



Research article

Forced displacements and the environment: Its place in national and international climate agenda

Maereg Tafere¹

World Vision Canada



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Environmental impact
Climate change/variation
Conflicts
Deforestation clusters
Disasters
Internally displaced persons (IDPs)
Rapid environmental impact assessment
Refugees

ABSTRACT

Countries in the East African region have for decades been synonymous with natural disasters, conflicts and severe environmental degradation. About 10 million out of the 65.6 million displaced persons globally are found in this region. This paper presents an empirical analysis of environmental impacts caused by forced displacements in five East African countries. Contrary to a widely-held opinion, there is sufficient anecdotal and empirical evidence depicting environmental damage caused by refugees and/or Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). A spatial analysis of current and former refugee and/or IDP camps in these five countries suggests the formation of “deforestation clusters” with concentrations of camps that compound environmental impacts. Technological advancements such as remote sensing capabilities can provide the means for assessing and implementing environmental protection measures. This paper recommends environmental care in humanitarian settings be considered an integral part of the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and climate change/variability agenda, based on cost- and responsibility-sharing, employing technology, and incorporating appropriate monitoring tools.

1. Introduction

Globally, disasters have affected over 193 million people annually between 2005 and 2014 (World Disaster Report, 2015). Conflicts also force millions of people to flee their homes and settle as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) or refugees in temporary camps. The combined effect of natural disasters and conflicts on human displacements is astoundingly high. In 2014, the number of forced displacements jumped to an all-time high of 59.5 million (UNHCR, 2014). That figure increased to 65.3 million in 2015 and 65.6 in 2016, of which about 50 million are hosted in Asia and Africa (UNHCR, 2016, 2017). Even worse, it is estimated that by 2050, the world may have as many as 200 million environmental migrants due to climate change (Brown, 2008). If current trends are to go by, most refugees and IDPs (Displaced Persons – DPs) will be hosted by less-economically developed countries. At the end of 2016, the top six host countries were: Turkey (2.9 million), Pakistan (1.4 million), Lebanon (1.0 million), Islamic Republic of Iran (979,400), Uganda (940,800), and Ethiopia (791,600), in that order (UNHCR, 2017). The highest proportion (84%) of the displaced are hosted by low- and middle-income countries, 28% being in the least-developed countries. Other countries in the East Africa region, *inter alia* Kenya, Sudan, Rwanda, and Tanzania, also host a large number of DPs. According to 2016 Environmental Performance Indicators, these

countries are ranked among the lowest (124–170 out of 180 countries) – evidence that they already have fragile environments. Climate change projections for Africa point to a worsening trend, particularly in the inland subtropics characterised by frequent occurrences of extreme heat, increasing aridity, and changes in rainfall (Serdeczny et al., 2016).

Studies have strongly affirmed that massive forced displacements and conflicts instigate significant environmental alterations including deforestation, soil degradation, water resources depletion, and environmental waste (Black, 1998; Kakonge, 2000; Biswas and Quiroz, 1996; Tafere et al., 2013; Fangama, 2015; Solomon et al., 2018). Refugees are expected to return home or resettle in a third country, while IDPs normally return to their original homes when the cause of their displacement has been addressed. However, DPs stay in temporary camps from few years to decades. Environmental damages and losses can, therefore, ensue at various stages of population migration. Rural refugees arriving in countries of first asylum either spontaneously settle in border areas or are channelled by host governments to assigned locations where they are registered, re-grouped, and relocated. Similarly, IDPs seek refuge in areas presumed safe from further harm, usually in an environment foreign to them. Such sudden movements tend to produce uncontrolled environmental damage resulting in serious disruptions of ecological systems (Simmance, 1987; Lonergan, 1995).

Despite decades of discourse and a series of policy frameworks since

¹ E-mail address: Maereg_tafere@worldvision.ca.

¹ Maereg Tafere (PhD) is an environmentalist working in the disaster management field since early 1990s and is currently with World Vision Canada, email: Maereg_tafere@worldvision.ca or mtafere2@gmail.com. The opinions described in this article are the author's and do not represent the organization's stand.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2018.07.063>

Received 18 April 2018; Received in revised form 19 June 2018; Accepted 18 July 2018

Available online 23 July 2018

0301-4797/ © 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

the Rio Earth Summit (UNCED, 1992), reviews of practicality (UNEP/OCHA, 2014) suggest that meaningful action to stop environmental damage in humanitarian response has been mediocre at best. The lack of adequate attention does not seem to emanate from a lack of human and financial resources in the humanitarian aid sector, as some like to believe. Since the establishment of the humanitarian system, subsequent to the adoption of UN General Assembly resolution 46/182 in 1991, the humanitarian support landscape has changed drastically. Humanitarian resources have grown exponentially, propelling the sector to a nearly US\$ 27.3 billion annual budget in 2016 (Development Initiatives, 2017). The largest international NGOs are important economic and political actors with incomes amounting to more than half a billion USD annually, and a workforce of over 10,000 each (World Disaster Report, 2015).

Environmental policies related to humanitarian action are relatively recent because the humanitarian imperative took priority over environmental impacts that have been described by some as “globally insignificant” or the emphasis has been on environmental degradation that may have forced some people to become ‘environmental refugees’ rather than the environmental impacts created by the DPs themselves (Biswas and Quiroz, 1996; UNHCR, 2001). But, the second session of the UN Assembly of the United Nations Environmental Program “called upon member states to support and implement programs, projects, and development policies aimed at preventing or reducing the impact of armed conflicts on the natural environment ... including the unintended collateral impacts of human displacement resulting from armed conflicts” (UNEP/EP.2/L.16.Rev.2, 2016). This recognises the seriousness of the challenge. What, then, is the reason for the lack of attention being paid by aid actors and local governments to such an important 21st century global concern as the environment?

2. Research objectives

For over three decades, East Africa has remained synonymous with natural disasters and conflicts, both generating and hosting the largest number of DPs in the continent. At the end of 2016, 5 out of the top 10 sources of refugees and 2 out of the 10 sources of IDPs were found in East Africa (UNHCR, 2016). Refugees have usually been settled in semi-arid, agriculturally marginal areas, or (as in the case of the Rwandese in Eastern DRC) near national parks or forest reserves (Shepherd, 1995). Arid & semi-arid locations such as *Darfur*, *Dadaab*, *Kakuma*, and *Dollo Ado* host some of the largest displacement camps on the continent. These refugee/IDP-camps tend to be large for both logistical and political reasons, and are believed to have a more negative impact on the environment compared to smaller ones (Shepherd, 1995). In addition, DPs are often forced to stay in these camps for decades. DRC refugees in Rwanda, South Sudanese in Uganda, and Somalis in Kenya are a few examples. In Darfur, over 2.5 million IDPs have been living in camps since the conflict started in 2003. A high number of people settled in extremely environmentally-sensitive areas for an indefinite period—often for decades—is a recipe for environmental disaster, especially when camps are not well designed, and without sound environmental management systems.

Several studies suggest that significant negative environmental changes are caused by sudden movements of large populations. During the 1994 Rwandan conflict, the *Virunga* National Park in Eastern DRC lost 300 km² of tropical rainforest (IISD & IUCN, 2002). In the first six months of the same year, tree resources within 5 km of the *Ngara* area of Tanzania had been all but depleted. A few months after the camp establishment, the average radius for fuelwood extended to 10 km or more from the camp's centre-point. These are rapid fuelwood depletion rates (Shepherd, 1995). Many of the displacement camps in the East African region have experienced a similar fate. In *Bokolomayo*, *Dollo Ado*, Ethiopia, more than 257 ha of woodland was totally cleared for refugee settlement, as well as 1182 ha for firewood, fencing and shelter in just a few months (Save the Environment Ethiopia, 2010). In

Lekadida, another camp in the same area, more than 1722 ha was totally deforested to create space for the camp and satisfy the camp's need for timber. A recent study in Sudan demonstrated that in the *Kuna Zemberma* camp in *Gedarfif* state—which is an arid ecological setting—15,685 refugees cleared more than 16,150 ha of forest for shelter and agriculture, as well as another 26,507 for building and renovation of the shelters—in a period of just twelve years (1985–1997) (Fangama, 2015). These figures don't include the amount of timber used to make furniture and charcoal for own use and for income generation. In Lebanon, environmental assessment on the impacts of Syrian refugees highlighted a rapid deterioration of the already-fragile state of the natural environment, due to the dramatic increase in the refugee population (MOE/EU/UNDP, 2014).

The intricate relationship between climate and displacement (though not all displacements are caused by climate change or variability) can be described as a vicious circle: climate change and variability affects the intensity and frequency of hydro-meteorological disasters and conflicts, which consequently sparks displacement; displacement affects the environment, and the environment in turn influences the climate. Environmental destruction caused by displaced persons is different from other forms of environmental degradations in that camps are often located in either already-degraded areas or are close to natural reserves (UNHCR, 2015). DPs are more destitute (at least until they settle) and confined to restricted spaces; lack local knowledge, have dysfunctional traditional/cultural leadership, and lack incentives to invest in environmental protection. In addition, logistical arrangements used to deliver goods and services are unique compared to that of host communities (Hoerz, 1995), and DP's basic needs are not always met by aid.

Lack of accountability is another key issue in relation to environmental care in humanitarian and development aid. Recent studies on the accountability of INGOs suggested poor stewardship towards the natural environment (Direct Impact Group, 2016). The study was based on factors such as environmental stewardship approaches, evidence in greenhouse emission reports, mitigative plans, the availability of monitoring systems in NGOs' plans, and any evidence of public awareness materials demonstrating environmental responsibility. The results say it all – only 5 out of 15 INGOs had environmental policies (about 33%). However, the implementation of those policies was based on individual initiatives, and even when implemented, they were less coordinated by a central function. When mentioned in NGOs' documents, environmental management is presented as a cross-cutting agenda not warranting relevance (Kelly, 2013). Perhaps the most frequently-mentioned reason is a “lack of systematic evidence on the unintended consequences of disaster responses,” which must be critically investigated. Many analysts and practitioners in the field of Disaster Management expect the international community to take a clear and practical stand on the importance of caring for the environment, while at the same time providing humanitarian and development assistance to disaster victims.

This study endeavours to explore the implications of these factors in five East African countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan and Uganda) hosting a total of 6,873,533 persons sheltered in more than 57 refugee and IDP camps. The study attempts to:

- i) find out, from literature review, how environmental protection issues have so far been addressed in refugee/IDP settlements, and whether or not the issues have been included in the climate change discussions;
- ii) review current gaps in Environmental Assessment (EA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) policies and practices in the five host countries and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) involved in addressing the needs of displaced persons;
- iii) provide additional empirical evidence from the five countries that are currently hosting the highest number of DPs in East Africa using Rapid Environmental Assessment (REA), Focused Group Discussion

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7475603>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7475603>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)