

# International Development Committee

## Oral evidence: Forced displacement in Africa, HC 1433

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Members present: Stephen Twigg (Chair); Richard Burden; Mrs Pauline Latham; Mr Ivan Lewis; Paul Scully; Henry Smith.

Questions 1 – 44

### Witnesses

I: Sanj Srikanthan, Acting Senior Vice President Europe and Executive Director UK, International Rescue Committee; Markus Geisser, Senior Humanitarian Affairs and Policy Adviser, International Committee of the Red Cross; Lucy Hovil, Senior Researcher, International Refugee Rights Initiative.

II: George Okoth-Obbo, Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, UNHCR; Valentin Tapsoba, Africa Bureau Director, UNHCR.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sanj Srikanthan, Markus Geisser and Lucy Hovil.

**Q1 Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome. This is our first oral evidence session as part of our inquiry, in which we are looking at forced displacement in Africa, with a particular focus on east Africa. Can I thank our opening panel of three witnesses? We have you for about an hour, and we are seeking to cover nine areas during that time. We go straight into questions, but please give a bit of an introduction when you first answer. My opener is for each of you to answer briefly.

We know that forced displacement is at an all-time high in sub-Saharan Africa, with an estimated 20 million people displaced. What is your assessment of the current situation in the region? Sanj, do you want to go first?

**Sanj Srikanthan:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the Committee. I am Sanj Srikanthan, executive director of International Rescue Committee UK. The scale of displacement is not slowing down in east Africa. There are a number of fault lines but also unresolved matters around resettlement ambitions that have not been realised. We have active conflicts going on, such as South Sudan, where we have upward of 2 million displaced internally within the country. By the end of this year over 1.8 million will be hosted by Uganda, which is the largest concentration of South Sudanese refugees in any one country.

You can overlay on top of that internal displacement within countries like Kenya as a result of climate change and drought, which is numbering in the millions, combined with an unrealised ambition to repatriate, voluntarily, Somali refugees in Somalia. That is caused by the fact that, in Somalia, again, displacement is growing as a result of both conflict and high levels of food insecurity. Of the 15 million people in that country, 6.2 million are dependent on food due to poor coping mechanisms and a lack of community resilience, on top of which, about 1.5 million are internally displaced there. Those are not conditions on which we can rely to have Somali refugees return.

All of this is set against a conversation that we will hopefully have time to get into around a reduced level of funding commitments to this region.

**Lucy Hovil:** I am Lucy Hovil. I am a senior researcher for the International Refugee Rights Initiative. I am also a deployable civilian expert in the Stabilisation Unit, but I speak here entirely as a member of civil society.

Yes, I would echo what Sanj has said. It is almost a perfect storm of cycles of conflict, where ongoing conflicts fail to be resolved—I guess that reflects our collective failure in that area—and new pockets of conflict are developing. To add to what he said about South Sudan and Somalia, we



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

have a very concerning situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is only likely to get worse with elections at the end of the year. The same goes for Burundi. I would just endorse that: the problem is really quite significant.

**Markus Geisser:** My name is Markus Geisser. I represent the ICRC, the International Committee of the Red Cross. I am part of the ICRC policy team here in London.

I can only confirm what my colleagues have just mentioned in terms of countries. If I just look at the latest IDMC figures, of course Ethiopia comes to mind, with 1.4 million displaced people within the first six months, if I remember correctly. That country has not been mentioned. Of course, we are very focused on east Africa right now, but, as Lucy has mentioned, there are also other countries such as the DRC. I would add the situation in Cameroon and the Lake Chad Basin. South Sudan has already been mentioned. It is indeed a failure in many ways. It is also a protection failure. I hope we can address these issues.

In the ICRC, we believe there is a clear correlation between displacement and the respect, or in this case disrespect, of international humanitarian law. It is not a main cause of displacement, although depending on the context it can be, but it is certainly a very strong contributing factor to displacement.

**Chair:** Thanks for those concise and clear overviews. The follow-up questions explore a number of the issues you have spoken about.

Q2

**Richard Burden:** Sanj, you mentioned internally displaced people. While the issue of refugees rightly gets a lot of profile, about 40 million of around 68 million displaced people are displaced in country, about 30 millions of those in Africa alone. Why do IDPs not get the same level of status, protection and assistance as refugees do? What can be done to change that? It is a question to all of you.

**Sanj Srikanthan:** There are a number of factors. First, they are often less visible than refugees. Often, they look to cope among themselves or within other parts of the country where they speak the language and have a cultural affinity. Secondly, if we look at the international structures, the global compact on refugees, there is a focus on refugees, which is understandable considering their vulnerabilities when crossing borders into a strange country. Thirdly, there is an expectation that countries should deal with internal displacement themselves. If we look at the challenges in implementing the global compact on refugees, the support for countries is very conditional. In many cases, it is loans and not grants that support refugees. The threshold for internally displaced is even lower.

But the reason this is an important question is that, when we work with people who are vulnerable, which is our mandate, we have to work with internally displaced persons as well as refugees, as well as host



communities, which have not been displaced but in some cases are poorer and more vulnerable than the refugees or internally displaced persons themselves. It is right to ask this question about the invisible number of internally displaced persons and what we are doing for them, not least because there are huge political tensions if we do not address that and just focus on refugees in these countries. It will create a “them and us” perception if we distinguish too much between the two groups’ needs.

**Markus Geisser:** Being self-critical, in our organisation it took a lot of time for us to have an IDP adviser. We all have to learn how to better assist and protect IDPs. If you look at some key UK humanitarian policy documents, the UK aid strategy does not mention internally displaced people. It has been rectified in the humanitarian reform policy, where of course it is mentioned, particularly the issue of protection.

To add to what my distinguished colleague from IRC mentioned, the ICRC just published a report on urban IDPs. Yes, it is difficult to find them, but you can also find them in urban contexts. It is not exactly a collective failure of the humanitarian system, but it is probably a failure to apply the same imaginative solutions that we apply when we, for example, assist refugees in Oman or Lebanon. I am referring to the Wilton Park principles. They do not only talk about refugees; they relate to refugees, but also mention IDPs. How do you say it in English? Where there is a will, there is a way to find those IDPs. That is probably the way I would frame it.

Q3 **Richard Burden:** Perhaps I could press you a little more on that. What is the way that this will should follow, if you like? How can we change the situation? Christian Aid has provided us with evidence that says, where there are appeals for crises that have high levels of internally displaced people, they are consistently underfunded. My question is to all of you: how can we start to turn that around? Particularly in relation to the UK, is there more that DFID could be doing?

**Lucy Hovil:** I am sure there is more. The interaction between visibility and response is interesting. I find it very interesting that recently we are beginning to hear about Ebola in North Kivu in eastern Congo. Suddenly, the fact that there is a crisis in North Kivu has come on to the radar. It is about working out how we have those kinds of mechanisms in place that point to where there is extreme vulnerability before we have a crisis such as Ebola, which adds another layer of crisis on to one that already exists. It is not very difficult to do that; it is completely possible, but unfortunately it is going slightly against the public grain, inasmuch as it might mean putting a lot of money and resources into a situation that does not have that kind of traction in the public eye. It is very doable.

**Markus Geisser:** It is also about better using existing instruments. We have the Kampala convention on internal displacement. Not many people seem to talk about it. Lucy, you will know better; I am not a specialist on displacement. But we do not really hear about this interesting instrument,



which provides a very comprehensive counteraction framework. It could actually be seen as an inspiration.

As for the things the UK could do, we have learned through DFID about the potential for a high-level meeting on internal displacement, probably at the next UNGA. That would be an important contribution to raising attention. It would be an excellent way to do that. We really need to find ways to raise attention. We produce reports; I have just mentioned the one on urban IDPs. That is one thing, but a high-level meeting on this particular issue at the UNGA would probably be an interesting start.

**Sanj Srikanthan:** It is just worth reflecting that, normally, people start out as internally displaced and then they become refugees. They are displaced within their country and then they move outside. The reasons are fairly common; there are three that we would say are the top ones: food insecurity; safety, which is often tied to conflict and particularly affecting women and girls; and livelihoods or lack of livelihoods, and therefore an inability to support them. In the case of women and girls, lack of livelihoods increases their insecurity, because it makes them more prey to perpetrators, et cetera.

When you think about those three things, you have to think about the responses. First, if you look at South Sudan, it started out as an internal displacement crisis and then became a refugee crisis. If we deal with the internal displacement crisis first, it has to be about more than funding; it has to be about conflict prevention. South Sudan is one of those conflicts that have gone largely unmediated and unresolved. The end state is this huge IDP number and an equally huge refugee number. Conflict prevention and conflict mediation is something that donors and Governments need to consider that is not within the purview of humanitarian agencies.

The second point is to think about what my colleagues have said in terms of the existing mechanisms to draw attention to what can be done to fund the gap in terms of IDP needs. It is very variable. If it is a natural disaster that leads to internal displacement, there is more charity or aid available to countries. If it is due to conflict, protracted crises or protracted displacement, that is viewed very differently. We need to have a common understanding of the mechanisms and what is available to address this, because if we do not address IDPs the end result is that we have a refugee crisis. If we have a refugee crisis, it translates into a wider issue around migration. Some of the challenges that Europe has faced since 2015 have been around the boiling point of unresolved displacement that started with internal displacement.

Q4 **Mrs Latham:** You talked about women and girls, and livelihoods for them. That is the case in every situation, because women do not get the same opportunities, but in Africa 52% of displaced people are women or girls. Obviously, that is a fairly natural number in terms of the fact that we are 52% women and 48% men, but in this particular instance what



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

unique challenges do they face as displaced persons? They need livelihoods in normal life; they need them everywhere, but what unique challenges do they face?

**Markus Geisser:** If I may, I think my colleagues would agree that gender-based violence is of course one of those challenges they face. It is not unique to women and girls; this also applies to others. But in particular we have to accept the fact that—

Q5 **Mrs Latham:** It is worse for women and girls.

**Markus Geisser:** In certain contexts, they are more vulnerable, yes. This is something we need to consider.

Q6 **Mrs Latham:** If they are more vulnerable, then, what more could be done to protect the women and girls when they are fleeing from their homes? Is there anything that could be done that would improve things for them?

**Sanj Srikanthan:** One observation I have made previously is that, in any case of displacement resulting from conflict, there will be violence against women and girls. In every single historic case, there has been, and it will continue in the future. We need to assume the worst is going to happen, sadly. In some cases, it is much worse. A DFID-funded research piece we did showed that, while globally 34% or 35% of women and girls have faced physical or sexual violence, in South Sudan it is 65%; it is almost double the global average. A number between those two will be the case in every single crisis. Yet the funding from UN appeals that goes to address gender-based violence is only around the 0.5% mark. Why is that? One observation is that the decision-makers are overwhelmingly male when it comes to making these commitments. Therefore, there is no real recognition of the unique challenges that women and girls face, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

The second issue is that, when a conflict happens, males in particular have less respect for the rule of law in some contexts. Therefore, we see a breakdown of norms, a reversion to stereotyping of the role of women and the ability to exploit women and girls, who may have been protected by the rule of law. That is another challenge about prevention, which needs to happen before the crisis. Lastly, when they are displaced, even if they had a job before displacement, their ability to cope is far less. The opportunities open to them are far less, even if they were to receive treatment for, as an example, acts of physical or sexual violence. Therefore, their ability to recover is much slower, which is compounded by the fact that they are not part of any decision-making circles in many cases. We often have to force the issue at community level to ensure 50/50 participation in community consultations.

Q7 **Mrs Latham:** If DFID were to increase funding particularly for this issue, what more could be done? If the funding was there, what exactly, practically, would you see DFID doing?



**Sanj Srikanthan:** First, DFID is a disproportionately high contributor to addressing violence against women and girls. It is one of its thematic priorities, which we welcome. The challenge is that other donors do not follow suit. In general, when funding is going through the UN appeals process, it often does not translate into funding for violence against women and girls; it often goes to other sectors or other responses. In almost all cases, it is not proportionate to the need. As you have correctly pointed out, women and girls are 52% of the displaced in Africa; we know that at least 35% will face some form of physical or sexual violence. Therefore, 0.5% does not translate to adequate funding. That is what we need to see more of from DFID. Within DFID, for example, in its humanitarian spending tracker there is no measure of its funding to prevent violence against women and girls, which is a disservice considering that DFID is funding that. But we need to signal it, and there needs to be more advocacy to encourage other donors to step up.

This is part of a wider issue around where funding is going. So little of it is multi-year funding, which means that programmes start and stop. That is one thing if it is not related to protection, but if it is about sexual violence it is very different. Six months ago, I was very fortunate to sit alongside Denis Mukwege before he got the Nobel prize. He spoke about this issue in Congo and his hospital, where he had to stop services from one week to the next because his grant had run out and it was not multi-year. He literally had to turn away women and girls who had been horrifically sexually abused because he had no more supplies or ability to implement. That is the tangible cost of lack of multi-year financing, particularly for this issue.

**Markus Geisser:** It is not only DFID. Of course, DFID is part of the UK Government, which is a very joined-up Government with a comprehensive approach. If I go back to my very first point about IHL, I am not saying that respect of IHL is the solution for everything, of course not. But it nonetheless is a way towards the solution. In particular, if you think about the UK Government, the Ministry of Defence is supporting certain state armed forces in Africa. It is not only about the respect of IHL by their own troops. We understand the British armed forces are not very present in Africa with a big footprint, but they support other troops. This absolutely critical issue of not allowing soldiers to violate women has to be part of any training programme. I know this is done, but it has to be reinforced. This is really just to say that it is not only about DFID; other Ministries within the Government have to do their fair share, to hopefully generate positive change.

**Lucy Hovil:** I agree: we need the emergency response, but we also need to focus on longer-term issues such as education. Somehow, ironically, displacement contexts can allow for education opportunities that people might not have had otherwise. It is not a very nice argument, but it gives an opportunity for education to be given, particularly in camp environments but also in urban environments. It is absolutely crucial.



**Chair:** Lucy, that is a perfect segue to Henry's questions.

Q8 **Henry Smith:** It is a perfect segue. Thank you for your very useful answers. Pauline spoke about women and girls, but over half of those displaced in Africa, as you will know, are children. Is enough being done to ensure their security and wellbeing?

**Lucy Hovil:** No, not really. Obviously, our idea of refugees is often refugees in camps. I acknowledge that, probably, more refugees are not in camps than are in camps, but when you go to a camp it is a very stark thing. You see children just hanging around with absolutely nothing to do. I was recently in the camps in Shire in northern Ethiopia. The demographic was primarily young men, who were hanging around with relatively little to do, because there was so little funding available. That is shocking, because there is an opportunity for people to be using that time. No one ever wants or chooses to be in an encampment context, but, if people are forced into that situation, at the very least there should be a minimum of education supplied for children.

**Markus Geisser:** If I may reinforce that message, I would refer to the ICRC with regards to urban IDPs. What Lucy has just mentioned is also the case for those IDPs who do not go to camps, which can be for all kinds of reasons: because they do not want to, because they are not allowed or because, unfortunately, they have to pay money to go into certain camps. I think of a particular case in Baidoa in Somalia. Lucy has explained the issue here very eloquently. I am sure there are ways to give them other opportunities. We need to have a bit of a long-term perspective here. I am sure we are going to talk about the aid and development nexus at some point this afternoon, and there it is.

**Sanj Srikanthan:** I would agree with my colleagues. If we look at this country, we recognise that investment in our children is important in preventing potential social crises in the future. That is on a greater magnitude in some of these places, where a lack of education consigns the next generation to a future without hope. It is often a future where they are influenced by conflict actors in the worst cases but, at the very least, they do not have opportunities. But it is also not a one-faceted solution. It is about education, but also health outcomes and giving parents education and training to develop their children. There is a knock-on effect to children: conflict results in a threefold increase in intimate partner violence, between partners. The knock-on effect of that is increased violence against children. There is a negative spiral that needs to be corrected through education and investment in children, combined with education and combined with vaccinations.

We need to recognise that this kind of programming cannot be short-term. As we know, globally the average displacement is 10 years. Therefore, the short-term nature of funding is not ideal. In that sense, DFID recognises this. A £210 million commitment was announced by Harriett Baldwin, Minister for Africa, which looks at all three parts of this: vaccinations, mother and child nutrition, as well as education for South



Sudanese children in Uganda. We need to see this replicated. If we have 52% women and girls, we have roughly the same number of children, slightly over the majority. Obviously there is overlap, but it is the next constituency that needs to be addressed, alongside women and girls.

**Q9 Henry Smith:** Everything that all three of you have said is absolutely right. I have seen some great examples of education in displaced persons' camps but also, as you say, people and children hanging around. That vacuum can be filled. You talked about the longevity of people being displaced or being refugees. We saw that when we went to the Rohingya camp at Cox's Bazar.

Given this longevity, which might cover the whole period of what would be a child's school life, what more can be done to ensure they continue to receive an education? As an obvious add-on to that, what can DFID be doing specifically to ensure that ongoing education is available to refugee children and those who are displaced internally?

**Markus Geisser:** Children are usually and hopefully part of a family, so they have parents. You probably then have to go down to see what has been given to the household as such. Is it just food assistance? Is it something that looks a bit more into the long term such as cash-transfer programming or protracted input? Somehow, the family needs to be given a chance to generate resources. I go back to the issue of urban IDPs, where this is absolutely essential. This is why they face so many difficulties and why they are so vulnerable: they are just running out of money and they are living on the edge at all times. If you have a slightly broader vision of what a child is part of—the family—it will help.

**Lucy Hovil:** It is worth slightly unpicking the policy context in which this is happening, because there is a good policy context in many respects. For instance, we have the "Alternatives to Camps" policy, which provides a really good blueprint for how services can be delivered outside the strong emphasis on camps. That not only helps the refugee population but also supports the local communities in the nearby area. This is part of the idea behind the CRRF. If these could be implemented, we would see some really big changes, not least because they recognise the protracted nature of most displacement situations.

**Sanj Srikanthan:** First, you need to reduce the incentive to divert children away from an education and a safe space, particularly the incentive for child labour. When displaced, many families feel the pressure to send children out to work. There are various tools for doing that, not least through cash programming but also through education. There is an old adage: literate parents do not have illiterate children. It is about breaking that cycle.

We also have to incorporate social and emotional learning. It is not about an output; it is not measuring how many people are in a classroom, because that is not necessarily learning. In order to get an outcome, which is an educated child who can read a certain number of words per



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

minute, which allows them to get a white-collar job if possible, it is about incorporating the fact that over 50 million children are conflict affected, meaning they have seen something traumatic that has not resolved in their minds. We cannot just put them into a classic classroom and expect them to absorb and learn. We recognise this and we have launched a curriculum that incorporates social and emotional learning, addressing trauma and thinking about mindfulness of children. This is not a luxury or a gimmick; it is integral to what we have to do, to get the best out of them.

Lastly, I am sorry to harp on, but this is about funding. If violence against women and girls is at 0.5%, education in emergencies is at 2%. When we say "in emergencies", those emergencies are multi-year. If the average is 10 years, that is an entire secondary school cycle without education for some children. It completely alters their life path.

**Q10 Henry Smith:** What DFID can do, then, is to give more support for that kind of intervention or assistance.

**Sanj Srikanthan:** Yes, and the combined approach, addressing nutrition, et cetera.

**Q11 Mrs Latham:** This is basically to Sanj and Markus. You have talked about violence against women and girls, but refugees and IDPs are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse, which you have mentioned. How do you ensure the organisations you are working with can stop that abuse and make sure it does not happen?

**Sanj Srikanthan:** Thank you for the question, because it is an important one, considering everything that is happening within the sector as well. It is about protection both in their environment and when they are displaced. There might also be perpetrators working with those who are trying to assist them, including in NGOs. This is the first and most important thing: if it hard for a staff member of an NGO to report, it is even harder for someone who does not understand the mechanisms and the context, or indeed in some cases expects to be abused, because it is the tragic nature of that area.

Therefore, the most important area here is not response but prevention. Part of this is open and clear communication on a regular and frequent basis to anyone seeking to assist displaced persons or refugees of the fact that we want to hear reports and how they can do that reporting safely. We have discovered that the best way is to have not one way but many ways of doing it. Many, particularly women and girls, will not have access to a laptop to do a website report or access even to a phone to make a phone call in privacy. Therefore, there are ways to think about this through other services. You do not want to signpost that you are looking for reporting, but as part of other programming you can find ways to get reporting, particularly through extensive protection programming, led by woman leaders, which allows a chance for people to disclose if they need to.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

The other part of this is showing that we are responding and being transparent about when cases of violence against women and girls happen. The reality is that these cases are always going to happen, because perpetrators look to infiltrate and create opportunity, as they do in schools in this country or in other places. By signalling what we have done when cases happen and being transparent about it, we can show and signal that we do not tolerate that kind of behaviour.

It is also about changing norms. It is about working with women, but equally with men. We have a programme at IRC called Engaging Men through Accountable Practice, which is about the duty to protect but also about changing norms around attitudes towards women and girls, because often sexual exploitation and abuse does not start with sexual exploitation and abuse; it starts at a lower level and builds up through a process of individuals thinking they have permission to escalate to sexual exploitation and abuse. This is about nipping it at the micro-aggression level. Those are just some of the ways we all need to address this question.

**Markus Geisser:** It is at the bottom that these unfortunate incidents take place. I fully agree with my colleague. But it is also clear that any organisation must provide clear messages from the very top. If I understand what you are referring to, I am sure it has been a wake-up call for many organisations to review whether they are doing the right thing. For example, the ICRC internally had a rather decentralised management approach to cases of sexual misconduct. Over the years, this has proven to be successful at times, but not always. Now we have gone to a very centralised approach from the very top. As an organisation, under no circumstances do we accept any cases of sexual misconduct. Of course, sanctions then have to take place if allegations are proved sadly to be correct.

I understand that next week there is a big summit on all this. I am not here to applaud the UK Government, but I do, actually. We at the ICRC are very fortunate that we have been invited to this summit. We are sending our director-general. It is about messaging very clearly from the top. That works very well in an organisation like the ICRC, which is a bit hierarchical, a bit top-down. It may not work with other organisations, but I can tell you that within our organisation it does.

Q12 **Mrs Latham:** It has to work all the way through. How do you co-ordinate safeguarding efforts with other major organisations you work with, in both the camps and the communities, and ensure you have the same safeguarding standards as implementing partners? How do you co-ordinate that and make sure it happens?

**Sanj Srikanthan:** For IRC, we are absolutely clear that, where we work with partners in the community or local NGOs, they must abide by our code of conduct, the IRC Way. It is a training that is mandatory for everyone from the chief executive to an intern, and therefore to the partner as well. They sign to accept that. I have recognised, though, that



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

it is one thing to sign and accept it, but to implement it is always an ongoing process and challenge. In some instances, we have had cases where they have queried elements of the IRC Way as not culturally appropriate. There are any number of areas that we can say require adjusting according to cultural appropriateness, but sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment is not one of those. That is where there is one standard, and we adhere to it. If you want to be a partner of our work or work in partnership with our donors, you need to abide by it.

This is almost to say, "Whatever might be happening in the wider society, whatever the attitude to women and girls might be in your wider society, if you sign as a partner, as an IRC staff member, you sign up to this code of conduct". That is a line that must be held to and reiterated by leadership from the top down.

**Markus Geisser:** It is a critical point. As a sector, we have to improve this cross-communication. This is what you are pointing at. From the ICRC's perspective, I am sure we have to improve with regard to that. As an organisation, like IRC, I am sure, if we hire someone and we have doubts, or if we are not going to be given the information we think we should know, as an organisation we have a responsibility to stop the recruitment process. Following the unfortunate events that have taken place, this probably has to trickle down even more. We have to be clear that we had to learn very bitter lessons.

Q13 **Mrs Latham:** Sanj, you mentioned reporting procedures and having multiple ones. You mentioned being able to report on a website. How many camps genuinely have access to the internet in order to do that sort of thing? Internal displacement camps are much poorer, not that any refugee camp is luxurious, and do not have some of the luxuries that a refugee camp may have. How on earth can they do it through a website?

**Sanj Srikanthan:** You are absolutely correct. In the vast majority of cases, they do not have access to it. In fact, it is more likely staff who will use a website. There are very few cases among clients. The phone line we have called EthicsPoint, which goes through a third party, is used more.

**Mrs Latham:** It is very difficult to use.

**Sanj Srikanthan:** It can be very difficult to have the privacy to make that phone call. That is where we go to other options, such as comments and suggestion boxes, for want of another word, around our programming. We are clear that you should not make that the box to put SEA-SH complaints in, because no one will go near that box, since they can often be seen doing that in a public space. If it is a general feedback mechanism for all aspects of programming and how we are doing as a deliverer of services to you as a displaced person, you can anonymise the feedback so no one knows the nature of your feedback.



As I say, the other mechanism is often face to face, with woman-led sessions. One of our staff will lead a focus group with other women around the ways in which they are not feeling safe. Often, this elicits further information that results in a report being filed by our staff member on behalf of the individual. The important thing is to have a range of mechanisms; we are certainly not expecting a website to be the tool that the vast majority of refugees or IDPs would use.

**Markus Geisser:** At the ICRC, we have had experience with so-called maisons d'écoute or listening houses. What are they? They are little huts, for example in the eastern part of the DRC, where we have had them for almost 10 years as part of our response to gender-based violence, so women can come forward and talk to trained staff. This is not a kind of focus group, but with an individual, face to face. This is just another instrument, another way to do that.

Q14 **Mrs Latham:** This will be women listening, not men.

**Markus Geisser:** Yes, it is woman to woman. I must admit that I do not know all the details of this, but I was involved when it started 10 years ago. It would be woman to woman in this case, yes.

Q15 **Mr Lewis:** Good afternoon. My question is for Lucy. In 2017, you said to our predecessor Committee that refugee policy was "predicated on repatriation from the day they go into exile". I wondered whether you think things have moved on from then. Is there more political will now for a broader range of durable solutions, including integration, for example? To what extent is repatriation an effective and realistic solution for refugees specifically in Africa?

**Lucy Hovil:** Thank you. It is always good to be reminded about what you have said before. I stick to that. Unfortunately, not much has changed. Out of the three durable solutions, repatriation is the only one that is given serious air time. The challenge is to see the three durable solutions together. Any discussion on local integration has to take place at the same time as discussion around resettlement. At the end of the day, this is about political will. Who has the leverage to persuade Governments that are hosting enormous numbers of refugees to begin to offer local integration, without a similar level of commitment? It is not just about funding. Even the funding is very low, of course. It is very hard to see where the political leverage is coming from in the global north at the moment. That continues to be a problem. The global compacts offer a tiny glimmer of hope, inasmuch as there is a core element around responsibility sharing in the compacts, but there is no mechanism to make sure those are actually implemented. It could just be another talking shop, quite possibly.

At the moment, repatriation continues to be quite a dangerous idea for most people. A lot of Somalis have tried going home and then found that it is just impossible. They may have gone back to Kenya, but they cannot then re-register as refugees, so they are infinitely more vulnerable than



they were before. What little they had before they repatriated they have lost now. A similar situation is happening in Burundi, where there is so little assistance being offered in the Tanzanian camps that Burundians are starting to go back home, but they are going home to absolutely nothing. Similar problems are likely to happen with South Sudan. A new peace deal has been signed and it will be a matter of weeks before a discussion starts quite seriously around repatriation.

We have to be very careful, because it is not only that repatriation is not viable in the short term, but it sets the stage for a new round of conflict and displacement in the medium to long term. We keep putting these very quick fixes on to situations. You push everyone back over the border and it looks like the problem has been solved, but you have actually created the beginnings of a far bigger problem.

I just saw today that there is an article in *The Guardian* about Guinea Bissau offering citizenship to people from Senegal who have been there for a couple of decades. That kind of example is so important. But I cannot emphasise strongly enough that it has to be done in the broader context of wealthier nations offering resettlement places as well as delivering on their promises of funding.

**Q16 Chair:** One of you—I think it was Sanj—touched on the comprehensive refugee response framework. Can I ask you to elaborate on that and, in particular, the impact that framework will have on refugees in the affected countries?

**Sanj Srikanthan:** First, Chair, we should commend all the parties who have signed that and intend to act upon it. We would agree that the intent behind it is the right one, within the framework of the global compact on refugees. But, as my colleagues have said, the reality in implementation is that there is a disproportionate focus on what is politically convenient, such as repatriation, when in fact that is only one of the pillars within the CRRF. One of the concrete challenges with implementation has been that there is not really a legal framework for implementation. It is a set of ideals or aspirations, and it is really down to local actors. In some cases, where it does work, it is down to an alliance between international donors, Governments and civil society to make it work.

But in many other cases we have run into challenges at sub-national level with implementation. For example, granting citizenship at a national level is one thing; settlement solutions in places like Tanzania are more complex, where land issues, integration with the local economy, et cetera, prevent us from realising the self-reliance pillar of refugee integration, which is so essential to making this work. Where this has worked is where there is good partnership between local government ministries as well as civil society. Where it has not worked is where political tensions or political considerations override those.



The challenge going forward is that the international donor community is somewhat at odds with local governments or Governments that are affected by large numbers of refugees, where they are, certainly within the framework, seen to be doing a global public good in hosting refugees, but often the support translates into loans, rather than grants. That is one issue. Secondly, if you look at one of the other pillars around resettlement to third countries, signals such as the one we have seen from the Trump Administration to lower that figure to 29,000 are not great. There does not seem to be the principle of burden sharing. Aside from the local and sub-national issues, you certainly have Governments increasingly questioning whether this is a one-sided agreement and whether they are seeing a true partnership between UN agencies, NGOs, Governments and donors.

Q17 **Chair:** Am I right that Tanzania has pulled out of this because of this loans issue? Is it more complicated than that?

**Lucy Hovil:** I would assert that it is. Back in 2008, the Government of Tanzania made this incredibly generous offer of naturalisation to Burundian refugees who fled in 1972. Quite surprisingly, 162,000 took that offer up. There was a real commitment and promise—so the Tanzanian Government understood, anyway—that funding would go with that to allow for the kind of integration that was going to be needed. That has come in the form of a World Bank loan, which has really moved the goalposts. It is not at all surprising that the Government of Tanzania have pulled out of it.

We have to be very careful with countries such as Uganda. We presume an enormous amount right now. In terms of motivation, Uganda has been incredible at opening its borders and allowing refugees to come in, but there is political expediency driving this. It would be odd if there was not. If that is not understood and the funding does not come in, it means the whole system could collapse like a house of cards. We could see some serious pushback from countries such as Uganda.

Q18 **Chair:** Can you elaborate on what you mean by “political expediency” in terms of Uganda’s policy?

**Lucy Hovil:** Uganda has leveraged its role as a leader in progressive refugee policy, because it has chosen that as a means of moving forward rather than the demonising or xenophobic message that a lot of other Governments around the world have used. The problem is that it has put its cards into that deck, if you like. It is really important that the funding comes in. If the funding does not come in, it means that Uganda has allowed all of these refugees to come in, but they have come to the areas that are the poorest. Northern Uganda and West Nile have had years and years of conflict. Those areas are only just beginning to recover. They have been very marginalised. Either this is an opportunity to kick-start development in those areas, or it is basically setting up a complete disaster.



Q19 **Chair:** Is there ever a case for World Bank loans to be the conduit for supporting refugees?

**Lucy Hovil:** It would seem odd. In the context of responsibility sharing, it just seems very, very odd to do that, but I am not an economist.

**Sanj Srikanthan:** It is a well-recognised economic tool. It is just at odds with the political declarations of the CRRF. If on the one hand you are talking about burden sharing, and on the other hand you are talking about a tried and tested loan mechanism to address something that you have declared is a collective problem, it does not square well with Governments that are expecting more unconditional support. Equally, if we go down the grant route rather than the loan route, which is certainly a hope, you can expect more transparency around the spending of grants. There is a quid pro quo there as well, which donors like DFID can push for, in terms of transparency, lack of corruption and spending on specific projects that create solutions that are sustainable for refugees.

Q20 **Henry Smith:** We were talking earlier on about how protracted crises become the norm. The amount of time for which people are refugees or internally displaced people has increased. What is an effective way forward for both humanitarian organisations and Government agencies like DFID to work together to better address that challenge?

**Markus Geisser:** First of all, we probably have to realise that, while protracted conflict is called the new norm, this is perhaps not quite true. Looking at the history, I may not have time to develop this point here, but it has been around; we have probably just been under some illusions. As organisations or donor agencies, we have had 36 years of Afghanistan, or whenever it started, maybe 36 Afghanistan appeals and 36 ICRC missions in Afghanistan. It is a very late recognition, in that sense.

We have to understand that sectors have transformed how they operate. We have to recognise this, because sometimes this recognition is not here. I would not say it is all doom and gloom. I can only talk for the ICRC, but it is important to realise that in certain contexts, such as urban contexts in Africa, we are trying very hard to create what are called development holds to avoid development in reverse. We can only do this as far as is possible. Of course, finance is needed. As we all know, the World Bank is changing its modus operandi. This is going in the right direction. As a sector, we have to be mindful that aid and development work from different scripts, but we are nonetheless part of the same field. We have to be a little more imaginative to overcome these, at times, sterile separations.

I will conclude now, but sometimes people say that humanitarian principles and development do not go hand in hand. I do not have time to develop on that now, but I would not say that. We operate with local authorities in many protracted conflicts. Of course you can co-operate with health authorities even if the Government in the capital are not necessarily very principled. Here, we have to deconstruct some myths



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

and recognise the way that many organisations have transformed, not only development organisations but also humanitarian aid organisations.

- Q21 **Henry Smith:** Sanj, when you appeared before the predecessor Committee about a year and a half ago, you said that you had yet to see multi-year funding commitments translated on the ground in east Africa. Have you noticed any change in that period of time?

**Sanj Srikanthan:** No, sadly not. If we look at the landscape of multi-year financing, it has not moved in any significant way. Of the funding from UN appeals, 71% went to UN agencies, of which 65% went to the big three: WFP, Unicef and UNHCR. Almost none of that, using their own reporting, went as multi-year financing to implementing partners. So, no, we are not seeing that. As I have illustrated through the example of the prevention of violence against women and girls, it has real, tangible impact in terms of continual delivery. We have also raised it with DFID, which is sympathetic to the challenges we have on this.

**Henry Smith:** That is a very strong message on the importance of multi-year funding. That has definitely come across very strongly today.

- Q22 **Richard Burden:** Could I take you back to the global compact on refugees, which Lucy described as offering a glimmer of hope as long as it is not a talking shop. The evidence we have had from IRC referred to it as “a relatively low-ambition document”. Do you think it really will lead to change in the way countries support refugees? How can the issue of burden sharing develop? Is it a realistic concept or is this, in reality, about offering loans and not grants?

**Lucy Hovil:** The extent to which responsibility sharing is crucial cannot be overemphasised. In a recent bit of research we did with Somali refugees in Nakivale camp in Uganda, a young man said, “Once Trump closed down the resettlement programme, I decided to migrate to Europe”. He had got as far as Egypt and then turned around. His family has lost an enormous amount of money in the process. It shows that we are very much operating in a global context. The extent to which some countries happen to find themselves next door to a country in conflict and suddenly have a million refugees land on their doorstep is such a stark image of the lack of fairness, if others do not step in.

In a way, there is not very much that is new in the global compacts but, to the extent that we can harness a bit of a spotlight on this issue of responsibility sharing, it is absolutely crucial. Maintaining that pressure and turning it into implementation on the ground is an enormous challenge. That is where really clear mechanisms need to be in place, but I cannot say strongly enough that it has to come down to that responsibility sharing, which is what drives the political will that creates the space in which people can be protected.

**Markus Geisser:** This is absolutely crucial. It may sound a bit naive, especially in a context where there is a lot of mention and talk of national interest. Of course, what is in the global interest is also in the national



interest and vice versa. Here, we as humanitarians can sometimes only appeal to the humanitarian imperative, which nonetheless drives many of the aid policies of many countries. This sometimes has to be remembered in this conversation, as you have just mentioned.

**Sanj Srikanthan:** The global compact on refugees is like all documents: it is only effective in its implementation. It is a starting point, not the end point. It does not address all aspects of concern around supporting refugees. The biggest challenge with it is the selective interpretation of elements of that, depending on whom you talk to. Particularly in the context of some of the challenges Europe is facing at the moment, there is a focus on the prevention of migration rather than addressing the underlying causes. Where we see, for example, EU trust funds in east Africa focusing on securitisation—i.e. more borders, more border guards more fences, et cetera—that is unhelpful in addressing the underlying causes, because people will find a way if they are desperate enough. I have an interesting figure for the Committee: 50,000 people have fled from Africa to Yemen, which is a conflict zone, out of desperation. You can imagine how desperate they must be and what they must be living through in Africa to go to Yemen, of all places, right now. That kind of desperation cannot be stemmed through borders and fences. It has to address livelihoods; it has to address inequality; it has to address safety, particularly for women and girls, as mentioned.

Q23 **Richard Burden:** One of the things the IRC has called for—it has basically issued this challenge to the UK—is the development of a robust accountability framework to address these issues and to make sure implementation happens in practice. What would that accountability framework look like?

**Sanj Srikanthan:** The UK has an opportunity now. Much of what the Secretary of State for International Development said yesterday was about laying out the future vision for Britain's role as a leading international donor, with DFID at its disposal as a leading implementer of aid programming. Part of this is about recognising that in some cases, at the moment, there are weak accountabilities between funds given and funds implemented with respect to things like the global compact on refugees. What an accountability framework at a top level needs to address is changing the "business as usual" approach.

In the previous question around how we address protracted displacement, the issue is that funding is not going to keep up with the scale of displacement, sadly. Therefore, we all need to be more efficient in how we use aid to drive solutions. Part of it is spending; part of it is of course conflict resolution and conflict prevention. But, on spending, it is absolutely essential that a framework incorporates everything from best use of resources, so value for money, through to whether we are achieving outcomes or outputs. As a crude example, an output could be doubling the literacy rate of a child, when in fact they need to triple it in order to get a white-collar job, which is an outcome. We need to think



about how we create sustainability so that particularly host Governments are able to take funding and develop sustainable solutions themselves, rather than becoming dependent on multi-year, open-ended funding, because there are new crises all the time that need to be addressed.

These are just some of the pillars of what an accountability framework could look like. There are more specific ones I could go into on the global compact on refugees, but these are some of the important ones, I feel.

**Q24 Richard Burden:** Going back to the first question I asked about IDPs, the global compact does not extend to IDPs. Does that limit its effectiveness? Is there any realistic prospect that it could be extended?

**Sanj Srikanthan:** At this point, we are trying to make it work for refugees. It is not yet working for refugees, but that does not mean IDPs should be excluded from the problem. If we look at what was announced yesterday by the Secretary of State, particularly around investment in Africa, we also need to recognise that IDPs are often created by weak Government mechanisms for addressing the needs of the most vulnerable when a shock happens, whether that is conflict or natural disaster. Therefore, when we think about investment through vehicles such as CDC, we need to think about addressing the most vulnerable in those societies and not just about investment in corporations in Africa, because the end result of unequal growth is that you are very likely to see future shocks that create large numbers of IDPs. Where does that lead? It leads to refugees and then to migration. It is about more than equal development; it is about addressing the underlying causes of the creation of IDPs.

**Markus Geisser:** In this conversation, as much as we focus on the global compact on refugees, it is important that we do not forget the IDPs. That is why I would really commend this Committee for looking into displacement in Africa and putting a particular focus on IDPs. This is really crucial. Just from an operational perspective, I am sure there are common elements to how refugees today are assisted in different contexts. Yes, Oman is not Aleppo; I see the point. But I am sure that imaginative solutions can also be applied to IDP situations. I understand that DFID and the UK have championed the, hopefully upcoming, high-level meeting on IDPs. They are not leading it; it is the Norwegians who are leading it, but that does not really matter. It is hopefully not going to be another talking shop, but first of all we need to make sure it takes place. You need to make sure it takes place, and then organisations like ours and researchers like Lucy would certainly be interested in having a conversation to help bring about such a high-level meeting. It is time well spent.

**Chair:** Can I thank all three of you for your evidence today and for appearing before us? We recognise that this is a big and challenging area. You have helped us enormously over the last hour. I am going to invite our second panel to join us now, but thank you very much to all three of you.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: George Okoth-Obbo and Valentin Tapsoba.

Q25 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed for joining us here this afternoon. We are going to seek to cover eight areas over the next 45 minutes. Let me kick off with a similar question to the one I put initially to the first panel. We know that a combination of factors including conflict, violence, persecution and climate change has forced 20 million people from their homes across Africa. What do you see as the biggest challenge the continent faces that we should be addressing as part of our inquiry into forced displacement in Africa?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** Good afternoon. My name is George Okoth-Obbo. I am the assistant high commissioner for operations in our organisation. My colleague here is Mr Valentin Tapsoba. He is the director of the Africa bureau. We are both from the region. I am from Uganda; he is from Burkina Faso. We have very helpful segues from the previous conversation.

**Chair:** Excellent, thank you very much.

**George Okoth-Obbo:** Let me at this stage perhaps make the following broad statements. First, if you were to ask me to leave this room now, to leave one statement hanging in the air and to express myself about which side I err on, the side of hope or the side of risk, I would leave in the room the side of hope and expectation at the moment, as it relates to displacement in Africa at large, but particularly in east Africa. There is a “but” to that, which is twofold. The first of those “buts” is that the pathology of the global compact on refugees has changed and is continuing to change the narrative around refugees and displacement in a very positive way with a very positive dynamic. But in that comes the risk of a high level of expectation. In the composition phase, we can go back to the Tanzania case and what it represents. As much as we have to accelerate and support this expectation, we need to be extremely attentive to the risk of failure, because we would not descend back to where we were before; we would go much lower than where we would have been.

The second thing I would like to leave in the air—and I will stop at this point—is that surrounding the dynamic I just described is a series of fundamental questions. The two that I would like to highlight are the crisis of decline and the lack of social progress. In the way in which it is reflected in the context of displacement, this actually reflects a deeper dynamic and problem for the countries in question. Of course, the final point relates to accountability with regard to refugees, whether that is displacement in general or the issue of the protection of IDPs, which was



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

raised earlier on. Those deficits will usually typify larger deficits that affect even populations that are not displaced.

**Chair:** Thank you very much indeed for that overview. We are going to explore a number of those strands through our questioning.

Q26 **Mrs Latham:** We know there is a huge shortfall in funding; we heard it from the first panel. But it is enormous, in that South Sudan's regional refugee response plan is only 12% funded and the one for DRC is only 11% funded. That is miniscule. They cannot possibly do everything they need to do. Why is this? What more could the international community, in particular DFID but not exclusively DFID in the UK, do to support those displaced in the region?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** This is a very good question, because it allows me first and foremost to thank the UK. For us in UNHCR, those thanks relate to two things. The first of them is that the United Kingdom, through DFID, is an important supporter of what we do, not only in financial terms, which is important and to which I will return, but in terms of what I might call humanitarian diplomacy. That is perhaps the area where I would like to add to what my colleagues who preceded me talked about in terms of the different leveraging effects.

But, just taking the financial question for the moment, the UK has been the fifth largest overall financial supporter of our work, but there is one particular element that I would like to highlight in this. In terms of core funding, i.e. funding that is not earmarked, it is the third largest and a very dependable one. This is to say that one of the fears we have, given the negative politics, to put it like that, around refugees and migrants, is that even in cases where the quantity of the financial support does not reduce we see the risk of a heightening of earmarking. That means that operations that are dependent on core funding—many of the operations in Africa, including east Africa, are of this character—are at risk of suffering the consequences of the migration of available funding to other priorities.

Secondly, in terms of overall funding, in 2015-16 the UK was our fifth largest funder. That represented a portfolio of about \$213 million. Allow me to point out that it is falling. This is important in two ways. First, the spread of what we are able to meet obviously becomes poorer on a per capita basis. The second is the greatest risk to the opportunity, to which I alluded, that has been brought about by the global compact. It relates not just to the comparative negative references that are attributed to the drop in funding, but the instrumentalisation of that question. When we come back to Tanzania in further questions, we will illustrate what that point means.

Q27 **Chair:** Can we focus a bit now on IDPs, as we did with the first panel? Our understanding from our evidence is that two-thirds of the world's displaced persons are IDPs, yet this accounts for around one-seventh, 14%, of UNHCR's budget. What is your explanation for that apparent



gap?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** As you now, the global number of people we serve is close to 70 million; 68.5 million is the exact figure. Refugees account for about 24 million or 25 million. Most of the difference is made up of internally displaced persons. The first of the reasons for this delta that you have alluded to relates to what the nature of the accountability itself is. As you know, in the refugee context, the accountability we have for refugees is end to end. If you wanted to visualise this, it goes from the first point at which the refugee makes contact with an asylum space at the border to when the refugee exits that. In between, we have an end-to-end responsibility. If you look at our programming, for example, it is comprehensive across the sector. Especially since 2005, when the cluster system was established, it attributed to agencies such as ours a rather limited accountability, in two ways.

First, it was attributed to three areas: protection, shelter and camp co-ordination. But within those three sectors it was primarily an accountability of co-ordination rather than delivery. For all the agencies that have these responsibilities around the eight or nine clusters, the primary attribution was one of co-ordination and not of delivery. If you see how this translates in our programming, whereas the refugee activities are programmed and funded on a continuous basis, when it comes to IDPs it is based only on project funding. The measure of what we can and should be able to do is the measure of available funding. That is not the case at all with refugees.

Q28 **Chair:** I think I understand what you are saying. You are saying that it is partly because of the way funding is constructed. If donors, including the UK, were to construct funding in a different way, the share that was available for IDPs could then increase.

**George Okoth-Obbo:** That would be an important part to it, although the truth is that the funding deficits we experience for refugees are also mirrored for IDPs. That is correct.

**Chair:** Of course, yes.

**George Okoth-Obbo:** But an important part of this difference is exactly what I have described, in the way you have understood it.

Q29 **Chair:** Just so my understanding is correct, when you initially answered you talked about the end-to-end responsibilities you have for refugees. In a sense, are you saying that, because refugees have left the countries and there is an asylum process, there is inevitably expenditure associated with that, which you would have not associated with someone moving to a different part of the same country. Is that part of the explanation?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** That is in the right direction, but let me put some quantities to it, just to elaborate on that. In the case of a refugee, the end-to-end accountability could be broken down into about 19 sectors according to our previous programming model. I cite that because it is



easier to quantify it in those terms. If you look at what we present to you as a donor in the case of refugees, it covers all those 19 sectors. You can compare that with our ask to you as an aid donor in the case of IDPs, which will typically be limited to three and sometimes only one, i.e. protection. To add one more thing, the ask in the case of these three will typically be driven towards co-ordinating the action of others rather than delivery, which is the difference from the case of refugees.

**Q30 Chair:** Broadening this slightly, we know from evidence both in Africa and indeed elsewhere that many, often most, refugees and IDPs live outside of camps, in host communities. How has UNHCR adapted its approaches to ensure it can support refugees living in host communities as well as those living in camps?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** Here comes the demonstrated power of the CRRF, the global compact on refugees and the opportunities that this represents. I will cite just two cases: Ethiopia and Uganda. Both these operational situations have historically been characterised by an approach of encampment. If we start with Ethiopia, under the CRRF, one of the pledges they made in September 2016 at the New York summit was precisely to relax encampment through what they called an “out of camp policy”. This is where they are going—incrementally, it has to be admitted—within those margins, in a relatively decisive way. In other words, they have allowed initially Eritreans to live outside of the camps. That has now grown to the point where they are willing to consider other populations, particularly Somalis. You will know that Ethiopia is set to promulgate a proclamation that will basically legitimate freedom of movement and freedom of life for refugees in Ethiopia. The key about this is that it is effectively conditional on continuing support and solidarity, quite frankly, in financial terms. That is the key that will make that happen.

If we move to Uganda, the Ugandan approach to this is based on something called the STA for short; that is, the settlement transformation agenda. This will basically allow refugees to settle rather than be encamped. At its inception, it was based on a commitment to provide each refugee family up to 100 square metres of land, which was calculated to allow them to feed themselves within a six-month period and to generate a surplus to be marketed. The CRRF in Uganda is built around this in a very big way. Unfortunately, the growth in refugee numbers since July 2013, mainly from South Sudan, has defeated this a bit, just because of the ability to accommodate people.

To conclude on this, the opportunity I mentioned earlier that is represented by the global compact on refugees and the CRRF is that Governments are owning this idea of doing things differently. One of these areas is precisely the encampment question. That new narrative is looking for a handshake with international solidarity and responsibility sharing. The conclusion would have to be that, the more that is demonstrated, the more that these opportunities have a chance to be



realised, but the opposite would also be true, which is the case of Tanzania.

- Q31 **Chair:** In the example of Uganda, are you essentially saying that we are getting to a point where the land just is not available for that policy route to be the main one?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** This is absolutely correct. I am Ugandan myself. Broadly speaking, the history of refugee rights in Africa has a startling irony. Protection has often been best for refugees during periods of dictatorship, such as under Idi Amin in Uganda, because the big man could basically come and appropriate an entire district, and say, "From tomorrow that is for the Angolan refugees", in the case of Zambia, which was basically the western part of the country. Part of the space that Ugandan nationals have occupied over the last two decades, in having a greater say in their life and governance, has been around the issue of land. In Uganda right now, at the beginning, when the settlement transformation strategy was being devised, the land law had not been changed—it has now been changed—to put land ownership and decision-making power in the hands of the people. Once that happened, we started to see a diminution of the space that was available to refugees. That continues to be the pattern right now.

- Q32 **Chair:** Are you able to comment on the issue the first panel raised about these World Bank loans?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** I am, yes. I see somewhat more opportunity than they expressed. That opportunity is to applaud the World Bank in having effectively firewalled a funding appropriation under IDA18, as it is called. IDA19 is now being looked at. This is not small money. It is \$2 billion. If you consider that globally we are normally looking in a humanitarian response for \$8.2 billion, the opportunity to leverage another \$2 billion is not insignificant.

The second area where I would differ slightly from my colleagues is regarding the reaction of specific Governments, such as Tanzania or Rwanda. That is not against the grant element of IDA18, which is quite significant and results in Cameroon, for example, being able to get \$120 million under IDA18. Compare that to our own budget for that operation, which is just \$38 million. The problem is that, within that window, the component of it that relates to host communities ranges from concessionary to very low. It is more a political than a financial thing. Let me cite President Uhuru Kenyatta. The reason I do so is because there we have a \$122 million package that the Government signed off on. It is basically concessionary. The real difficulty is how the President explains that: "I am able to get a grant for refugees, but not when it comes to our own citizens". That is the issue.

- Q33 **Chair:** Is there a solution to this that changes the mix without changing the quantum? Could you have it that the refugees are part loan and part grant and the host communities are the same, or would that just be seen



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

as a fix?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** You could. There has to be a whole-of-situation approach. What do I mean by that? I mean that refugees rarely stay in a firewall. They stay in a context. Let us stay with Kenya. We are looking at Dadaab and Kakuma. In one case we are looking at the South Sudanese, and in the other we are looking at the Somalis. Let us take an approach that is situationally based. These are semi-arid areas, refugee-hosting areas, et cetera. Let us apply a similar approach to all of them, without the issue of refugees and nationals being a key deciding factor.

**Chair:** Brilliant, thank you.

Q34 **Mr Lewis:** Good afternoon. Are the UNHCR's durable solutions—resettlement, integration and repatriation—realistic options for refugees in the current political environment? Your evidence highlights a reduction, for example, in the number of refugees being resettled in third countries. Why is this? What more could the United Kingdom as a country be doing?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** Allow me to give a short initial answer, but please feel free to come back.

**Chair:** We like short answers, I must say.

**George Okoth-Obbo:** First, in this period of global compacts, and in an era where refugees and migration issues are being so heavily politicised, resettlement is not only necessary and advantageous; it is imperative. Why? It is for two principal reasons. First, resettlement actually helps people. Even where it is one single refugee who is resettled, it helps that refugee. The second reason, however, is political. One of the most visible forms of international solidarity and burden sharing, which is in fact one of the four specific ones under the CRRF, is solutions including resettlement. It is absolutely critical for resettlement countries—I will ask you to allow me to plead directly to the United Kingdom—to demonstrate that not only are they holding level the quotas, such as they might be, but that they are nominally even increasing them. You cannot imagine the positive effect of being able to say that the United Kingdom has increased its quota by even 10, to be quite frank. But it is even more telling for that narrative to be a negative one, i.e. that the United Kingdom has reduced its quota, or the United States has done so, to be more direct to a resettlement provider that has reduced it.

I have asked for your indulgence on the advocacy part. As you know, with the United Kingdom we have advocated that the different streams of resettlement be consolidated in a package, to which we have put a number of 10,000. If the United Kingdom was to go anywhere towards that, we would see the two effects I have mentioned; i.e. it will help people and have an incredible demonstration effect. The word I would use for that would be “tremendous”.

Q35 **Richard Burden:** In your written evidence, you said that you quite often have to find out about what DFID is doing in a very ad hoc manner. How



could that change? How could DFID better co-ordinate and communicate its work not only with UNHCR but perhaps with other actors as well?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** There are two movements that I would like to speak to. Quite frankly, one of them is on our part. The one on our part is that we recognise and are recognising much better that DFID operates in a very important way through the empowerment of country representations. When it comes to local resource mobilisation, I have to say we are more centralised than DFID is. The tip we have to take on our side is to ensure that our field-based workforce can engage with DFID more robustly and more strategically in the shaping of strategies and information perhaps more than it does.

If I was to illustrate some of the asks on our part towards DFID, which is precisely what I have said, I would add two more. First, I want to be very transparent and refer to some of the more challenging situations we have had. That has been in the Uganda operation around issues that have to do with registration difficulties and allegations of corruption, and of course in the Sudan, where we have had a resettlement situation. In both of those cases, DFID took actions that basically resulted in the stopping of funding support to us. That decision was taken and then the conversation took place around the consequences of it.

The ask on our part would be—this is something we have asked for; I am sure you know this already, but I will recite it here just to emphasise the point—for a more horizontal conversation around even the difficulties that we have. This is not just on the more strategic engagement and so on, which I mentioned earlier on, where we definitely recognise that we have to take these steps, but also on the more critical issues that we face. Then we are able to demonstrate, as we have continued to do in these two cases and others, how we are taking the steps, which we fully understand that DFID has to be concerned about from the point of view of accountability and communication, and we can work together to resolve the actual difficulties we face, as in these two particular cases.

**Q36 Richard Burden:** Are the problems in communication between you and DFID to do with the specific nature of DFID and UNHCR, as you have described, whether that is your centralisation relative to DFID's decentralisation in country, or DFID's decision on things like the Sudan situation? Are those problems symptomatic of something a bit broader in terms of relationships between donors and organisations? Are they generally as joined up as they should be?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** I would tend toward the more specific; they tend to be defined by those particular issues. The overall conversation, I have to say, is a strong one. We have understandings between ourselves institutionally speaking and in particular operations. I would probably say that we have tended to be exercised more by situations that have arisen as opposed to something that is more organic.

**Q37 Richard Burden:** Could I ask you perhaps one more question about your



relationship as UNHCR with the International Organisation for Migration? How do you co-ordinate your work to protect and support refugees and IDPs, particularly in Africa?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** We have had over many years, and continue to have, a very effective relationship with IOM on established touchpoints of shared work: resettlement, repatriation, et cetera. It is, however, true that we have had, as in the case of Bangladesh and the Rohingya operation in that country, some really deep-seated challenges to overcome. Moving forward, with these two compacts, which are in reality side by side with each other, we have to find greater complementarity between the two organisations.

These would be the three sets of catalogues. One is an established relationship that works quite well on a number of issues. Secondly, there is a particular operational context, of which Bangladesh would be a representation, in which we have—I cannot hide this—fairly serious issues that we need to resolve. Thirdly, now the refugee issue and the migration issue have been configured side by side in this highly formalised way, we have to find a more mutualising way as we move forward. If you wish, I can come back to each of these three and give a little more detail.

Q38 **Richard Burden:** That would be useful, yes. We were in Bangladesh a few months ago. This inquiry is specifically on Africa, but one of the things that surprised us a little was the issue about what IOM was responsible for and what UNHCR was responsible for.

**George Okoth-Obbo:** That is correct.

**Richard Burden:** If you could give a bit more detail on that, it would be helpful.

**George Okoth-Obbo:** Let me talk about Bangladesh. The issue in Bangladesh is that we were both put in a certain situation. From the UNHCR's side—I recognise that you might have listened to the IOM's side, and they would have described it differently—in August 2016, when there was this sharp rise in the Rohingya, we felt the IOM should have taken a step back. That situation was the following. Because until that period the Bangladeshi Government did not want to recognise the Rohingya as refugees, it created a distinction. Whereas we had up to 250,000 Rohingya in Bangladesh, only 33,000 of them were recognised as refugees. The rest were categorised as "Myanmarese displaced nationals" and IOM was asked to deal with them. Somehow, we could live with that.

After August 2016, with what now the UN itself was describing as a classic or textbook case of ethnic cleansing, the position we took was that this entire situation was a refugee situation, which should have been dealt with under refugee obligations. Our ask was that IOM step back not out of the engagement but out of a posture that allowed the Government, up to today, to take the position that the Rohingya are only displaced. Because that did not change, we have this situation. The truth is that we



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

were at least seen as fighting among ourselves but, even if you leave that aside, we have an arrangement with two lead agencies for a situation that is now bifurcated between on one hand an officially very small refugee population and a much larger one, whereas it quite clearly deserves to be seen across the board as a refugee situation.

This led to the complexities and difficulties you witnessed on the ground, such as multiple co-ordination systems and the inability to liaise with a single agency. If you asked UNHCR to describe to you how we were dealing with the threat of the monsoons in terms of contingency planning, we would be able to answer that question for you only for the portion for which we are responsible, and then you would have to go to IOM for the other portion. We all recognise this is inefficient, but we have been put into that situation and we are just trying to manage it in the best way possible.

**Chair:** I know you have touched upon the issue of Sudan, but Henry has a question relating to that.

**Q39 Henry Smith:** How is UNHCR dealing with the allegations of bribery and corruption in the resettlement programme of Sudanese refugees? When will the Office of the Inspector General conclude its investigation into that?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** What we are doing in Sudan is the typical response we have for all situations of allegations of malfeasance and corruption, not only on the side of partners or even the Government but, quite frankly, on the side of our own staff. In the case of Sudan, as you know, we have launched this investigation. It is carried out under the conditions of confidentiality that you will know about. Again, I recognise that this has created communication challenges for all of us. I do not know if my colleague has an actual timeline. I unfortunately do not have that. We can provide more details later on.

I can add two quick things. I am echoing what the deputy high commissioner said when she was here at the beginning of September. First, we have found—I hope this is recognised and acknowledged—that we are able to share essential information, not detailed information but essential information, which we do. My colleague here does these briefings in Geneva. Secondly, once the investigations are completed, we are also committed to teasing out certain information that we will share with stakeholders such as the United Kingdom as well.

**Q40 Henry Smith:** As a follow-on to that, what impact has the suspension of DFID funding had on UNHCR's operations?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** Sudan is an operation that, as you can understand, because it does not benefit from a large portfolio of earmarked funding contribution, really survives on core funding. It is a matter of life and death, if you will indulge me a bit on that one. When the funding we receive from organisations such as DFID is suspended, because the activities we are carrying out in this case are in the nature of



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

lifesaving activities, quite frankly, the effect is almost immediately visible. It is visible directly in the impact it has on the persons we care for.

- Q41 **Paul Scully:** First of all, can I apologise for coming in so late? We had a particularly productive meeting in New York with Ninette Kelley when the Committee was over there. She was talking about the fact that they wanted greater transparency in sexual exploitation and abuse allegations. We know that those people who are forcibly displaced are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse. How does UNHCR assess who is most at risk and when they are most at risk?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** I do not know if this would have come up in the conversations that you refer to but, in the steps we are taking to up our response to SEA risks and abuse, we are going much further into the programmatic footing of this while we continue with the behavioural part as well, i.e. the behaviour of staff.

I want to concentrate on the programmatic side and highlight three key elements. First, especially in emergencies, it is important to have presence at the first point of contact for refugees as they are displaced, because we have found out that, with regard to these particular risks, we do not usually have a chance for a second impression. We have to have people at the point of contact. Secondly, we are looking at two main things. The first is systems that can uptake on vulnerability and the second is data. There is a huge surge in increasing the data capabilities, data gathering and analytics, in order to highlight and prioritise vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

The third one, still concentrating on the operational side, is programmatic integrity. What does that mean? The idea is to pick up on these elements that either create or multiply the risks to the persons we serve. Let us take, for example, unaccompanied or separated children. When you were in Cox's Bazar, you must have seen the dilemma in that particular case. We have in our programming and in our conversations with donors such as yourselves a firewalled approach, i.e. to say that, for the Rohingya young women and girls, this is the extent of the vulnerability; this is the nature of the vulnerability; and this is what we require in terms of response, from staffing to programming, referral pathways and survivor response, to hopefully secure a 100% protected ability to deliver. This is what is represented on that side of things. As for the rest, I am sure that is what Kelley will have highlighted to you.

- Q42 **Paul Scully:** What are you doing to protect against SEA allegations, not just yourselves but through your delivery partners as well?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** First, through our programming instruments called PPAs, programme partnership agreements, we have applied to our partners the full range of ethical considerations that apply to us. All our PPAs with our partners are the same. Secondly, this firewalling that I have mentioned applies in exactly the same way to our partners as it applies to us. Thirdly, we have changed our oversight; that is, the



investigations. We have changed and escalated our oversight mechanisms to apply not just to UNHCR but also to our partners. To go through the examples that have been mentioned already in Kenya and now in Uganda, it is an investigation of not only UNHCR staff but also our partners.

Let me quickly acknowledge the weak point when it comes to Governments, which is the dilemma we have now in Uganda. The high commissioner personally made a request of the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister agreed on 28 February that they would investigate and so on, but quite frankly up to now it has not moved.

**Q43 Paul Scully:** I know we are short of time, but, finally, how does UNHCR empower refugees and internally displaced persons to report allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in the first place?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** Let me describe the visual part that you will see in almost all our operations, but I am also willing to acknowledge the difficulties. Every single UNHCR representative has, as one of their mandatory performance requirements, an outreach performance obligation. That is defined as creating mechanisms that would allow not just reporting but communication, input, et cetera, with the persons we serve. If you go—this is where they tend to be stronger or more visible—to any one of our camps, including in Cox's Bazar or Kutupalong, you will see all these mechanisms, boxes, et cetera. They have gone up to creating capabilities on the internet for anonymous reporting to be made. I say that while also acknowledging that access and ability to use that medium will vary, depending on where the refugees are.

That is working the way it is. I would recognise that there are some cases where it works a little bit better. The investigation that was triggered in Kakuma refugee camp in 2016, of which I am sure you will be aware, was primarily as a result of the reporting that came from the refugees. Where we face more difficulty is outside the camp settings, particularly where refugees live in a more dispersed way, particularly in urban areas. The footprint we try to create there is mainly through our partners.

**Q44 Chair:** This is the final question, really. What is the mark of success for the global compact on refugees? What difference will it make in practice to the lives of refugees?

**George Okoth-Obbo:** In the east African context that we are discussing now, its tremendous success so far has been to shore up asylum and protection on the whole and particularly in Kenya. As you remember, as we headed into September 2016, which is when these commitments were made, and into the first part of 2017, the Government was closing the entire Somali refugee programme. Without the time to go into detail, let us just say that it was the CRRF approach that shored up the situation to where we are now. The second thing that is already visible, not just in Kenya or Uganda but also in five of the 15 CRRF pilots in east Africa, is what I mentioned earlier on: a change of outlook. There is a readiness to



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

now, as in the case of Uganda, appropriate refugees as part of social inclusion. We are also seeing it elsewhere, in Djibouti, et cetera. This is the thinking now. This is the narrative; this is the outlook. We consider that as a positive.

However, I mentioned earlier on that all of this needs to be shored up, and I want to conclude with two points. The first of those is that, in the dialogue that is emerging, there is almost a quid pro quo that we should guard against. In other words, Governments should recognise and accept this as something they are doing because it is the right thing to do as part of their obligation, not because it will be secured in financial terms. If we go there, the potential to go even further back is very real. But, having said that, it is important that as much support as possible should be secured. You have the numbers. If we look at the support in financial terms, quite frankly it is very weak across all the situations. Of the top six situations that are most underfunded in terms of basic humanitarian requirements, three are in Africa and within this east African context. That dramatises that.

The final point I would like to make is that the demonstration effect that I mentioned—i.e. that the compact is being played out everywhere—should not be binarised to only the global south but should be demonstrated everywhere. This is why I was saying that, in the case of the UK, it is very important to take even a quantitatively small step, which nonetheless shows that the UK is increasing the footprint of its responsibility. You may have seen the statement from Tanzania. I am not saying it is right or wrong, but they were able to use it. One of the lines they used in pulling out of the CRRF was about how they saw it as a conspiracy to increase the responsibility on hosting countries while the same responsibility is not being seen elsewhere. As long as we are able somehow to close these two circles, as I said, we still see a very strong opportunity in the global compacts.

**Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. That is a very clear and very comprehensive set of evidence that you have presented us with today. I thank you for that. Thank you for joining us. Thank you very much indeed.

**George Okoth-Obbo:** Thank you. I am very glad you could have us. My colleagues you see behind me are from our office here. If you want it, we are ready to provide further documentation and information, even when we have finished here.

**Chair:** That is brilliant. We are very grateful. Thank you very much indeed.