

Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Collins, Andrew (2008) Displacement Risks in Africa: Refugees, Resettlers and their Host Population, I. Ohta and Y.S. Gebre (eds.) Kyoto University Press (2005) [Book review]. International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters, 26 (3). pp. 128-132. ISSN 0280-7270

Published by: International Research Committee on Disasters

URL: <http://www.ijmed.org/articles/288/> <<http://www.ijmed.org/articles/288/>>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:
<https://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/7198/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE



UniversityLibrary

BOOK REVIEWS

Displacement Risks in Africa: Refugees, Resettlers and their Host Population, I. Ohta and Y.S. Gebre (eds.) Kyoto University Press (2005).

Andrew Collins
Disaster and Development Centre
Northumbria University

Displacement Risks in Africa is a useful compendium of comments on diverse displacement issues and a significant contribution to the resource base for what has become a fairly well established academic fraternity for refugee studies of Africa. As suggested in the title, displacement in this text is primarily concerned with recognised refugees or displaced populations who physically relocate, rather than broader notions of displacement that might also have been possible. A focus on the overall nature of the refugee and displacement predicament in Africa, reintegration and resettlement, is addressed as Part One. Jeff Crisp provides a comprehensive review of the nature of protracted refugee situations in Africa. The message is that there is no reason to believe that there will be an end to it, but that vital lessons need to be learnt in dealing with the inevitability of long-term refugeedom. Furthermore, building risk into displacement analyses highlights how prevention of displacement impacts avoids grappling with the often-ineffective cures. The editors point out that “discourse and instruments focus on the treatment of effects rather than causes of human uprooting” (p.6), a sentiment that is then supported by several of the contributions that follow. It is also made clear from the opening introduction that existing institutional refugee rights and conventions abound. The problem is the failure to uphold them.

The heterogeneous and complex nature of refugee resettlement is made apparent through most of the contributions. Effective solutions in addressing refugee’s needs are dependent on understanding particular circumstances of externally induced relocation or self-settlement. This varies for urban, rural and camp environments during conflict, development or otherwise, and for different parts of society. Refugee groups are generally made up of social networks that are key to survival during displacement, in particular when no formalised emergency relief is provided. The importance of this social capital and how it varies pre- and post-displacement is addressed by Roos Willems (Chapter 2) for the case of refugees to urban contexts in Tanzania. However, it is not indicated here what complicates matters is when the displacement of pre-existing civil society is such that alternative (sometimes extreme) survival networks of conflict replace the more obvious social capital restoration process. This is exemplified by the example provided by Art Hanson in the following chapter (Chapter 3) focussed on child soldiers. This case raises questions about the need for specialist policies for reintegration of ex-

fighters. Hanson provides a unique attempt at identifying more precisely what might be needed, not least community education and a community development component. Although very useful advice is provided, it is also one of the most honest of the contributions in acknowledging that more questions may be raised than can be answered in dealing with social learning with this type of displacement. Gaim Kibreab provides a fascinating contribution (Chapter 4) addressing core themes of belonging and displacement. Based on his observations of the experiences of Eritrean returnees, this chapter has much wider application in terms of how we assess displacement. Nationalism, territorial belonging, together with the debate on the relationship between people, particular places and identity lie behind understanding relative risks and the outcomes. Based on the Eritrean case, Kibreab leaves the reader with a closer understanding of just what it is that policy makers may fall short of understanding as regards to displacement identity. By way of contrast, but equally convincing, is the following chapter by Takeuchi and Marara (Chapter 5), who demonstrate the Rwanda displacement crisis to be largely a function of people's tie to specific areas of land. Rapid shifts in population density, due to return migrations, were part of a long history of ethnic tension exacerbated by colonialism. Here we see that failure to recognise the cause of tension, leading to conflict and then displacement, means that resettlement provoked still further tension, fear, and mistrust. The issue of reconciliation in terms of land is alarmingly complex to address and an issue ongoing in that region to date. I found the argument for the case of Rwanda convincing in being the opposite outcome to the case of Mozambique where land availability for returnees post conflict was generally plentiful and where a remarkably sound peace has remained intact since the first half of the 1990s. Arguably, the complexity of ethnicity, kinship and state imposed identity existed in that case too, but land availability has prevented any more elevated an issue that would lead to community hostilities.

Part Two opens with an analysis of the process of impoverishment, revealingly combined with a chapter on displacement through dam developments, and another on conservation projects. First we are presented with the Impoverishment, Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) model (Chapter 6) attributed to the author of this contribution, Michael Cernea. The model is well acknowledged by scholars several of who refer to it systematically in their contributions to this book. The items that make up the IRR model are by no means startling even at the time this framework was first released. It is perhaps a list of what the lay reader or practitioner of development or relief work would expect to see, a basic criteria list of well-known displacement impacts. There are parallels with basic and extended needs analysis and with notions of primary subsistence and the poverty frameworks. The chapter is the longest of the book seeking to document where others have used this model in their work. It is here that in a scholarly sense the model may be of additional use, to show how basic indicators show up in the varying contexts other authors have applied it to. A more critical view of this contribution might however

be that it tends towards promotion of the author's own model in terms of its adoption by other scholars rather than an impact on refugee policy. Arguably, what is needed in this field is less of a prescribed model checklist, and more of the skill of listening, empathising and recording refugee and displaced people's issues. The contributors to this book have in most instances demonstrated that as possible. However, there is acknowledgment of the need for flexibility in the model and acceptance of the need for added ingredients. Two of these, politics and education, are acknowledged during the course of this book.

The case of dam-induced resettlement is taken up by Chris to Wet (Chapter 7). Whilst the overall figures of people displaced by dams is actually not high in comparison to other forms of displacement (less than 0.5 million), it has devastated a good number of communities. It exemplifies a failing of development in that in no instance of this type of development have all stakeholders been satisfied with the outcome, and it is clear that many more than those immediately resettled have been affected. The story of dam developments is one of a lack of consultation and participation, which is the precursor to impoverishment. The case of conservation-induced displacement by Kai Schmidt-Soltau (Chapter 8) is interesting in that only 54,000 people are in this instance indicated as having actually been relocated for the whole of Central Africa. Whilst total figures impacted on if hosting area populations are taken into account will be significantly higher, this clearly contrasts significantly with the magnitude of conflict related displacements dealt with elsewhere in the book. It can also be pointed out that sometimes more than half the population of a country is displaced. For example, if various categories of internally displaced people are taken into account, as well as refugees who crossed international borders it is estimated that over half of Mozambique's 12 million population were displaced during the war there (Green 1992). Similar magnitudes apply to Sudan, and Angola. Nonetheless, displacement for conservation is clearly critical for those of this very much smaller group it has impacted. Also, the point that conservation is for global gain, but at local cost, is a fair one that demands a rethink in terms of its wider resonance beyond the game parks of Africa. It is surprising that no contributor to this book has extended such an argument to the potential impacts on African displacements of climate change should it be increased further by combinations of industrialised nations' pollutants and loss of vegetation in various locations. This section is nonetheless important in that it affirms that displacement risks also occur through economic and nationalistic development, and through conservation in the name of nature. Also, some dam and conservations projects have included a measure of participation and some benefits, which is rarely the case for other forms of displacement.

Part Three addresses the implications of displacement induced inwards migration for host populations based on a case study from northern Kenya and two from Ethiopia. Whilst much of the book has understandably focussed on vulnerability and negative aspects, we start to get a better impression of the possible adaptation and resilience

between refugee and host communities from Itaru Ohta's case study of the Turkana and Sudanese refugees in northern Kenya (Chapter 9). The explanation of there being a relatively successful relationship, despite notable impacts, between the two groups is convincingly explained in term of the self-assuredness of the Turkana. Individual characteristics of hosting groups are therefore seen as one of the keys to reduced problems with hosting communities. A further example would be a case presented by refugees in urban areas of Mozambique in the 1990s (Collins 1998). Little conflict between the two groups, and little difference in vulnerability, could be explained in terms of the host community at that time being already below the level of absolute poverty. Each community experienced common risks to health and wellbeing largely determined by their immediate environmental and economic context. But, this contrasts dramatically with the very different situation described by Eisei Kurimoto (Chapter 10). Here a detailed account of the complexity of Gambela, Ethiopia demonstrates how human adaptability and tolerances can break down with tragic consequences when overridden by overpowering structural or political forces, including in the management of humanitarian aid. At this point the role of the international "contribution" is brought under the spotlight. Yntiso Gebre's recounting the suffering caused by imposed settlement in Ethiopia provides a further example of how politics and aid can be destructive of human coping in adversity (Chapter 11).

Surprisingly, there is no concluding chapter, although some of the summing up is provided in the introduction. In my view it would have been possible to summarise some of what is presented here in terms of the key displacement risks being about a lack of security, reconciliation of conflicting groups, accountability of governments and humanitarian assistance, and of a sense of justice more widely. Where issues are continuously left unresolved it leads to further perpetuation of displacement risks and outcomes. To some extent, the continent is facing the scenario of ongoing inter-ethnic alliances and feuds in a context of changing structures and political economies, including that presented by aid. Part of this is the scenario referred to in this book by Gebre as "resettlement-induced deterioration of livelihood" (p.375). However, refugee situations are highly diverse, such that homogenisations of the condition of displacement or the refugee process of survival might not be helpful, although refugeedom tends to cause that. Furthermore, refugees aspire to more than just survival and coping.

For such an extensive book, it is perhaps unfair to flag what might be missing. It generally misses an examination of how displacement is also a state brought on by underlying development trends. The book concentrates on the more quantifiable physical examples, missing the underlying creeping displacement of the development of underdevelopment and contemporary globalisation processes (of economies and cultures) impacting on the continent. A text of this type seems incomplete without more specific analysis of displacement of life and livelihood through, for example, free trade and structural adjustment programmes. Whilst the book does imply displacement occurs *in*

situ and through misguided development action, it does not venture far into the issue of displacement as a consequence of cultural rape. The full meaning of location and ancestry, of nature, culture and spirit in relation to land, kin and origin, would be beyond the scope of this text, save perhaps for the some of the contribution by Kibreab. For meaning in people's sense of belonging and security, and the impact and recovery from displacement, we would probably need to enter beyond the domains of exogenous written word. Furthermore, it could be argued that, to capture the essence of displacement more thoroughly, it would take a contribution from a wider group of African scholars and non-formalised thinkers from those communities that experience displacement. The contributors are most likely sensitised to the participant voice in their various fields of expertise, but often lack evidence of this in constructing this book. There is also surprisingly little on health despite the fact that HIV/AIDS, like other previous diseases, is displacing and impoverishing on a far greater scale than most of the other displacement examples used in this text. A more gendered view of displacement is also conspicuously absent, although some contributors provide brief comment. It is perhaps also fair to point out that 11 of the 12 contributors are male. Beyond these observations, I found the book on the whole highly engaging and informative. Perhaps it is best classified as a contribution to a subject area for which there is plenty of room for further exploration, understanding, and influencing change.

References

- Collins, A.E. 1998. *Environment, Health and Population Displacement: Development and Change in Mozambique's Diarrhoeal Disease Ecology*. Making of Modern Africa Series. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Green, R.H. 1992. *The four horsemen ride together: Scorched fields of war in Southern Africa*. Paper presented at Refugees Studies Programme, Oxford 11th November 1992.