

RESEARCHING INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

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“Don’t Take the Foot Off the Pedal” Internal Displacement Is Still a Reality in Uganda

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Abstract

In Uganda, the period between 1986 and 2008 was marred by violent attacks perpetrated by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) on the people of Northern Uganda, resulting in the internal displacement of approximately 1.8 million people into IDP camps. Described as Uganda's largest displacement crisis, it came to an end in 2008 following the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the government of Uganda and the LRA rebel group. However, in subsequent years the country witnessed a number of new displacement events. While only very limited assistance and protection was afforded to the affected populations, these events were also underreported by the media and poorly documented by the government. As a result, reliable and updated data on internal displacement in Uganda since 2008 is scarce. By providing a thorough review of key displacement events that occurred in the country during the period between 2008 and 2020, this paper therefore seeks to bridge a critical information gap.

Beginning with a brief historic overview of the issue of internal displacement in Uganda, the paper demonstrates the multifactorial character of the issue as conflict-induced, disaster-induced and development-induced. Additionally, it further points to the fact that political violence may have become an increasingly significant driver of internal displacement in the country. Accordingly, it underscores both the importance and the absence of reliable disaggregated data on internal displacement in the country. Hence, highlighting that the issue remains a reality in Uganda, the paper argues that the government has failed to provide sufficient assistance to IDPs in order to achieve durable solutions, despite earlier promising and progressive efforts in addressing internal displacement caused by the LRA wars in Northern Uganda. It thus emphasizes the need for more research and data on post-LRA internal displacement events in the country, particularly on development-induced displacement and urban IDPs, and accordingly makes a few recommendations in this regard.

Keywords

Internal Displacement; IDPs; Uganda; Protection

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1. Introduction

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) defines internal displacement as the forced movement of people within the country they live in (IDMC, 2021c), while the 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement describe internally displaced persons (IDPs) as:

*Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.*¹

This “descriptive identification” (Ní Ghráinne, 2022, p.11) of an IDP has been adopted in the two legally binding internal displacement protocols, namely the 2009 African Convention on the Protection and Assistance for Internal Displaced Persons in Africa (also known as the Kampala Convention), and the 2006 Protocol on the Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons (also known as the Great Lakes IDP Protocol), adopted by the Member States of the International Conference on the Great Lakes region.

A number of countries, including Uganda, have since incorporated the IDP definition contained in the Guiding Principles into their national laws and policies on internal displacement. It is worth noting that the key elements contained in this definition are the involuntary or forced nature of movement, and the fact that internally displaced persons have not crossed an internationally recognized State border. The list of causes provided is however merely indicative, suggesting that other factors could be causing the forcible displacement of people from their homes or places of habitual residence, in search of safety within their own country. Furthermore, while the definition of IDPs contained in the Guiding Principles does not confer special legal status to internally displaced persons (Ní Ghráinne, 2022, p.11), IDPs are nonetheless entitled to enjoy the full rights and protection provided for under international human rights law (IHRL). It is however important to highlight that as citizens of the country within which they are displaced, their government bears the primary responsibility for their protection.

Internal displacement is a global crisis (Deng, 2000) which, as of 2020, affected 55 million people (IDMC, 2021b). This record number of internally displaced persons has been caused primarily by conflicts, violence and disasters occurring in over 40 countries across the globe. Among those most affected by mass internal displacement are Ethiopia, Mozambique and Burkina Faso, where escalating violence and expansion of extremist groups represent significant root causes of forced displacement, while Congo, Syria and Afghanistan are affected by long-running conflicts (IDMC, 2014). Additionally, climate-related events such as intense cyclones and heavy rains have widely affected the Americas, South Asia and East Asia, causing both internal and cross-border displacement (Gemenne *et al.*, 2021).

In Uganda, the period between 1986 and 2008 marked the country’s largest internal displacement crisis. Over 1.8 million people were internally displaced as a result of the violent attacks

¹ Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement contained in the annex of document: E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, 11th February 1998, Introduction, paragraph 2.

perpetrated by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda. The signing of a ceasefire agreement between the government of Uganda and the LRA in 2008 resulted in the achievement of relative peace in the region,² enabling the vast majority of IDPs to either re-establish themselves in their ancestral lands or to resettle in new locations. At this point, many of the international organisations who had been providing support to the IDPs ended their programs. Some later shifted their efforts to implementing programs for refugees who, by 2009, accounted for over 140,000 people in the country (UNHCR New Stories, 2009). Consequently, IDP returnees received insufficient NGO and government support to recover from the horrors of displacement and redevelop their communities. Moreover, the continued lack of basic services provision as well as poor livelihoods were only further compounded by land conflicts that led to violence and death (IDMC, 2014).

Since 2008, the relative stability of the situation of internal displacement in Uganda could mislead one to think that internal displacement is no longer part of the country's reality and concerns. However, Uganda continues to experience an internal displacement crisis mainly caused by natural disasters such as floods or landslides, as well as inter-communal conflicts and land evictions for development projects. As a matter of example it is estimated that in 2020 alone, natural disasters triggered the internal displacement of 40,000 people in the country (IDMC Country Report, 2021). Yet, despite the prevalence of the issue, data on internal displacement in Uganda, i.e. the number of people affected but also the socio-economic impact on the populations concerned, is regrettably scarce. This is notably due to the fact that in 2012, UNHCR handed over to the Government of Uganda the responsibility to collect and compile statistics on IDPs (UNHCR, 2012), although the government lacks a standard data collection system as well as a dissemination mechanism. As a result, the data collected tends to be mere estimates, not even disaggregated by either age or gender (Ferris, Mooney and Stark, 2011).

Furthermore, while research work conducted on internal displacement in Uganda has generated a wealth of knowledge and policy guidelines over the years, these appear to mainly focus on internal displacement caused by the LRA wars in Northern Uganda, as well as on the aftermath of these violent events in the region (Vinck and Pham, 2009; Onegi, 2012; Janmyr, 2014; Whyte *et al.*, 2014; Dunovant, 2016; Oosterom, 2016; Anderson-Gough, 2017; Kamara, Cyril and Renzaho, 2017). As such, while a few post-LRA displacement events are occasionally reported on in the media based on publicly available project reports and policy briefs, there nonetheless exists a significant information gap on the situation of internal displacement in the country. Consequently, a thorough documentation of these post-LRA internal displacement events is required, that clearly indicates the causes of displacement, the number of people affected as well as the protection needs of affected populations. This paper therefore sets out to provide a detailed overview of key internal displacement events that have occurred in Uganda during the period between 2008 and 2020, while also offering a brief critical analysis of the Ugandan government's response.

² On 1st November 2006, a first ceasefire deal was signed that temporarily pushed the LRA back to South Sudan, until a "permanent deal" was signed in 2008.

2. Overview of internal displacement in Uganda

Between 1971 and 1979, more than 500,000 people in Uganda were displaced into IDP camps following the post-independence conflicts in the country (Ferris, 2012). An additional 800,000 people were internally displaced between 1983 and 1985 during the Guerrilla war of the Luweero triangle, while thousands others lost their lives (Kabera and Muyanja, 1994). In 1987, insurgencies by the Uganda People's Army in Soroti and Kumi left more than 300,000 people displaced and scores dead. After 1987, the National Resistance Movement government, led by Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, maintained peace in the country and instituted a pro-democracy and equitable development agenda for all the regions of Uganda. However, Museveni's rule faced resistance from the Lord's Resistance Army, one of Africa's longest-surviving insurgent groups. Led by spiritual leaders from indigenous communities of northern Uganda, the LRA was initially formed to fight against the purported economic marginalisation of the Northern Region. With an estimated 20,000 people progressively recruited by the LRA since 1987, the group established rebel forces that launched terrorist attacks on a number of government infrastructures and settlements. By 1996, over 75,000 people had been evacuated from the conflict-affected areas of Northern Uganda and resettled into temporary camps established along trading centres, from which they received humanitarian support.

Described as the peak of the crisis in Northern Uganda (Santner, 2013), the period from 2003 to 2005 saw over 98% of the population of this region, or approximately 1.8 million people, displaced into IDP camps. Further to this, the LRA also carried out attacks in the neighboring Teso and Lango regions, displacing an additional 200,000 persons in Usuk County (ACT, 2003). At that time, thanks to media coverage as well as assistance provided to displaced populations by international human rights groups, relief agencies and NGOs, there was greater awareness of the IDP crisis in Uganda among the international community. Between 1980 and 2005, over sixty disasters related to natural hazards such as floods, earthquakes, landslides, drought, epidemics, crop failures and livestock diseases were reported to have taken place in Uganda (IDMC, 2014), resulting in the internal displacement of over four million people. The combination of public pressure and humanitarian challenges faced by Uganda during that period prompted the launch of the 2004 National IDP policy.³ Intended to improve IDP's quality of life, this policy instrument provides guidance on the management and protection of internally displaced persons. It covers both conflict and disaster displacement and clearly defines measures to prevent internal displacement, mitigate its adverse social impact and facilitate durable solutions. However, since it was hastily developed in response to the displacement crisis, and that too under international and public pressure at the time, it does not clearly define strategies to reduce or mitigate displacement risks. Consequently, it lacks a well-established plan for systematically documenting and keeping records on internal displacement in Uganda.

³ The Uganda IDP policy establishes the principles which serve as a guide to 'Government institutions, humanitarian and development agencies while providing assistance and protection to Internally Displaced Persons in Uganda.

3. Internal displacement events in Uganda since the LRA in 2008

The extensive literature review undertaken in the context of this study allowed the identification of 78 internal displacement events that have occurred in Uganda since 2008 and the large-scale LRA-induced displacements. However, it appears that most of these events were underreported in the media, despite having had a considerable impact on affected populations across the country. Referring to the IDP definition adopted in the Kampala Convention, the internal displacement events identified in this paper were categorized into three major root causes of internal displacement, namely internal conflicts, natural disasters and internal development projects. While natural disasters account for the largest number of recorded events, followed by development and environmental conservation projects, only a small number of internal displacements were caused by internal conflicts during the period 2008-2020, as we shall see in the following section which provides a more detailed account of these events.

3.1 Displacement caused by internal conflicts and violence

By 2008, a majority of IDPs displaced by the LRA wars with the government of Uganda had returned to their places of origin. However, it is estimated that in 2009, over 437,000 individuals remained in IDP camps in Northern Uganda (Birkeland, 2009), while many others were still displaced in urban centres. Furthermore, even after the Ugandan government proceeded to dismantle the camps in 2012, an estimated 30,000 IDPs remained “stuck” there, unable to return to their homes due to their age, health, or physical condition, or simply because they had no land to return to (NRC/IDMC, 2014). Sande Lie (2017) posits that by 2017, the majority of IDPs displaced from Northern Uganda by the LRA wars had reached provisional solutions through resettlement and provision of social services within their local communities, such as health and education. This assertion is however misleading. Indeed, to this date, a number of IDPs from Northern Uganda remain displaced within urban centres, including many young people forced to resort to begging on the streets of Kampala to survive (Street Children Uganda, 2021). In that regard, it is important to note that the Ugandan government’s attempt to achieve durable solutions for IDPs affected by the LRA wars in Northern Uganda were curtailed by the lack of resources and proper coordination mechanisms, as a result of the misappropriation of over \$13 million of aid money by the Prime Minister’s office, as revealed by the Uganda’s Auditor General in 2012 (NRC/IDMC, 2014).

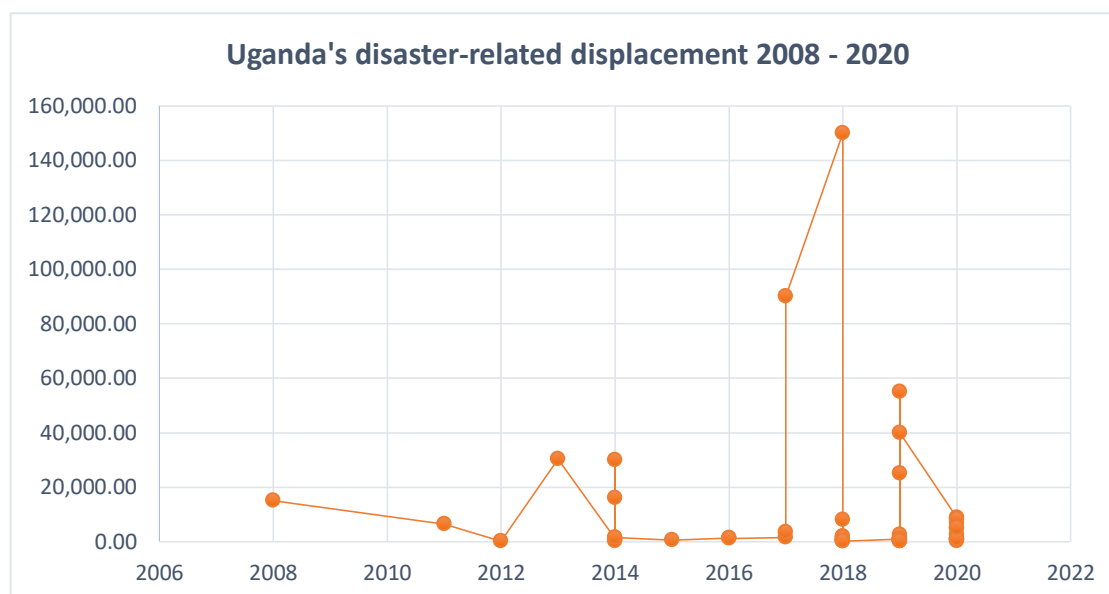
Beside displacements caused by post-LRA events in Northern Uganda, the country experienced a number of other conflict-induced and violence-induced displacements between 2010 and 2020, notably owing to ethnic and political conflicts as well as cattle rustling, among other reasons. Although these specific events remain largely undocumented, the IDMC nonetheless reported that over 35,000 persons were internally displaced in Uganda as a result of conflicts and violence between 2016 and 2020 (Cazabat and Yasukawa, 2020). No further indications were however provided on the exact places where these displacements took place nor on the parties involved. Unresolved grievances between the government of Uganda and the Rwenzuru Kingdom over the recognition by the former of three new Kingdoms in the Rwenzori region have long been the cause of sporadic violence in that particular region. Indeed, perceiving this move from the Ugandan government as a threat to the integrity of their Kingdom, the majority Bakonzo ethnic group staged numerous strikes and uprisings in the Rwenzori region (Reuss and Titeca, 2016).

These resulted in the death of an estimated 100 people and in the detention of 500 others by the government, among whom was the King of the Bakonzo ethnic group (Atuhaire, 2016). Further to this, an undetermined number of people fearing to be detained on account of their relation with the Kingdom were displaced. To this date, people displaced by these conflicts remain unaccounted for, and no information exists on their whereabouts. Reuss and Titeca (2017) argue that they might have fled to Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, or to other neighboring districts, in search of safety. The absence of any information on their situation only further underscores the critical lack of documentation and follow-up on IDP events in Uganda. Additionally, in Karamoja region, land wrangles and cattle fights between the Karamojong and Itesots ethnic groups have resulted in the forced displacement of thousands of people. Similarly, the land border conflicts along the Karamoja and Katakwi borders left hundreds of people internally displaced and many others lost their lives (Bainomugisha, Okello and Ngoya, 2007). With the resurgence of cattle raids in the Karamoja region, new cases of internal displacement are inevitable. In 2020, 800 cows were indeed reportedly taken by cattle raiders and a number of people were killed (Wambede, 2020). Fearing for the loss of their own lives and that of their animals, shepherds have resorted to moving their cows to safer areas, mainly those where the government has established army camps for protection (Africanews, 2020).

3.2 Displacement caused by disasters and climate change effects

Natural disasters such as drought, floods and landslides represent the main causes of internal displacement in Uganda (IGAD, 2019). Between 2008 and 2020, over 66 natural disaster events occurred across the country that caused the displacement of 535,268 people (IDMC, 2021a). In 2018 alone, over 150,000 people were displaced by floods across 20 Ugandan districts (Adebayo and Ntale, 2018), while in 2020 an estimated 40,000 new displacements associated with natural disasters were reported in the country (Trading Economics, 2020). Accordingly, the graph below provides an overview of these displacement events over the period 2008 to 2020.

Figure 1: Displacement caused by natural disasters 2008- 2020, Uganda (IDMC, 2021a)



Among the regions most affected by floods and landslide-related displacements are the mountainous and Nile river basin regions (Davies, 2021). Other parts of the country, such as central Uganda, are commonly affected by heavy rainfalls. The impact of the latter is only further compounded by poor drainage systems (Xinhua, 2020), as well as economic activities such as farming on the slopes, which tend to leave the soil weakened and easily washed away by the rains. While disasters related to floods and landslides are the main causes of internal displacement in most parts of Uganda, some regions have also experienced droughts, sometimes alternating with floods. For example, in early 2017, Northern Uganda experienced severe droughts that saw thousands of people leave their communities in search of food security. Later that year heavy rains affected the region resulting in massive floods (Branch, 2018), while other areas such as Kween district have also been affected by alternating drought and flood disasters.

These events therefore demonstrate the prevalence and impact of natural disasters in Uganda to which a large numbers of people have been repeatedly exposed, and which resulted in multiple displacements, eroding IDPs' resilience and making their recovery even harder. In addition to loss of lives, injuries and displacement, disasters have also largely affected the socio-economic development of Uganda. Indeed, floods and mudslide being responsible for the destruction of property, livelihoods and infrastructure, rebuilding these comes at a huge cost. For instance, in 2020, floods in Western Uganda washed away five schools, leaving 16,803 students affected (UNICEF, 2020), while in September 2021, over 270 residents in Kasese had their gardens, houses and businesses washed away by floods, leaving them homeless with no or limited opportunities to earn incomes (Davies, 2021). Overall, mudslides and floods deprived more than 87% of the rural population in the affected areas of their farming land, exacerbating their already critical vulnerability as a result of low incomes and food insecurity. Yet, the Ugandan IDP policy offers no clear plans to mitigate the risks caused by such disasters, which undeniably represents a significant shortcoming of the policy.

3.3 Displacement caused by development projects

The IDMC defines development-based displacement as the forced removal or movement of individuals from their homes or places of habitual residence to make way for development work (IDMC, 2016). These could be projects such as dams, natural resource extraction, agricultural investments or infrastructure development activities implemented by governments or private sector actors, domestically or internationally (IDMC, 2016).

In Africa, development-induced displacement is a reality, even though it has not gained as much attention as conflict and disaster-induced displacement. In Uganda, in an attempt to attract foreign investments, the government has allowed domestic companies to purchase or lease large areas of arable and mineral-rich land for projects such as palm oil plantations, sugar factories, oil refineries and carbon offset tree planting among others (IDMC, 2014). As a result of these projects, thousands of Ugandans have been displaced, not only losing vital resources such as farmland and water supplies but also their source of income. As a matter of example, the Palm Oil plantations development project in the islands of Kalangala and Buvuma caused the displacement of thousands of people, resulting in the loss of their farming land. This, in turn, led to their marginalisation, further causing family separations as well as increased poverty (Timbuka, 2018). Moreover, as a result of the discovery of oil in Uganda and the subsequent

development of the infrastructure necessary for oil extraction and refining, the country has in recent years experienced an increase in the displacement of people from the oil rich communities (Ogwang and Vanclay, 2019). When combined, these projects could possibly displace an estimated 14,977 people, thus exacerbating poverty, food insecurity and breaking the existing community structures. While plans to compensate the affected households for these projects are underway, households affected by other projects such as the Tilenga project have already been compensated (Total Energies, 2018), albeit at a lower value than that of their household. However, regardless of the amount, it is worth noting that such compensation will neither make up for the lost community cohesion, nor for interferences in child education or any other challenges related to forced displacement.

Additionally, other government conservation projects such as wildlife and forest reserves have also led to the displacement of many Ugandans. For example, between 2017 and 2018, over 840 homes were destroyed in Apaa village in Amuru district, following the gazetting by the Ugandan government of the Apaa area into the East Madi Wildlife Reserve; a gazette area acquired before 2008 when people in this area were living in IDP camps (Lenhart, 2013). As such, when the LRA war ended, the Ugandan government, under the Uganda Wild Life authority, declared that IDPs could not return to their land as it had been gazetted into a wildlife reserve. This particular situation, unfortunately not uncommon, highlights the fact that people's land has often been transferred without their knowledge, such that many end up being neither compensated nor resettled in alternative land (Refugee Law Project, 2013). While a number of people decided to leave the area fearing for their lives, a section of the community insisted on staying to protect their land. In February 2019, the government therefore offered to compensate up to 370 of these households to allow them to identify alternative land, and thus start new lives away from the 'gazetted land' (Taylor, 2019). While only a fraction of the population was ultimately compensated, leaving over 2,000 households with no means or resources to rebuild their lives, a critical analysis of the proposed government compensation package also revealed its inadequacy in addressing the actual needs of the displaced populations. It therefore points to significant shortcomings in the way that Uganda addresses internal displacement and accordingly underlines the work that remains to be done by authorities in order to guarantee to IDPs the protection they are entitled to under national and international human rights law.

Furthermore, research undertaken for this study also shed light on the number of private business owners who, through their development projects, have engaged in land grabbing activities that have resulted in the forced displacement of thousands of people. For example, in 2017, over 186,000 households lost their land to grabbers in Mubende district (Kasadah, 2018). A total of 1,975,834 hectares were lost to private developers, causing the forced displacement of bonafide occupants. Until now, the government has not traced the whereabouts of the displaced persons in Mubende, nor has it designed a clear strategy to address their protection needs. Land grabbing and the resulting displacement have affected both rural and urban populations alike. In 2019, over 350 people were displaced from Lusanja village (Segawa, 2019), just 10 km from Kampala. With over 90 houses demolished (NBS Television, 2018), Lusanja victims ran to court for redress, only to be told that they had allegedly acquired the land unlawfully, since they were unable to present official land titles (URN, 2019). An appeal later filed to the High Court allowed to put an end to these evictions. However, while the area has since been protected by the police, legitimate owners remain prohibited from accessing it. Furthermore, despite a 2018 parliamentary resolution establishing that compensation should be accorded to people displaced

by the Lusanja evictions on account of their loss of land (Parliament of Uganda, 2018), the Ugandan government still has not provided them with a permanent protection solution, leaving large numbers of people in a very precarious situation.

3.4 Election violence: a new driver of displacement in Uganda?

Over the last three decades, Uganda has enjoyed a fairly democratic governance system under the National Resistance Movement party founded in 1986, and whose current chairperson has been presiding over the country for 35 years, uninterruptedly. As per the Constitution of Uganda, the president has a five-year ruling term, after which an election is organized and a new president is voted into powers. Since 2005 however, elections have been marred by violence and human rights violations perpetrated by the ruling party. The 2016 and 2021 elections were a case in point in that regard, forcing many Ugandans to flee to other regions or areas across the country in search of safety.

In 2016, supporters of the leading opposition leader, General Kiiza Besigye, were targeted by the police and the army, forcefully detained, beaten and assaulted, causing many to flee their homes (Marima, 2016), while thousands others had already left Kampala in anticipation of election violence (Beesley, 2016). After Museveni was declared the winner of the 2016 general elections, violent protests erupted from sections of the public that challenged his victory, citing vote rigging and lack of transparency in the process. These protests resulted in the death of an estimated 31 Ugandans, while an undetermined number of people had to flee for their lives (Olukya, 2016). A resident of Buhihira, said:

We have abandoned our homes due to fear of being killed. We are now living in camps. We request the government to deal with the situation so that we go back to our homes (Olukya, 2016).

Election violence was also a main feature of the 2021 elections in Uganda, notably involving the incumbent Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and the Popstar-turned-politician Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu (also called Bobi Wine), among other candidates. It is estimated that over 2,000 supporters of Bobi Wine were abducted from their homes and detained to unknown places, while others were brutally beaten and imprisoned (Chrispin Mwakideu, 2021). Furthermore, over 54 people were killed protesting the imprisonment of Kyagulanyi. Others were being hunted down by the government security operatives across the country (Human Rights Watch, 2021), including 1,000 young people confirmed arrested by the Ugandan government (Africanews, 2021). Therefore, the fear of being imprisoned and/or killed forced people, especially young ones, to flee their homes to other areas of the country for safety.

Surprisingly, the targeted stronghold supporters of Kyagulanyi, who were urban residents at the time of elections, fled to rural areas in search of safety, while those from rural areas mainly fled to urban centres for hiding. Although the number of people who have fled their homes as a result of election violence is unknown, the above events nonetheless suggest that election violence might have become a new driver of internal displacement in Uganda. Additionally, while it is not known whether those who had fled eventually returned to their homes or remain in hiding, it is

nonetheless worth highlighting that for opposition strongholds in Uganda, peace can only be secured if they announce their allegiance to the ruling government.

Figure 2: Tweet from the 2021 presidential candidate, Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu — also known as Bobi Wine — expressing his dissatisfaction over the imprisonment of his campaigning team (Wine, 2021)



Election violence is not a new phenomenon in the politics of Africa,⁴ and evidence suggests that it has already resulted in the forced displacement of large numbers of people in several African countries. For instance, over 650,000 Kenyans were internally displaced between 2007 and 2008 as a result of the post-election violence that affected the country, and an additional 250,000 people were internally displaced in 2011 for similar reasons (Ferris, 2012). In Cote d'Ivoire, the violence that followed from the 2010 disputed presidential elections caused the internal displacement of more than a million people (Britannica, 2020), while in both Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ferris (2012) notes that in 2011, election-related violence resulted in internal displacement. Hence, in light of the above evidence pointing to election-related violence as a driver of forced displacement, strategies should be put in place to prevent it from happening. In this regard, it is likely that a democratic election process guaranteeing impartiality, inclusiveness, transparency, and accuracy of electoral results would go a long way in reducing the risks of such violence.

4. IDP data challenges

In January 2012, UNHCR handed over its protection role to the government of Uganda, which later implemented long term recovery programs for IDPs (UNHCR, 2012). Nonetheless, beside putting an end to the assistance that the UNHCR had been providing since 1996 to over two million IDPs in northern Uganda, this agreement also involved entrusting Ugandan authorities with the responsibility to compile statistics on IDPs. While the government continues to this date to collect IDP data, it has however been faulted for the lack of standardized collection system across all areas of Uganda, resulting in poor estimates that the government further fails to disaggregate by age or gender (Ferris, Mooney and Stark, 2011). As such, in the context of this

⁴ Some of the African countries that have experienced election-related violence include Angola, the Gambia, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe, Chad, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Algeria and Madagascar.

study, any search for a government report or a database on IDPs in Uganda has for instance been vain. Interestingly, the same is not true of data on refugees, thus likely presuming a lack of interest or political will to develop a reliable system of data collection and analysis, despite the critical importance of IDP data to inform protection policies.

Conversely, the media should be commended for their efforts in reporting on internal displacement events in Uganda, as they often represent one of the rare sources on the issue. Nevertheless, while a few media outlets have reported on the lack of government support to IDPs, they generally fail to provide further analysis of the long-term impact of forced displacement for affected populations. Figures regarding the number of people affected also tend to be approximate and thus merely indicative, as opposed to reliable. However, the media cannot be expected to substitute the government in providing accurate disaggregated data on the number of IDPs in the country. In this context, the work of the IDMC is therefore of critical importance.⁵

Indeed, as part of their mandate to inform policy and operational decisions to improve IDPs' lives, IDMC collects and updates data on displaced populations through its Global Internal Displacement Database (GIDD) (IDMC, 2021a), which provides estimated IDP data organized by country. Its country specific data could however arguably be improved by providing more specific details, such as the age and gender of IDPs, the nature of protection provided to them and the underlying challenges they face. Additionally, since IDMC's data is mainly focused on displacements caused by conflicts, violence and natural disasters, it fails to report on development-induced displacement, and thus leaves a lot of people affected by internal displacement unaccounted for. To the extent that data collection and analysis are essential for policy planning, the lack of reliable data on IDPs in Uganda since 2012 undermines the prospect of effectively and holistically addressing IDP issues in the country. It thus puts into question the political will of the Ugandan government to work towards the achievement of durable solutions for IDPs.

5. Government's response to IDPs in Uganda

Yet, despite this significant shortcoming, research undertaken as part of this study allowed to shed light on the government of Uganda's proactive role in addressing IDP issues in the country. Indeed, in 2004, the government adopted the IDP national policy, which notably establishes the principles that should guide government, humanitarian and development agencies in providing assistance and protection to internally displaced persons (ReliefWeb, 2004). Santner (2013) argues that Uganda's IDP policy is a unique policy instrument insofar as it addresses almost all aspects of internal displacement in a country. Additionally, as the first ratifying country of the Kampala Convention, Uganda is considered to have shown willingness to implement strategies in order to protect IDPs and achieve durable solutions, albeit with a stronger focus on the situation of IDPs displaced by the LRA war in Northern Uganda.

By 2012, the government had for instance facilitated the resettlement of over one million IDPs in Northern Uganda, such that *only* an estimated 30,000 people remained in the IDP camps

⁵ Some of IDMC data especially on disaster-induced displacements has been used in this study; presented as estimates – to represent IDPs in Uganda caused by disasters.

(Ogwang, 2014). It should however be noted that although resettled individuals had also been provided with basic services to start their new lives, these were nonetheless deemed insufficient and inadequate. Indeed, in 2010, over 100,000 mudslide survivors from Bududa were resettled in Kiryandongo, approximately 300 km from their habitual home (Wambi, 2010), but many later returned to Bududa, citing lack of social amenities and farmland as key challenges impeding their long-term resettlement (Meru, 2021).

Such shortfalls in the implementation of durable solutions therefore underline the failure of the Ugandan government to effectively address the issue of internal displacement through resettlement. While this can in part be explained by the lack of a systematically defined and implemented rights-based resettlement process, as prescribed in the 2010 IASC framework on durable solutions for internally displaced persons (IASC, 2010), not all resettlement efforts have failed. Indeed, since 2018, in an attempt to prevent adverse effects of disaster displacement in parts of eastern Uganda, the government has also been implementing an early resettlement program through the establishment of the Bunambutya resettlement centre in the Bulambuli district. In 2019, the centre had already admitted over 140 households from the mudslide-prone areas of Bududa (Watala, 2019), all of whom had received a house of three rooms as well as three acres of farm land. It is estimated that upon completion, the centre could host over 900 households otherwise exposed to possible risks of mudslides in their communities (Monitor, 2018).

However, despite such examples of good practices, there admittedly remains a number of shortcomings in the government of Uganda's approach to the issue of internal displacement, insofar as a number of IDPs have received little or no support from the government. For example, since 2020, over 15,000 displaced people in Bundibugyo have been stranded in Bubukwanga refugee transit camp and Semuliki high school, without any government assistance or any solution in sight (Asiimwe, 2020). Additionally, in September 2020, a New Vision article reported that over 300,000 people displaced as a result of disaster-related events across Uganda, remained deprived of any access to food, clean water, shelter or medical care. Yet, the government had done nothing to address their needs (Wassajja, 2020). Hence, despite Uganda's comprehensive IDP policy, much work remains to be done by the government of Uganda to fully guarantee to IDPs the rights and protection set forth in this instrument.

6. Conclusion

Much of the research on IDP situations in Uganda focuses on internal displacement caused by the LRA wars in Northern Uganda. Commonly described as the largest displacement crisis in Uganda (Owen, 2004), the impact of other internal displacement events should however not be neglected. Indeed, as demonstrated in this study, data collected from various sources suggests that internal displacement is still a reality in Uganda, caused primarily by natural disasters such as floods, mud slides and earthquakes in the Eastern and Western parts of Central Uganda, as well as development projects and political violence. However, the lack of any system of data collection and analysis as well as follow-up on internal displacement events throughout the country, underscores the lack of reliability of the reported IDP figures. In turn, this lack of accurate and up-to-date data significantly affects the planning and implementation of protection

activities for internally displaced persons. This paper therefore argues that greater efforts are needed to implement systematic data collection and analysis and to provide disaggregated data on internal displacement in Uganda. Echoing Asfour's (2020) recommendations in that regard, it further posits that renewed efforts such as establishing an IDP working group in Uganda or ensuring an effective collaboration between IDPs, the Ugandan government, humanitarian organizations and academics, would be key in documenting and understanding both the displacement context and dynamics in the country. Moreover, since natural disasters are responsible for the displacement of thousands of people every year in Uganda, this study highlights the importance of investing significantly more efforts in the monitoring and analysis of this key driver of internal displacement, as well as its long-term impact on affected populations. Doing so would in turn allow the development and implementation of sustainable strategies to effectively prevent, address or mitigate the risks of internal displacement.

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