2016 in North Kivu.
- 2 In the last 18 months, just 620,000 people (out of more than 2 million people internally displaced in the same period) have returned to their areas of origin. However, the number of newly displaced persons has risen significantly in recent months.
- 3 The African Union Convention for the Protection and assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, known as the Kampala Convention, was adopted in 2009. The Convention addresses internal displacement caused by armed conflict and natural disasters and establishes the responsibility of the state in the protection of IDPs.  
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