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Government Responsiveness to Internal Displacement in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Internal displacement in Ethiopia has a long history. In the 1980s, the government implemented 'voluntary resettlement programs' aiming to mitigate famine and balance ecological pressures in the north. However, the voluntary nature of this resettlement was contested, and the project had political motives.

This paper explores the Ethiopian government's response to internal displacement in the country. It argues that the government's recognition of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is a mixed bag, with IDPs sometimes being indirectly deprived of their status by the government. For instance, the government has been reluctant to recognize IDPs, downplaying incidents of displacement, and launching swift, and at times forcible, return processes.

The paper also finds that the institutional and legal frameworks for dealing with internal displacement are weak, with the institutional framework characterized by a lack of clarity regarding institutional mandates. The ad hoc system for responding to internal displacement, the paper argues, is indicative of the government's quick-fix approach to the problem.

The paper concludes by underscoring the need for not only state legislations and IDP policies but also of political commitment and institutional capacity for an effective response to internal displacement. It calls on the Ethiopian government to fulfill its commitment to the obligations of the Kampala Convention, which it ratified in 2020.

Keywords

Internal displacement, IDPs, Government response, Institutional framework, Kampala Convention

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1. Introduction

Internal displacement in Ethiopia, although intensified in recent years, is a phenomenon with a long history. In the 1980s, the government relocated half a million people from the northern highlands to southwestern parts of the country through what it called 'voluntary resettlement programs'. These organised mobility schemes aimed to mitigate famine and balance ecological pressures in the populated north (Rahmato, 2003). However, the voluntary nature of this resettlement was contested, and the project had political motives of alienating people from their neighbourhood to pacify political opposition in the north. Importantly, this program resulted in many deaths and induced further internal displacement afterwards (Labzaé, 2016). These IDPs include those who were physically displaced from the resettlement sites and those who, due to a lack of integration, became "displaced in place" (Regasa & Lietaert, 2022). People displaced in place are not well integrated and are structurally displaced while remaining in their permanent resettlement. Overall, due to the lack of meaningful recognition of IDPs, the lack of proper integration of the resettled, and the lack of efforts to find solutions for them, internal displacement governance has historically been poor.

Since 2017, with increased intensity and exacerbation of conflict-induced displacements, the Ethiopian government has been criticised for its weak response (MSF, 2019). On the other hand, some humanitarian organisations' reports indicate that GoE's response to internal displacement has recently improved, mainly in terms of expressing goodwill to collaborate with international partners to respond to IDP needs (DSI,2018). In a related development, a better legal environment is available for civil society organisations, giving local and international organisations better space to respond to IDP's needs.

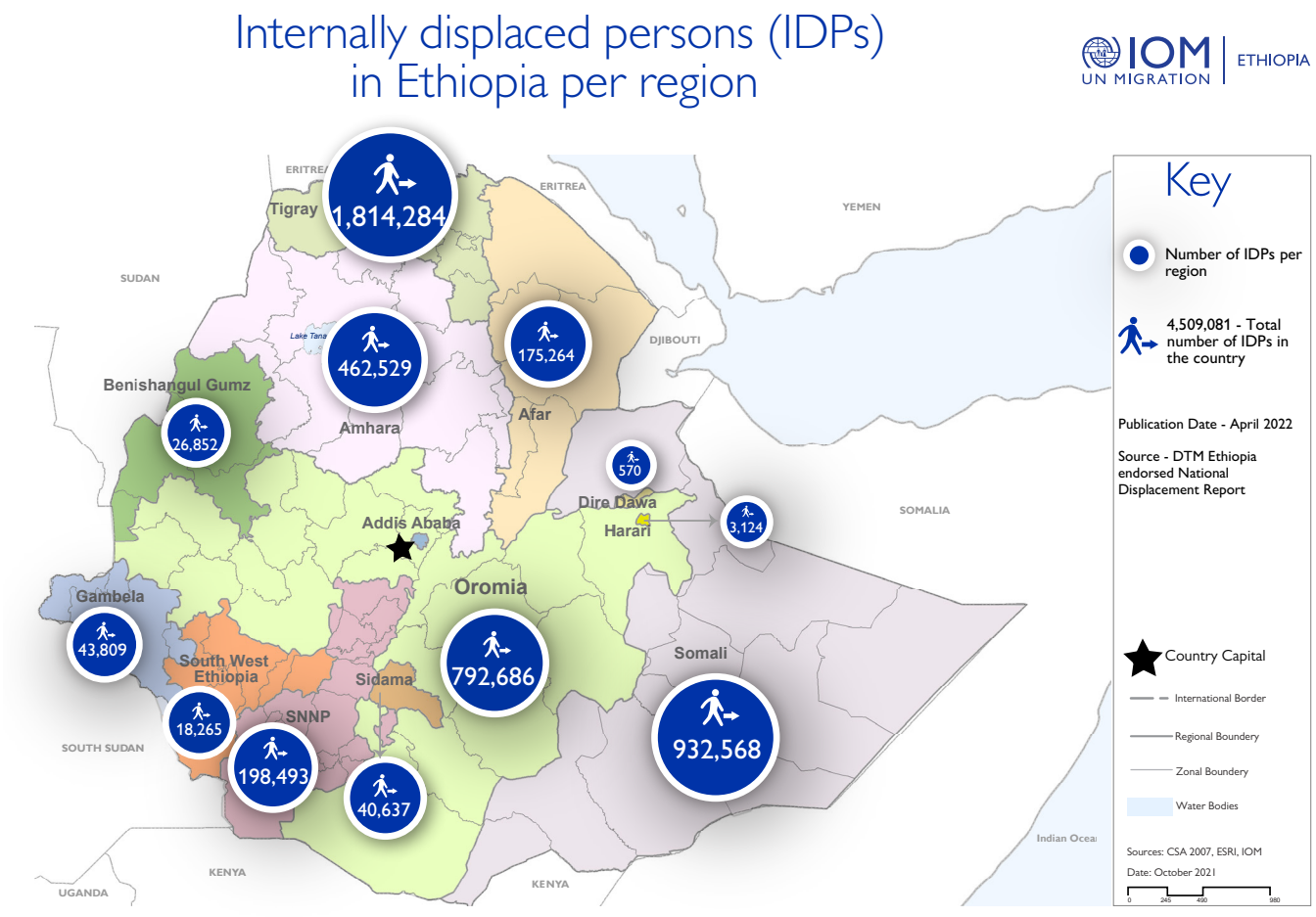

Figure 1:
Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ethiopia per region: Source: IOM (2022)

Based on analyses of international reports and academic studies, this paper examines the recognition and prioritisation of IDPs and their needs as fundamental steps to evaluate the government's responsiveness to internal displacement in Ethiopia since 2017. Concerning the recognition of IDPs, this paper will show that despite official recognition, IDPs are sometimes indirectly deprived of their status by the government. Despite the government's goodwill to tackle the problem collaboratively, the paper shows that the existing institutional and legal frameworks indicate weak government responsiveness. Instead, the current response system relies on an ad hoc-based quick-fix method in dealing with internal displacement.

In the first section of this paper, I situate a few cases of internal displacement within their political roots, reflecting on the mixed nature of government recognition of internal displacement and IDPs as a significant indicator of limited government responsiveness. While the government recognises the problem in general, it fails to recognise IDPs in some cases. In the second section, an assessment is made regarding the government's responsiveness vis-à-vis legislation, policy, and institutional setups in the country. Despite the recent ratification of the Kampala convention, no domestic law has been enacted, according to the findings of this study, and there is still no IDP policy in Ethiopia. Ongoing conflicts and security mitigation challenges complicate the process of an effective response to IDPs, including the making of IDP policy. Regarding institutions, this study finds that the institutional duty and mandate of designated agencies are left vague, impeding effective prevention, intervention, assistance, and coordination roles of the concerned government institutions. In the third section, this paper discusses the Kampala convention and exemplary practices in selected countries to ultimately demonstrate the need for IDP policy, political commitment, and institutional capacity building in Ethiopia. Although comparative cases have their own challenges, they present exemplary pathways.

The government is occasionally accused of orchestrating displacements and giving uneven responses to some displacement cases over others. However, validating such claims requires access to tangible sources and a closer study of institutional operationalisation, especially at the decentralised level.

This paper has extensively used a limited number of authoritative sources because sources with adequate case-based analysis of internal displacement governance are scanty[1]. Although it includes a few displacement cases, this paper is not an exhaustive study of internal displacement across the country. However, it could be important to integrate recent developments and study variations across the regions, especially regarding the activities and performance of decentralised concerned offices.

2. Government Regulation

Most internal displacements, whether directly or indirectly, involve politics as their cause and require government intervention for their solution. Since 1991, the Ethiopian government has addressed the problem of internal displacement within a broader framework for development-induced displacements (FDRE DRM Policy, 2013), primarily focusing on IDPs displaced by development projects and leaving out conflict-induced displacements.

In 2018, following the resignation of Prime Minster Hailemariam Desalegn amid ongoing political turmoil in the country, the ruling party selected Dr Abiy Ahmed as the new Prime Minster. The transition period witnessed political reforms that included the release of political prisoners, the official acknowledgement of the state's human rights violations, and removing the terrorist designation of political opposition (Sori, 2020). As positive and democratic as the reforms were, they created a rupture in government. Political uncertainty, tension, and the Prime Minister's internal antagonism with factions of the leading party, the Tigran People Liberation Front (TPLF), marked the early stages of the transition period (Dibu & Ahadu, 2020).

The massive early displacements in 2017 and 2018 happened amid this political upheaval, with the crisis persisting afterwards. Large-scale displacement affected the SNNPR (Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region), Somali, and Oromia regions, which have a long history of border disputes. The political transition saw tensions between the new consolidating government and local bureaucrats of the old government who failed to prevent communal conflicts or, as in the case of the Somali region, participated in popular unrest, leading to large-scale displacement (Africa News, 2018).

Although some early signs of displacement were seen in some regions, no effective preventive measures were carried out. The unpreparedness of the new government and the occasional sudden onset of displacements in some places hindered an effective

1 MSF (2019) report is one of the most relevant sources that gives an in-depth analysis of the situation under study through an elaborate case-study method.

response and an immediate mobilisation for assistance. The difficulty of mobilising a sufficient workforce on short notice stretched humanitarian capacity (MSF, 2019).

2.1 Recognition of Internal Displacement

Any governmental response towards displacement starts by recognising the problem of displacement in general and the needs of IDPs in particular. Since the 2017 displacements, the government has openly acknowledged the issue, and concerned government institutions have called on partners to resolve it collaboratively (DSI, 2018; OCHA, 2018).

According to MSF, the government was concerned that emergency-based humanitarian assistance could "create more displacement and aid dependency" and even impede the "sustainable livelihood" of IDPs. Organisations have been informed in some cases about the "pull factor". The pull factor suggests that the flow of humanitarian aid can encourage more displacement as people migrate for aid. It also implies that aid might impede return processes, as displaced people would not want to return, given the availability of aid. The discourses also indicate concerns, including the "flag-planting" problem and "overlapping aid" (MSF, 2019). On the part of the government, there is an interest in shifting from humanitarian emergency responses to displacement to rehabilitation and reintegration (DSI, 2018).

Given the IDP's desperate situation in temporary collective shelters and the shortage of emergency assistance, this government discourse contradicts reality. Along with the expressed interest in engaging international partners in rehabilitating and reintegrating phases, emergency needs must be met in the first phase of displacement. In response to displacements, on an ad-hoc basis, government institutions mobilise local donations and grant some funds to assist IDPs (Zewedu, 2021). However, such assistance has proven inadequate and faces problems when delivering need-based aid to vulnerable groups such as pregnant women or children (MSF,2019). As a result, international humanitarian aid organisations have also mobilised emergency assistance.

Regarding the CSO proclamation, the 2009 proclamation was amended in 2019. This amendment can be seen as part of the wider government reform to recognise internal displacement and allow local and international actors to function in the country. Under this law, some restrictions on CSO's funding sources and registration requirements were lifted. More importantly, the power of the Civil Society Agency, which, among other things, oversees licensing and monitoring CSOs, was significantly reduced, and CSOs are given the right to challenge the agency's decisions when needed (FDRE OSCC Proclamation, 2019).

In summary, the government now recognises internal displacement and expresses an interest in collaboratively tackling it. However, broadly recognising the problem, expressing goodwill to work collaboratively, and availing CSO law, although important steps, are not all that is needed.

2.2 Recognition of the Internally Displaced

IDPs across the state need to be recognised as being an IDP. There is a tendency to downplay incidents of displacements and launch swift returns, indicating the government's reluctance to recognize IDPs. In the 2018 displacement in SNNPR and the Oromia region, the government's first response was to immediately facilitate return even when situations were still volatile. The federal government wanted to deal with the issues instantly and provide a quick fix. The return advocacy trickled down from and was initially facilitated at the federal level, and later, local authorities made such decisions (MSF, 2019).

The rationale for the forcible return of IDPs was somehow not clear to humanitarian agents who called for a more gradual approach. Moreover, the return effort was protested by IDPs themselves in the Gedo zone, even through explicit demonstrations (MSF, 2019).

In response, the government gathered traditional leaders and local administration for talks, and IDPs were promised rehabilitation assistance, aid, and security upon return. Humanitarian actors dialogued with the federal government and were told that the returns would be carried out voluntarily in line with humanitarian principles of safety, dignity, and sustainability (Response Plan, 2018).

The government's swift return process had repercussions, as it created new waves of displacements after the return. In April 2018, around 274,548 IDPs were displaced in the Gedo zone of SNNPR and 84,000 in Guji of the Oromia region. After the return in June 2018, 642,152 IDPs were displaced in Gedo, and 176,098 IDPs were displaced in West Guji (Response Plan, 2018).

Figure 2:
Gedo (SNNP) and West Guji (Oromia) conflict, Horn Affairs (2018)

Among the government's stated rationales for the return were the precarious conditions in the sites, posing risks to public health, cholera, and that the collective centres were schools that needed to be evacuated before the school season (UNICEF, 2019, Response Plan, 2018). Remarkably, none of these rationales took into consideration the well-being and security of IDPs. Besides its interest in "resolving" the issues quickly, this indicates that the government was not ready to face the spillover impacts of the displacement in the host areas and wanted to clear the temporary settlement sites as soon as possible.

Moreover, there are indications that political interests may have played a role. For instance, the return interest on the part of regional governments was such that the Gedo would return because local administrative authorities in Gedo did not like that Gedo people were "pushed out" of the Guji area. Authorities may have feared a permanent demographic shift in the zone. Political dynamism and manoeuvres contributed to the complexities of intervention and humanitarian assistance work in the

2018 displacements in the two sites (MSF, 2019). Consequently, the needs of IDPs went unmet; instead, IDPs were returned to places where security remained fragile.

The consequence of these 'pushbacks' has been the discouragement of IDPs in the sites from claiming IDP status. The government introduced the practice of providing aid assistance based on status or IDP beneficiary registry. For instance, IDPs from Guji who arrived in Gedo but were not registered as IDPs no longer received assistance in Gedo, indirectly denying them IDP status. This restriction of aid in the Gedo zone continued until 2019. Some humanitarian agents tried to bypass the authorities to deliver aid directly to vulnerable IDPs, with limited success. Certain NGOs openly challenged the system, requesting inclusion in the registry phase, but their requests were denied. As a result, some of them even suspended assistance to avoid manipulation of aid (MSF, 2019).

This case study highlights that the recognition of IDPs is inherently political. Government acknowledgement of IDPs would entail admitting the extent of the prevailing political crisis and the imminent protractedness of the problem. This poses a challenge to the recognition of IDPs as political instability and inter-communal conflict has been a threat to the legitimacy of the government and one of the primary sources of its criticism (Dibu & Ahadu, 2020). Although the government recognises the problem at large and expresses interest in working on the issue, it does not recognise all IDPs. As demonstrated, government authorities deprive IDPs of their status at times by restricting humanitarian aid. Overall, the government's recognition can be seen as a mix of recognising internal displacement in general, and, to only a certain extent, recognising IDPs.

3. Legal and Institutional Frameworks

In addition to recognising internal displacement and IDPs, assessing the available or absent legal and institutional frameworks is crucial to understanding how the government truly recognises the problem and how responsive it is.

3.1 Legal Framework

The constitution, specifically Art 44, provides for the compensation of the displaced through development projects (FDRE Constitution, 1995). Notably, this provision does not address conflict-induced displacements. In 2019, the refugee law was revised to allow for better integration and access to education, as well as work permits for people receiving refugee status in Ethiopia (Seifeselassie, 2019). However, a similar law has not been developed for Ethiopian citizens who are IDPs. In the same year, a new CSO proclamation was ratified, although not a direct law addressing IDPs. In February 2020, Ethiopia ratified the Kampala Convention, which requires the domestication of local laws for its implementation. Art 3(2) of the Kampala convention mandates state parties to enact or amend local laws in conformity with the convention. There have been exchanges of practices between Kampala member states as part of the durable solutions initiatives, where MoP and other concerned institutions have received training on how to domesticate the Kampala convention (Seifeselassie, 2019). Moreover, under the Kampala convention, the AU Model Law has been designed to serve as a model for states to legislate in conformity with the needs of IDPs (Fekadu, 2021). It is unclear from the sources whether attempts were made to adopt such models in Ethiopia, but this study identifies no such law. The absence of amendments to laws and regulations affects the translation of the existing DRM policy into action in the case of conflict-induced internal displacement.

3.2 Policy Framework

Regarding policies, there is the 2013 policy on national risk and disaster management. Although this document defines IDPs as people displaced due to natural or man-made disasters, including conflict, its provisions only target development-induced internal displacement. It proposes strategies for early warning and official declaration systems, decentralised management, and technology-based information management. The policy mainstreams disaster and risk mainly to the development plans of government and private institutions. Its strategy indicates that mobilisation of resources should build capacity from internal sources unless the inability of in-country capacity proves impossible. The policy also highlights the need to enhance implementation capacity through an effective organisational structure and workforce with relevant knowledge, skills, experience, and attitude (FDRE DRM policy, 2013).

Although the problem of internal displacement is currently extensive, Ethiopia does not have an IDP policy. The ongoing conflict continues to impede the policy-making process (Adem, 2020).

IDP policy is important in bridging gaps to effectively respond to internal displacement. States that have better performance in IDP governance have IDP policies. Although effectiveness cannot be entirely deduced from availing a policy, it can still be argued that it is the next important step for the GoE to take. Moreover, the absence of IDP policy or any appropriate legal framework is indicative of the weak responsiveness of the government. Besides, a clear policy can resolve some practical challenges in IDP governance. In Ethiopia, solutions to institutional impediments, as will be discussed in the next part, require a clear IDP policy framework.

3.3 Institutional Framework

Concerning the institutional set-up, the Ministry of Peace (MoP), established in 2018, succeeding the previous Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Development Affairs, is mandated to oversee the National Disaster and Risk Management Commission (NDRMC) since 2018 . The MoP is tasked with implementing the Kampala convention, by coordinating concerned bodies.

The ministry has two major departments: 'peacebuilding and national consensus' and 'federalism and conflict management'. It also houses five major directorates, one of which is the 'conflict early warning directorate' that runs a 'situation room' with an electronic network system collecting information about indicators of forth-coming conflicts through phone calls and SMS text messages from people. Other units within the MoP include the durable solutions for conflicts directorate, law enforcement directorate, crime monitoring and controlling directorate, and peace value mentoring and national consensus directorate (MoP official website).

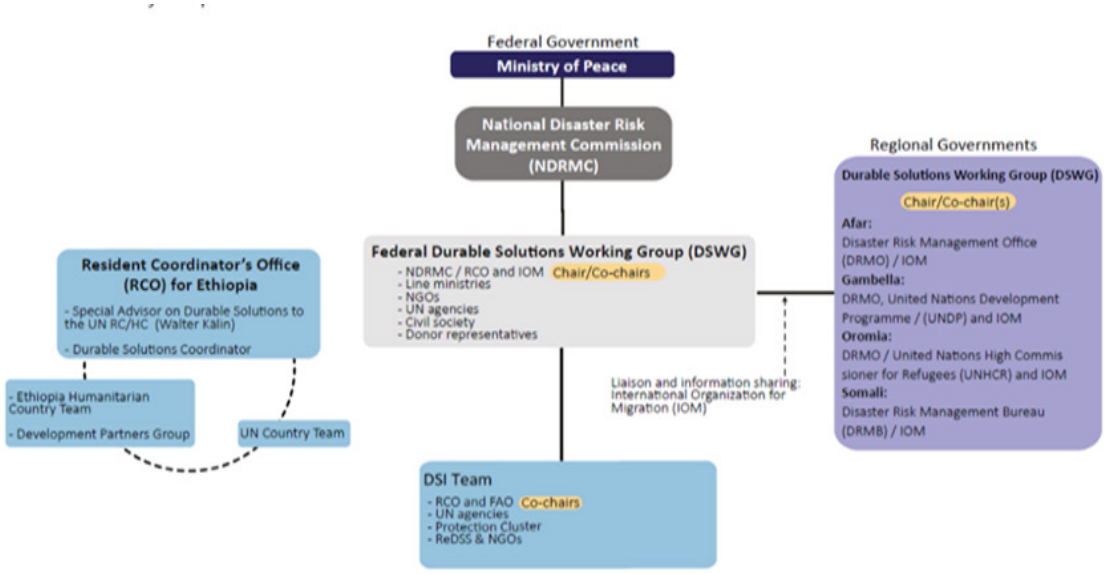

Figure 3:
Durable Solution Initiative (2020)

The NDRMC is the central organ dealing with internal displacement, as it has decentralised offices. Established in 2015 under the Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Development Affairs and aligned with the 2013 Disaster and Risk Management policy, the NDRMC initially focused on natural disaster management. While explicitly addressing IDPs, it was mandated to alarm authorities through its early warning mechanism and mitigation of and recovery from disaster, including internal displacement. The NDRMC has a Disaster Response Rehabilitation directorate, working towards long-term solutions. It conducts studies and assessments before, during, and after disasters and coordinates similar centres at the federal, regional, zone, and wereda levels. NDRMC mobilises national and international resources and watches the proper utilisation of allocated resources, and it leads, coordinates, and provides emergency responses (DSI, 2020).

One major problem with this institutional framework is that DRM structures vary across the regions, and they lack skill, manpower, and resources. There is a serious capacity-building gap at the decentralised levels (Desalegn, 2022).

The MoP's involvement in inter-regional peace dialogues makes it a crucial institutional framework for IDP governance. Overall, the missions and vision of the MoP mainly reflect a facilitating and advocacy role involving assessments, deliberations, and recommendations for corrective measures to the regional government or institutions.

In the Ethiopian institutional set-up, the MoP, being a federal institution, can only intervene upon the requests of regions, limiting its mandate. Moreover, inter-regional issues such as border disputes, often associated with internal displacement, are technically mandated to the House of Federation according to the constitution (FDRE Constitution, 1995). Therefore, there is a problem of a limited mandate for the ministry to conduct its responsibilities successfully.

Apart from this institutional framework, an ad hoc national task force comprising various ministries, including Health, Water, Energy & Irrigation, and Agriculture, responds to internal displacement cases. This ad hoc system originated with the National Steering Committee established by the Prime Minister to respond to the Somali-Oromia border conflict in 2017 (Fekadu, 2021).

Other concerned institutions include the Human Rights Commission, which now has a directorate for the Rights of Refugees and Internal Displacement, focusing on human rights violations. The directorate monitors the HR conditions of IDPs and advocates for their rights. For instance, it conducts joint HR monitoring with the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in some displacement-affected areas, submitting assessment results and recommendations to the respective regional governments on displacements since 2018. However, it lacks enforcement power and manpower (Adem, 2020). The Ethiopian Human Rights Council, a local NGO, also engages similarly and does press releases, special reports, and annual reports. The ombudsman and other bodies such as the police, court, and even the House of Peoples representatives are all concerned bodies.

The coordination role of institutions depends on the availability and utilisation of data. The government acknowledges problems like "flag-planting", aid "overlapping", and "duplication" problems in coordination works. At the same time, the government's capacity to gather and use efficient information to assign agencies to the right humanitarian assistance location is vital. Humanitarian agencies indicate that they do not receive sufficient information, and they sometimes mistrust local authorities (MSF, 2019). Some information-related gaps in coordinating humanitarian assistance delivery include lengthy assessment processes without transparent decision-making. In some cases, there are long lapses in the importation process for non-food items and kits for humanitarian agents (OCHA, 2018).

This study identifies a lack of up-to-date information on legal and institutional frameworks as well as intervention practices. Poor data recording and management could indicate serious capacity limitations and possibly a discreet process of displacement governance to some extent.

Therefore, the institutional framework reveals a lack of clarity regarding institutional mandates. The framework also indicates the ad hoc nature of mobilising actions and capacity limitations which impede effective government response to internal displacement. The absence of a straightforward institutional setup could indicate weak responsiveness, whereas the ad hoc institutional nature demonstrates the quick-fix approach.

4. States under the Kampala Convention

4.1 The Kampala Convention

The Kampala Convention, a binding African Union Convention for the protection and assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), was adopted by the AU in 2009 and came into effect when the first 15 states ratified it in 2012. Grounded in international human rights law and the 2004 guiding principles on IDP, it includes provisions for the three phases of displacement management: prevention, protection, and re-integration. Art 3 demands states to "refrain from, prohibit and prevent arbitrary displacement of population". Art 5 states that "states parties shall bear the primary duty and responsibility for providing protection of and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons". According to Art 11, "states parties shall seek lasting solutions to the problem of displacement by promoting and creating satisfactory conditions for voluntary return, local integration or relocation on a sustainable basis and in circumstances of safety and dignity" (AU, Kampala Convention, 2009, P. 15).

Article 3 of the Kampala Convention requires states to allocate a sufficient budget and mandates inclusive IDP governance, involving not only central and municipal government agencies, but also civil societies, IDPs themselves, and host communities. The Convention also requires unrestrained access to humanitarian activities and cooperation with regional states parties of the convention. In terms of institutional capacity-building, the convention requires a coordinating body engaged in both national and local level governance with clear and concrete mandates and resources.

There are other parallel frameworks in Africa, such as the Pact on Security, Stability, and Development in the Great Lakes Region (Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda) (Beyani, 2020). This pact has a Protocol on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons and a Protocol on the Property Rights of Returning Persons.

Although the Kampala Convention is the most crucial framework for IDPs, it has fewer signatories and weak implementation. Only 30 have ratified it, and it is not domesticated by many signatory states. States perceive the convention as an already-existing legal framework in their legislation owing to its parallel human rights-based contents (Beyani, 2020). Moreover, domestication faces two significant challenges. One is the duty of state parties under the Convention to work with international agents and local non-state actors, including armed groups, which states find difficult for many reasons. The second challenge is the complexity of the process and technical expertise required to domesticate the convention. To this end, the United Nations mandates the protection of the human rights of internally displaced persons, and the Brookings Project has provided a manual for law and policymakers to guide domestication. Moreover, once made, interpretation and implementation of the laws in line with the Convention is crucial (Beyani, 2020).

Regarding the monitoring and implementation process, Kampala member states are required to integrate the measures taken in compliance with the convention in their report to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) (Fekadu, 2021). States parties have also adopted the 2017 Harare Plan of Action to facilitate the Convention's implementation.

The operationalisation of the Kampala convention is complemented by a program adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in 2010 called the Durable Solutions Initiative (DSI). This conceptual framework was intended to respond to internally displaced people through voluntary return, sustainable re-integration or sustainable resettlement. The major pillars of this initiative include gradual interventions for human rights, humanitarian development, reconstruction, and peace-building challenges with coordinated interventions from international actors (Ferris, 2020).

Success stories of operationalising the Convention mainly involve legalising and institutionalising internal displacement issues. However, few states appear exemplary, especially those that have domesticated the convention in their legislation and made policy. This paper discusses the cases of Uganda and Somalia in the following section.

4.2 Some Comparative Experiences

Uganda's 10-year resettlement program, conducted by the government, is lauded as a success, particularly in meeting the Kampala Convention obligations on disaster-preparedness and prevention (Workshop Report, 2015). Adhering to international guidelines on IDPs, the state established a national policy for IDPs in 2004, predating the Kampala convention. Uganda boasts a coordination body and national and local intergovernmental coordination arrangements at the national and local levels (Republic of Uganda National IDP Policy, 2004). The government had return and resettlement guidelines since 2007 with a resettlement policy underway. Accordingly, concerned ministries were effectively involved. The government invested 10 million dollars to buy land, build infrastructure and services, and cultivate them initially and relocate people. The budget from the affected area of government was distributed to the local government receiving the IDPs. The government held housing titles for 25 years to ensure tenure and prevent the possibility of a sale (Workshop Report, 2015).

However, Uganda's interventions did not go beyond the safety and security aspects of IDPs. The government prioritises enhancing the military protection of IDPs in protected villages. Integrating more economic and social aspects of assistance to IDPs requires the political will of the government (Van Deetjen, 2020).

In Somalia, small community-based businesses were given training so that they provided locally available building materials, which the government used for housing construction for IDPs. Once complete, portions of the houses were allocated to residents. Additionally, a Durable Solutions Initiative was implemented to prioritise and execute initiatives. The institutions gave technical expertise and high-level strategic guidance and oversight, and a durable Solutions Secretariat was established with a mainstreaming role, and clear vertical and horizontal coordinating roles for institutions. As part of DSI, radio broadcasts facilitated IDP participation in voicing challenges and priorities, while text messages were also collected. The institutional component of this initiative has been appreciated, especially by Ethiopia, which also adopted the DSI in 2019.

These experiences underscore that, beyond the Convention, the critical elements are not only appropriate legislation and IDP policy but also strong political commitment, institutional efficiency, and financial capacity to implement the policy. Experiences of states under the Kampala Convention demonstrate the need for IDP policy. Moreover, the challenges the states faced even after adopting IDP policy indicate that government responsiveness requires not only IDP policy but also strong political commitment and institutional capacity-building.

4.3 Ethiopia and the Kampala Convention

In 2019, Ethiopia officially launched the Durable Solutions Initiative for IDPs, and later, in February 2020, it ratified the Kampala convention. DSI, serving as a tool for the Kampala Convention, involves the MoP chaired by the DRMC and co-chaired by IOM and the UN Resident's Coordinators Office (RCO). Key activities encompass return, resettlement, and re-integration with IDPs participating in planning and decision-making. Lasting solutions include local conflict management mechanisms, reconciliation, and assistance in housing, land, and property issues (DSI, 2018). The Federal Durable Solutions Working Group coordinates national, international, and government partners. Similarly, MOP is the designated body for the Kampala Convention in Ethiopia.

Within the DSI framework, efforts have been made to engage IDPs and host communities, integrating resettlement areas within urban planning, as seen in places like Dire Dawa. The Somali regional government has also adopted the DSI strategy 2022-2025 (DSI, 2020).

However, DSI has not been scaled up, and during the civil war in 2020-2022, there was antagonism between most humanitarian agencies and the GoE. Some agencies, such as MSF and OCHA, were suspended by the government for "spreading misinformation" (MSF, 2022, OCHA, 2022). Additionally, DSI has not been sufficiently implemented due to minimal budget allocation from the UN. (Zewidu, 2021). Relatedly, COVID-19 pressures have impacted the initiative's implementation (Seifeselassie, 2019). The Tigray war, as it has slowed international aid, might also have hindered this initiative. After the November 2022 cessation of hostilities, signed in Pretoria, between the federal government and the Tigran People Liberation Front (TPLF), humanitarian access is opening up again in the northern parts of the country, where there are many IDPs (OCHA, 2023).

Overall, the institutional setup in Ethiopia does not fit the authorised regional and national institutions that the Kampala Convention requires to handle internal displacement. In Ethiopia, the MoP has a coordination mandate and multiple other functions. In some instances, responses to internal displacement are ad hoc, with no institution taking full responsibility. Relatedly, capacity-building is also about financial capacity. Although the Kampala convention puts clear financial commitment of governments to govern internal displacements, the GoE, for example, has officially held reservations about the financial compensation requirements of the Kampala convention (Zewidu, 2021). Moreover, as discussed in earlier sections, laws are not endorsed, and policy is not availed to implement the Convention.

5. Conclusion

The government response, as reflected in the recognition of internal displacement, is noteworthy. To this end, better CSO law and openness are expressed to work collaboratively with international actors. Simultaneously, the government expresses concern toward the humanitarian emergency-aid framework and calls for sustainable solutions for internal displacement instead. Moreover, as demonstrated in some instances, the government shows reluctance to recognise IDPs and fully prioritise their needs. Consequently, hasty return processes for IDPs have been implemented, leading to additional displacement. Thus, the recognition of internal displacement remains superficial without a corresponding recognition of IDPs.

Furthermore, designated institutions lack clear definitions with specific roles and mandates, contributing to the ineffective governance of internal displacement. Although a member of the Kampala convention, Ethiopia has, according to my findings so far, not legislated laws and IDP policy is still absent. Therefore, like recognition, the institutional and legal frameworks, and absence of policy show weak government responsiveness.

Additionally, the experiences of some African states underscore the need for not only state legislations and IDP policies, but also political commitment and institutional capacity for an effective response to internal displacement. In Ethiopia, ongoing and unmitigated conflicts pose challenges to an effective response system, and the lack of capacity and, perhaps, political will at different governance levels, further complicates internal displacement governance.

Since Ethiopia is now a state party to the Kampala Convention, the government must fulfil its commitment to the obligations of the Convention. Three years after the ratification, significant steps must be taken in accordance with its provisions. Despite the complexities of the overall political field in the country, which might partially explain the delays, institutions need to be authorised and legal, and policy frameworks need to be crafted to respond to IDP needs and alleviate the crisis. To this end, comprehensive policy consultations are necessary for the problem of internal displacement.

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