

# Bringing internally displaced persons back into sight in the Democratic Republic of Congo

## Key messages:

- Neighbours, new friends and the local authorities form vital support networks for IDPs, but many remain vulnerable with their basic needs unmet.
- International and national actors should better monitor the activities and needs of IDPs, and reach out to those who lack social support networks.
- Access to markets, land and education are also key to protect the most vulnerable groups.

## Introduction

The eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has faced conflict from armed and rebel groups for the past two decades, which has displaced millions of people. Currently, 776,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) live in North Kivu, with 62% living outside of camps (OCHA, 2016). South Kivu has 362,000 IDPs, but with a greater percentage living outside of camps due to lack of provision in that province (NRC 2014).

Arriving in big cities such as Bukavu or Goma, IDPs have urgent needs that need to be met, such as housing and health care for their families, education for their children, and the economic means to survive. To provide better assistance, it is essential to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of the needs and experiences of IDPs, as well as the coping strategies that they employ. Many researchers have stressed the importance of support from family and the wider community when IDPs arrive in a safe place – providing shelter and food, paying school fees, or helping to find employment (Vincent and Sorenson, 2001; Brun, 2003; Dick, 2002; Jacobsen, 2002; Davies, 2012). Yet, as highlighted in this briefing paper, other types of relationships – in particular with acquaintances and the authorities – can be just as important for IDPs trying to build their lives in the city.

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This briefing paper considers the support channels assisting IDPs who live outside of camps, as well as improvements that need to be made to the unpredictable assistance given within camps. The research is part of a broader programme of work by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium,<sup>1</sup> which explores how people are able to maintain or create secure livelihoods during and after violent conflict. Here, we explore the livelihood strategies of IDPs in urban areas, mechanisms for sustaining their survival, and the responsiveness of camp residents to the threat of camp closures. We ask, how do IDPs maintain their livelihoods in eastern DRC?

### Finding IDPs in eastern DRC: methodology and study participants

This study was conducted in eastern DRC in the provinces of South Kivu (in Bunyakiri, Nindja, Lusenda and several neighbourhoods in Bukavu) and North Kivu (in the Mugunga III IDP camp in Goma) from October 2013 to May 2015. The task of finding IDPs in North Kivu was somewhat straightforward, because many IDPs stay in camps in that province. However, this was difficult in South Kivu where IDP camps are non-existent. To add a further challenge, IDPs are not registered as a particular group, and therefore relevant information about them is not recorded anywhere.

Forging connections with NGO workers, priests, pastors and local neighbourhood authorities, as well as having discussions with the owners of small restaurants, tailors and bartenders in poor neighbourhoods, was a useful strategy to gather information about the IDP population. The fact that people were accustomed to being asked questions for research facilitated this approach, and reduced expectations such as receiving payment for an interview.

Data was collected through interviews, participant observation, observation and focus groups from 123 IDPs (45 living in Bukavu, 41 living in the Mugunga III camp, and 37 women working in Bukavu markets). Data was collected through visits to participants' neighbourhoods or villages, as well as spending time with them in their residences or on their way to work. Conversations touched on issues such as their decision to leave their homes, concerns about enrolling their children in school, their meals, livelihood activities and relations with neighbours in their new environment.

### Key findings

#### Network support in Bukavu

Although previous research has stressed the role of community and family ties in providing support for IDPs, most IDPs in Bukavu live in poor neighbourhoods far from their relatives or friends.

Acquaintances and new friends represent relevant ties for IDPs because of the types of support they provide. For many

1. See [www.securelivelihoods.org](http://www.securelivelihoods.org).

IDPs, finding a job is central to their survival. In this situation, neighbours serve as a significant source of support, because they tend to share characteristics such as being poor, lacking skills and having access to similar types of jobs as the IDPs. After spending several months at his father-in-law's house, Baba Atongwe moved to the Igoki neighbourhood in Bukavu and was in search of a job. He asked a neighbour what he did for a living and, with this neighbour's support, started to carry goods in a market to survive.

IDPs' networks may also include formal authorities, which provide useful assistance and can be trusted for certain matters such as housing. Maman Falizi arrived in the Panzi neighbourhood without knowing the city, and encountered people who directed her towards the office of the *chef de quartier* (the official neighbourhood chief). This individual hosted Maman Falizi and her children for several days, before he found a longer-term place for them.

Some IDPs face violence or resort to transactional sex in their attempts to establish a network to meet their needs, however. Dada Louise came to Bukavu from Shabunda, where she sold avocados to survive. She has two children with different fathers, and explained that both men abandoned her although they seemed to be in love and promised her favours such as clothes, a job or health care for her children. Although there are cases of support and solidarity, women and girls are vulnerable to abuse, early pregnancy, and often feel unable to report what has happened because of shame, fear and the cost of bringing a case to court.

#### IDP women's livelihoods in Bukavu

Many IDP women are expected to continue their domestic role, while also becoming breadwinners as men often stay behind to look after their assets or work in the countryside. Combining these two roles, IDP women can become involved in petty trade because this type of work provides an opportunity to earn a daily wage. Markets in Bukavu are often described as places with many rules and regulations where the poor and vulnerable are excluded, however, therefore we interviewed 37 IDP women across four markets to gain a better understanding of how they negotiate this environment.

There are two types of markets in this context: recognised markets and non-recognised ('pirate') markets. The first are managed by a market committee established by the commune and Bukavu town hall, and are strongly regulated by sellers' networks that are protective of the market and competition among sellers. The second fall under a *chef de quartier*. Official daily taxes and informal taxes are collected at both types of markets.

IDP women largely engage in recognised markets, working in the lowest positions available, such as hawkers with no fixed place to sell or retailers with a fixed place on the ground. Maman Nathalie stays in the neighbourhood of Igoki and sells products that she can carry, such as small bags of salt, body

lotion or soap. She walks for 45 minutes to reach Kadutu market (recognised market), where she doesn't have a place to sit, but is part of a fixed area where she is known. Many IDP women are able to earn money in the large markets despite the competition among sellers, because they bridge the gap between big retailers and customers who do not have time to enter the markets.

Accessing recognised markets through sellers' networks is important for getting goods on credit and maintaining a means of survival. At Beach Muanzi market in Bukavu, Maman Noella sells flour and works as a hawker. She began getting goods on credit after she paid the president of the sellers' network in charge of the flour section to gain membership, and then became known within the network. Other IDP women find it difficult to become members, however, and have to rely on more precarious community ties. Maman Adele used to get avocados on credit from a supplier in Beach Muanzi who was from the same village (Bunyakiri). After her supplier went bankrupt, Maman Adele had to find another supplier who would give her credit.

Daily taxes are also a hardship for many IDP women, especially in non-recognised markets. Maman Mugoli sells vegetables at Kafundwe market in the Bagira commune. When a seller here does not pay the daily tax, she must pay double the amount on the next day. In contrast, Maman Nelly sells vegetables at the recognised Beach Muanzi market and can escape the daily tax when she is sick, or has to miss a day at the market to care for a sick child for example. In these cases, Maman Nelly must inform the person in charge of the sellers' network so that the tax collector does not ask her for that day's taxes. Some IDP women can avoid paying daily taxes in situations of vulnerability, whilst others such as Maman Mugoli cannot.

A recurring aspect in women's stories is that they can only solicit support from neighbours, authorities or market managers during a short period when they can successfully claim vulnerability as a newly arrived IDP. After some time, they are expected to get by without further favours. This means that the early stages of being an IDP in the city may feel easier than thereafter when hardships have to be dealt with unassisted.

### IDP groups in the Mugunga III camp

In North Kivu, assistance to IDPs is organised around camps, where IDPs are seen as vulnerable and in need of essential assistance such as housing. But IDP camps have been problematic in the eyes of local authorities, who blame the camps for insecurity in some neighbourhoods in Goma.



La Botte neighbourhood in Bukavu

The sudden demolition of a camp in Kiwanja on 5 December 2014 following authorisation by the governor of North Kivu raised fears among IDPs, and caused concern among humanitarian actors who claimed that they have the right to assist IDPs in the process of resettlement before a camp is closed. According to these humanitarian actors,<sup>2</sup> 2,300 IDPs were asked to leave the Kiwanja camp on 2 December 2014, and on 3 December the IDPs were forcibly ejected and instructed to return to their villages or find a place to live in the Kiwanja neighbourhood.

Following the events in Kiwanja, the Mugunga III camp was the next to be closed. This presented the possibility to engage with 41 IDPs to gain an in-depth understanding of their lives in the Mugunga III camp, and to observe their responses to the threat of closure. We were also able to visit their new places of residence after the camp's closure.

Despite being residents of a camp, a significant number of IDPs are able to purchase plots of land in Goma neighbourhoods. Papa Andre came from Rutchuru at the Mugunga III camp in 2012. At the end of 2013, he bought a plot of land in the Mugunga neighbourhood with the assistance of a co-worker in a bar in Goma, who facilitated the connection with the land owner. Like Papa Andre, many IDPs prefer to buy a plot of land in Goma instead of returning to the countryside as land disputes are common in their villages. Some IDPs were able to generate enough income to stay in Goma.

Local authorities have the power to allocate plots of land in Goma neighbourhoods, but the multiplicity of authority can be a major obstacle. Baba Emil is from Masisi territory and arrived at

2. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49531>



the Mugunga III camp in 2011. He obtained a plot of land after paying money to the *chef de groupement* who is also the chief of the land. During an interview, Baba Emil explained that he was in conflict with a man who claimed to be the owner of the plot he was occupying, based on documents from a different chief. This case – which is not the only one encountered – illustrates the clash over authority for allocating land in Goma, and demonstrates the vulnerability of IDPs regarding land ownership. In total, 20 of our study participants bought plots through this process, without clear documentation.

Some IDPs are very experienced with the lifestyle and practices in the camps, however, and have been able to gain access to property outside of the camp in anticipation of the closure. Maman Esther is from Rutchuru and first joined a camp in 2006 in Rutchuru centre. She then moved to the Kanyatruchinya camp in Nyragongo centre in 2009, and then to the Mugunga III camp in 2012. She discussed her different roles in all of these camps in the past, firstly as the president of an association in charge of soap and brickworks, then the focal point for sexual and gender-based violence, and finally a member of a hygiene facility. She has rented a house in the Office neighbourhood in Goma city since 2013.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Through our analysis of IDPs in the urban settings of Goma and Bukavu, we have found that neighbours, new friends and the local authorities are vital to IDPs gaining access to housing, sources of revenue and other assistance in poor neighbourhoods.

Nevertheless, despite the social solidarity that IDPs encounter, most of them remain vulnerable with many of their needs unmet, especially after the initial stage as an IDP. Women and young girls are particularly vulnerable: the lack of opportunities and the need for survival can expose them to abuse and force them to engage in transactional sex. Homelessness can also be a threat to many IDPs due to inadequate property rights.

To better assist IDPs in eastern DRC, we propose the following for international, humanitarian and Congolese actors:

- Support should bolster IDPs' own strategies for moving through the stages of displacement and settling in the city. This requires closer monitoring of IDP activities, vulnerabilities and unmet needs.

- Community ties that integrate IDPs in the area of destination are key. It remains important to reach out to IDPs who lack such ties and are excluded from the associated benefits.
- Allocation of land should be more transparent for IDPs and other poor city dwellers.
- It is important to recognise the vulnerability of young girls and to reach out to them, especially providing education on early pregnancy and other forms of abuse.
- Credit mechanisms can facilitate IDP women in their efforts to gain access to markets and enable them to balance work with their household responsibilities. This is equally important for other poor people in urban areas.
- Camp closures should be organised in such a way to give IDPs sufficient time to prepare and protect themselves.

Homelessness can be a threat to many IDPs due to inadequate property rights

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