

Lessons from the refugee response in Eastern Chad since 2003

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Considering the arrival of 500,000 new Sudanese refugees in Eastern Chad since April 2023, what lessons can we learn from the response to the Sudanese refugee crisis in Eastern Chad that started in 2003? In particular what has worked well / not worked well to improve refugee protection and self-reliance?

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The K4DD helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Rapid evidence reviews are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.

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1. Summary

This rapid evidence review finds that there has been little progress on increasing refugee self-reliance in east Chad, but there is evidence on the barriers to and likely drivers of greater self-reliance. Lessons from protection efforts focus on the need to adequately address the range of protection threats and the structural drivers of insecurity, and agreement between Chadian and outside security actors.

The review focuses on refugees from Sudan in Eastern Chad since 2003, and excludes internally displaced persons, or refugees in other parts of Chad.

The region has hosted large numbers of refugees since 2003, triggered by attacks in Darfur. Ongoing conflict in and between Sudan and Chad, the arrival of internally displaced persons (IDPs) a lack of resettlement options, and limited integration into a fragile local economy mean many are still living in camps. While humanitarian aid has been reduced since 2014, refugee integration or self-reliance has not been achieved in the region.

The review finds that the key factors behind this include the weak economic situation and lack of infrastructure and services in the region. While the government has largely integrated refugees into national systems, the lack of available services reduces the efficacy of the reform. The decline of humanitarian funding combined with a lack of funding for development actors means that integration efforts have not been supported or coordinated sufficiently.

Findings and promising practices include:

- Contextual knowledge is required to effectively integrate refugees and hosts. Knowledge on issues such as local land tenure systems, dispute resolution and others is needed.
- Given the predominance of agriculture in the region's economy, methods of land allocation that benefit both hosts and refugees are needed.
- Better access to forms of credit, as well as technical help and inputs for agriculture, are likely to be helpful.
- An improvement of services and infrastructure, such as health, education and water, is needed for both refugee and host populations. Input from development actors and the government of Chad is required for this.
- Measures that benefit both refugees and hosts, such as shared villages, are a promising practice.
- Humanitarian and development actors need to carefully target assistance and safety nets as provision is reduced. Aid should carefully consider the needs of vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, and include gender considerations.
- Better integration of refugees into national systems, such as a form of refugee identification card recognised nationally. Better knowledge of refugee economic conditions, such as through inclusion in national household surveys, is also suggested.

- Mixed committees for refugees and host populations can be useful forums for dialogue, while services, infrastructure and economic opportunities that benefit both groups can be helpful in reducing potential tensions.

Because of conflict within Darfur and Chad in the period, as well as general instability in the region, protection considerations were part of international actors' efforts from the beginning, in the form of camp placement. Support for protection was given by a UN Security Council Resolution, and EU and UN forces, from 2007 to 2010, before the government asked them to withdraw. Instability remains in the region, and most refugees have not returned to Sudan. According to the wishes of Chad, the UN and EU forces did not have a political mandate, limiting their ability to address the root causes of protection threats. They had a wider conception of 'protection' than the Chadian government, with the latter focused on border and camp protection and the former including rule of law, intercommunity dialogue, gender issues and human rights monitoring. The mission highlighted differences between Chad and the UN and EU actors in framing the conflict, conceptualising protection, and delimiting the role of an effective response. It raised the question of whether a mission without a political mandate can be effective, and the need to consider the role of such forces in the political economy of the conflict. It also highlighted the instability of the region and the weakening of traditional dispute resolution systems by the central government.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) was identified as a significant problem. The protection measures sought to address it, such as through the actions of the UN-trained Chadian Détachement Intégré de Sécurité (DIS). Findings include:

- The importance of training the forces involved in SGBV (in this case the DIS), and employing female staff for the detection and prosecution of SGBV.
- The benefits of women's and victim's committees to spread awareness, combined with a need to recognise the prevalence of patriarchal cultural norms in the region. The need to root measures against SGBV in an understanding of patriarchal socio-economic structures.
- The need for infrastructure for protection of SGBV victims and to prosecute offenders. Most camps are at a distance from the nearest courts, for example.
- Understanding the socio-economic drivers and enablers of SGBV and not simply focusing on technical fixes.

Evidence for this review comes from a mixture of academic articles and humanitarian reports, focusing on the performance of humanitarian operations, the politics of aid and protection, and the socio-economic basis of livelihoods and cohesions in the refugee-hosting areas. There is little systematic analysis of programmes to improve refugee resilience, but more on UN and EU peacekeeping measures.

2. Background

Following conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan in 2003, hundreds of thousands of refugees fled to Eastern Chad. The border region had seen conflict-related migration from Sudan and

elsewhere in Sudan in the 1990s and before (Behrends, 2014; Ploch, 2010). Since then, many of the refugees have become ‘quasi-permanent’, and as of 2021, there were approximately 370,000 Sudanese refugees in Chad, comprising 75% of the total refugees in the country (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Durable solutions – return, resettlement or integration – have not been reached in many cases. Most of the Sudanese refugees are in five eastern regions – Ennedi Est, Ouaddaï, Salamat, Sila, and Wadi Fira. Many are in camps, which have a median population of 24,000 (Nguyen et al., 2021). Chad has a fragile economy and political situation. The eastern areas where the Sudanese refugees are settled experience ‘harsh agroecological conditions and are highly vulnerable to climate change’ (Nguyen et al., 2021, p. 10; Grünewald, 2009). There have been tensions between the host communities, which experience high levels of poverty, and the refugees.

Since 2003, there have been a number of threats to refugees’ safety and security. The camps have been attacked by cross-border raids, as part of a broader pattern of conflict in the region. Resource scarcity and host-refugee tensions have also led to violence between refugees and host populations, and against aid workers. Sexual and gender-based violence is also a problem, both related to the conflicts, and within the camp society.

Humanitarian aid was mobilised to help the refugees in 2003, but has declined since 2014 (Nguyen et al., 2021, p. 14). For instance, in 2014, the World Food Programme cut rations from 2,100 kilocalories to 800 kilocalories per day (Boyce and Hollingsworth, 2015). Increasing cross-border attacks in 2006 led to UN Security Council Resolution 1778 and a UN peacekeeping force (including EU troops) was mobilised in 2007 (Karlsrud and da Costa, 2013).

Durable solutions to the displacement have been hard to achieve. Continued violence in Sudan combined with a lack of resettlement options in Europe and North America means they are few options other than improved local integration. A tripartite agreement between the governments of Chad and Sudan and UNHCR in 2017 encouraged voluntary return but has had little success. While some seek to encourage refugee returns, since aid has declined, more have left to Libya (for Europe) and gold mines in Chad, than have returned to Sudan (Watson et al., 2018; Tubiana et al., 2018).

Aid actors called for more integrated solutions. For instance, UNHCR’s reliance approach (2013) called for an alternative to camps policy (aid to refugees who settle elsewhere); socio-economic solutions (e.g. land rights and agriculture support); replacing the Sudanese curriculum with the Chadian one, under Chad’s Ministry of Education and integrating refugee health into the Chadian system (Boyce and Hollingsworth, 2015).

The government has taken a ‘progressive approach’ (Nguyen et al., 2021). In 2020, it passed Asylum Law N° 027 /PR/2020, which ensures refugees’ ‘freedom of movement and rights to education, health, and access to justice’ (Nguyen et al., 2021, xiv). It is a signatory to a number of conventions on refugees, including the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol and the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Nguyen et al., 2021, p. 13). It applied the Global

Compact for Refugees Framework in 2018, which included plans to plan more new refugees in villages rather than camps and integrate refugees into national health and education systems.¹

3. Findings

3.1 Protection

Protection threats in the context include the conflict in Darfur, incursions and attacks across the border by various armed actors, the recruitment of camp populations including child soldiers, and conflict within Chad (Ploch, 2010). Banditry and the prevention of gender-based violence have also been highlighted as areas for concern (e.g. Amnesty, 2009). In 2007, a French charity attempted to take 103 children, said to be Darfuri, but actually mostly Chadian, to French foster homes, before being arrested and convicted (Karlsrud and da Costa, 2013). The evidence shows that these threats have been addressed to various degrees with different responses, e.g. Karlsrud (2014) distinguishes between hard (military), medium (policing) and soft protection measures (e.g. dialogue).

Initially, protection measures focused on the physical protection of camps from outside attack. In the first year of the situation, UNHCR focused on relocating refugee camps at least 50km from the border, in line with guidance, to protect them from cross-border attacks (UNHCR, 2004). In 2009, in response to concerns about militarisation and after agreement with the government, United Nations Mission in Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) also relocated the Oure Cassoni camp, from 7km to the border, to a site 45km further West (Karlsrud, 2014).

In the first years of the response, **UNHCR noted that success of this ‘primary’ protection, but a lack of comprehensive protection strategy, including measures against SGBV, documentation and family tracing** (UNHCR, 2004). A lack of security for women outside of camps, and lack of anti-FGM measures, was also highlighted in a 2006 assessment of the humanitarian response (Michael et al., 2006).

Security and protection concerns led to the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1778 in 2007. A UN force, MINURCAT (a police force, not initially authorised to use military force) and an EU force, EUFOR (able to use military force), were sent to undertake protection measures, but ‘without addressing the underlying political problems’ (Solhjell et al., 2010, p. 16). EUFOR undertook military measures until March 2009, when its mandate expired and UNSCR 1861 authorised a military component for MINURCAT. The UN force trained and funded the Chadian Détachement Intégré de Sécurité (DIS), which undertook work protecting humanitarian food distribution, refugee camps and pursuing hijackers (Karlsrud, 2014). MINURSCAT’s mandate was extended by UNSCR 1834, and

¹ <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/gcr-action/countries/chad>

MINURCAT was given a role in the peace process. The mission was drawn down in December 2010 after the government of Chad withdrew support.

The causes of conflict were portrayed differently by the actors involved (Karlsruud and da Costa, 2013). That threats to camps were created solely by the Darfur conflict and cross-border raids was a portrayal that suited the Chad government (Karlsruud and da Costa, 2013). However, the causes of conflict were broader and more varied and EUFOR, for instance, had difficulties in identifying and negotiating the sources of insecurity (Marchal, 2010). Armed conflict included anti-government forces within Chad and violence between government-supported groups in Chad and Sudan (Ploch, 2010; da Costa and Karlsruud, 2010). In addition, the country is 'highly militarised', and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms have been weakened, leading to high rates of violence (Solhjell et al., 2010, p. 11; da Costa and Karlsruud, 2010). The presence of large numbers of refugees, sometimes receiving a higher level of food and services than host populations in a poor area, has created tensions in some cases (Watson et al., 2018). Refugee-host tensions and 'generalised insecurity' remain problems in the area (Watson et al., 2018, p. 113).

The authorities in Chad and EU and UN actors had divergent understandings of protection. While the government of Chad believed that measures should focus on protecting the refugee camps and the border, the EU and UN argued for a broader understanding of the concept including 'soft' measures such as 'intercommunity dialogue, human rights monitoring and education, as well as gender issues and rule of law' (Karlsruud and da Costa, 2013, p. 176). The focus on camp populations left local Chadian communities at risk (Karlsruud, 2014). This divergence was not helped by the fact that Inter-Agency Standing Committee discussions on protection did not include the government of Chad (Karlsruud, 2014). The role of the Détachement Intégré de Sécurité (DIS) increased to include 'more robust tasks' and a wider geographical span, that MINURCAT would not address, leading the government to lose faith in the latter (Karlsruud, 2014).

Not all of the protection measures have been appropriately targeted. For example, EUFOR is not necessarily suited to tackling banditry and other policing functions. MINURCAT's Political and Civil Affairs Section (POLCA) undertook intercommunity dialogue projects. However, da Costa and Karlsruud (2010, p. 35) warn that short-term interventions might struggle in a state 'where the government often appears to support specific ethnic groups and has a long history of co-opting customary authorities and opposition members'. The authors also question whether UN peacekeeping operations have 'sufficient expertise and contextual knowledge to carry out effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding work at the local level' and argue that quick-impact projects need to be followed up with sustained commitment and linked to local government institutions and others (da Costa and Karlsruud, 2010, p. 35).

Support for security measures has not been constant. Because of differing conceptions of protection, and its focus on the DIS, the Chadian government withdrew support from MINURCAT in 2010 (Karlsruud, 2014). The government wanted EU and UN forces to focus on securing the border, rather than the camps. In December 2010, MINURCAR began to withdraw (Karlsruud and da Costa, 2013). Following the withdrawal of the UN forces in 2010,

there is scepticism over whether the Chadian army can implement international humanitarian law given high levels of illiteracy and the government's prioritisation of the protection of borders and 'physical protection', narrowly conceived (Solhjell et al., 2010). The DIS was also largely funded by the UN, and after the withdrawal of MINURCAT in 2010, donors mobilised funds to support it during 2011 and 2012 (Karlsruud, 2014). In 2013, the government created a Detachment for the Protection of Humanitarians and Refugees (DPHR) under the army, but it relies on foreign funds (Boyce and Hollingsworth, 2015).

The lack of a political mandate for MINURCAT can be argued to have prevented more sustainable solutions to the protection issues. Solhjell et al. (2010, p. 16) advance that 'there is reason to question the logic of such a mandate that in turn might be unable to grasp the very issues that cause the humanitarian situation' (Solhjell et al., 2010, p.16). The UN and EU security interventions were also found to potentially compromise humanitarian principles by forcing humanitarian actors to use escorts, by military 'quick impact projects' blurring the lines with humanitarian actors, and, by protecting camps and humanitarians, the interventions were part of the political economy (Grüneward, 2009; Karlsruud and da Costa, 2013).

3.2 Sexual and gender-based violence

Sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence and female genital mutilation, has only been partially addressed by these protection measures. The DIS was trained to deal with sexual and gender-based violence, and the force hired more female officers (15%). Women's and victims' committees were formed in camps to perform sensitisation on the issues and offer a way to report crimes. Following UNHCR suggestions, measures were put in place to reduce the frequency of women looking for firewood outside of the camps alone.

Reviews by Solhjell et al. (2010) and Solhjell et al. (2011) show that:

- It is important to correctly understand the drivers of SGBV. While some point to the conflict with Darfur (rape as a weapon of war) as a driver, or the importance of protecting women collecting firewood (by distributing it, or offering solar cookers as alternatives, for instance), other drivers also need to be addressed. It is noted that patriarchal attitudes are widespread among the refugees (Solhjell et al., 2011, p. 9). Women's vulnerability is also created by economic disadvantage and thus 'a very effective means of protecting vulnerable women against domestic abuse was helping women out of poverty', but few programmes address this (Solhjell et al., 2011, p. 13).
- By contrast, the over-focus on technological solutions to complex socio-economic problems has been criticised as 'technological-saviourism' (Abdelnour, 2015).
- While the committees were quite effective at raising awareness among victims, the 'physical structures for properly receiving victims, such as medical staff, safe houses and the like' are also needed.
- Committees and training can work to raise awareness about SGBV among those who attend, but it is also necessary to change the attitudes of the wider camp society.

- Local judicial capacity in eastern Chad is weak, and there are few prisons to support SGBV.

3.3 Refugee self-reliance

A World Bank report identifies land as the biggest obstacle to self-sufficiency for refugees in Bredjing in Ouaddaï (Watson et al., 2018). The dominant economic activity in the region is agriculture, most refugees farmed before leaving Sudan, and there are few other employment opportunities (Watson et al., 2018). In the eastern region where Sudanese refugees reside, climatic and economic conditions make it hard for refugees to make a living. For instance, Ouaddaï region 'is considered food deficient in two years out of three' with high rates of poverty (Watson et al., 2018, p. 122).

Refugee working outside the camps work under disadvantageous terms. Many of the refugees work as labourers for Chadian landlords to whom they pay a portion of their earnings. In Dar Sila, refugees approached local leaders to farm in the region, and many began to work for local Chadians. The situation in Eastern Chad means it is difficult for refugees to make a living. Many refugees leave the camps to farm for some months but, due to the scarcity of land and resources, have to pay much of their earnings to the landowners, who complain that refugees use up resources (Boyce and Hollingsworth, 2015). Most of the refugees labour, with few owning land and most work on a seasonal basis, and keep a family member in the camps to maintain access to social services (Tubiana, forthcoming, p. 36; Watson et al., 2018, p. 80). Women experience particular disadvantages, arising from patriarchal norms requiring extra work (e.g. domestic); less ownership over resources; less access to education; and widespread SGBV (Watson et al., 2018).

While refugees have negotiated access to the land themselves, international organisations have offered some support in the form of organisation of groups and seeds and tools (Tubiana, forthcoming, p. 37). International organisations have also sought to help ease potential tensions between host and refugee communities. From 2005 until 2014, 2.5% of UNHCR refugee budgets were allocated to projects to benefit local populations, before a switch to 'villages of opportunity, where villages agree to share their lands with refugees and where there are therefore high concentrations of refugees engaged in agriculture or gardening' (Watson et al., 2018, p. 79). For instance, the UNHCR supports a joint refugee/host community gardening project on the banks of Wadi Tiré (Watson et al., 2018, p. 107). The evidence from these schemes shows challenges including a lack of infrastructure like roads, low levels of health and education infrastructure outside of camps, as well as water provision. This requires input from both the government and development organisations (Watson et al., 2018). The World Bank highlights a need for a 'graduation approach' to ensure that the necessary support is still provided to refugees and is appropriately targeted at vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities or female heads of household (Watson, 2018, p.110).

In seeking local integration, there is a need to **understand land tenure, the history of violence in the area, land disputes, and traditional systems of land allocation and dispute resolution, in order to design effective aid programmes** (Tubiana et al.,

forthcoming). Watson et al. (2018) argue that 'refugee-host' dichotomies are unhelpful and should be supplemented by more nuanced, geographically and culturally specific understandings of conditions and interactions. The Chad-Sudan border has a long history of trade and migration prior to 2003; while some refugees shared an ethnicity or language with host populations in Chad (e.g. *Masalit*), those who migrated in 2003 did not integrate into Chadian settlements as easily and could not, as previous migrants had done, walk back and forth to their land in Sudan (Behrends, 2015). Efforts to encourage integration need to take into account that the limited availability of basic social services in the region (Watson et al, 2018; Boyce and Hollingsworth, 2015). There is a lack of schools, healthcare and transport. In some cases, refugees had higher standards of living than host populations, creating tensions.

A 2018 World Bank report gives the following suggestions for cross-cutting issues to help improve livelihoods opportunities in the region (Watson et al., 2018, xv):

- appropriate measures for land allocation and use for both refugees and poor villagers;
- technical enhancement of water supply and management for both rain-fed and off-season cultivation;
- provisions for means of production for different livelihood activities;
- measures to enhance pasture, fodder products and veterinary services for livestock, to develop pastoral water points and transhumance corridors, and to strengthen structures for conflict resolution between farmers and herders;
- adaptation of interventions to the seasonal dimensions of rural life and livelihoods;
- decisions on whether groups or individual household approaches are most appropriate in different socio-economic contexts and determination of the types and levels of support needed for each;
- mainstreaming gender approaches in all livelihood support.

Commercial activities and trades of various sorts should also be supported through 1) provision of rolling start-up funds or access to credit; 2) provision of appropriate tools, technology and equipment; and 3) expansion of technical training opportunities and follow-up support for entrepreneurial activities (Watson et al., 2018, xv).

A 2021 World Bank report suggest ways to increase self-reliance (Nguyen, 2021). These include:

- the use of cash transfers, provided local food prices will not be affected too much, which is a risk in an area with limited markets and transport, and a high proportion of refugees.
- A 'graduation approach', whereby various programmes, such as cash and training, are combined to 'help spur a transition to more secure and more sustainable income' (p. 127).
- Help refugees with land. For example, negotiate long-term land leases for refugees, and help refugees to cultivate unused land in other regions.

- Offer access to, and knowledge of, various forms of credit.
- Give refugees access to the national ID card system, so they can access mobile money.
- Measures to improve freedom of movement, including enforcement of the asylum law, and recognition of refugee ID cards,
- Better knowledge of refugee economic conditions, such as inclusion in national household surveys; early warning systems for conflict and evaluation of programmes; and more systematic analysis of refugee programmes.

3.4 Overall strategy and coordination

Donor preferences affected the amount and type of aid given to the crisis. While the high profile of the Darfur crisis ensured funds, actors emphasised different aspects of the crisis and different solutions. The EU's deployment of EUFOR to Chad reflected a focus on the effects of war in Sudan rather than on Sudan itself (Styan, 2012).

The switch from emergency relief to longer-term solutions has had limited success. A 2006 evaluation found an over-focus on emergency solutions rather than longer-term planning: "A weakness was observed in the planning process. In the rush to resolve problems, inappropriate solutions are sometimes chosen for problems that could be resolved more efficiently. 'Choices of "emergency solutions" such as tented hospitals or an expensive water distribution schemes [sic] are sometimes made when funds are initially easily available, burdening the successor with recurrent costs and/or missed opportunities for integration at a time when less funds are available for making strategic corrections' (Michael et al., 2006, p. 7). This meant that relatively little attention was given to sustainability.

Designations of aid and the mandates of different organisations were important factors. Grünewald noted a difference between aid given to South Chad and East Chad (Grünewald, 2009). Whereas linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) was funded in the South, the ongoing conflict in Darfur meant that humanitarian aid was prioritised in the East (Grünewald, 2009, p. 212). He argues that humanitarians had also not done enough to 'take into account the long- term issues concerning the self- sufficiency of displaced populations in protracted crisis contexts and the issues surrounding the post- crisis phase' (Grünewald, 2009, p. 219).

The need for responses that link relief and development is highlighted. A 2015 report highlighted the lack of development solutions (Boyce and Hollingsworth, 2015). It argues that humanitarian organisation were not equipped to provide the necessary solutions to the protracted displacement. The report found that schools, generators etc, were breaking down and there were no attempts to create livelihood opportunities (Boyce and Hollingsworth, 2015). This was partly a result of organisations' mandates and funding. The UNHCR's 'humanitarian focus, lack of technical expertise for development, and its year-to-year budget cycle make it unsuitable for development activities. This has been proven during decades of failed attempts by UNHCR to create development solutions for refugee populations on its own' (Boyce and Hollingsworth, 2015, p. 8). The authors argue that water management,

agricultural inputs and techniques, dispute resolution, and women's empowerment are needed (Boyce and Hollingsworth, 2015).

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5. About this review

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5.2 Review overview

This review is based on six days of desk-based research. The K4DD research helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of a selection of recent relevant literature and international expert thinking in response to specific questions relating to international development.

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