Coping strategies of Darfurians displaced women in Khartoum

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This study was designed to identify the Drarfurians (Darfurians: Refers to Darfur States people of western Sudan that face ongoing civil war and tribal conflicts) displaced women's sustainable strategies to meet their basic livelihood survival needs in Khartoum, Sudan. The purposive non-random sampling technique was adopted to select 90 displaced women. Data were collected in the face-to-face interviews by using a pretested questionnaire and observation. The study findings indicated that the respondents live in extremely poor conditions, characterized by high illiteracy rates, large numbers of dependents and very low income. The displaced women were compelled to accept low paid jobs to meet their household basic needs. Displacement to urban centers does not create improved opportunities for a significant portion of city dwellers living in slums as squatters. The results also revealed that the displaced people in Khartoum live in poverty and have little access to employment in the formal sector. The displaced communities are vulnerable in terms of their physical and social capital. Females headed households such as widows, are at increased risk of abuse, exploitation, coercion and manipulation because of their gender and status. The survivals strategies adopted by the respondents include inter alia income generation activities such as street vending, wage labor, buying low price food items and second-hand clothes; and social networking with the displaced people coming from the same tribe and/or origin to cope with their difficult situation.

Key words: Darfurians, sustainable strategies, livelihood, displaced, vulnerable, social capital.

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing civil wars in the Western Sudan (Darfur and South Kordofan), and Blue Nile States), have displaced millions of people. Loss of lives of innocent persons and property; damages to the properties, vanishing of social services and degradation of natural resources are few among the resultant outcomes. The conflict also compelled thousands of people to flee their homeland to other areas in and/or outside the country in search of safety and/better living conditions (Daoud, 2005). The situation has placed the rural groups (traditional farmers, hunters, and seasonal workers) and the nomads to resettle around the urban centers as sedentary population making new mode of life in the area and competing with the urban population for the limited resources and the poor social services existing in the urban centers. Considerable number of those migrants were targeted

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Khartoum State to live in the periphery of Khartoum City (Kweje, 2006). According to Saeed and Bedri (2010), about 1.2 to 1.5 million out of the 8 million people living in greater Khartoum, can be treated as internally displaced persons (IDPs). The IDPs are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, human rights violations, natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border (Borton et al., 2005).

In many ways, women have borne the brunt of the country’s conflicts and its protracted displacement situation. Displaced women suffered numerous human rights violations, and along with their families have struggled to re-establish sustainable livelihoods - both while displaced, and upon returning to their communities or seeking out another solution to their displacement (Abusharaf, 2004).

Describing the situation of a group of Darfuri Sudanese women, Daoud (2005) noted that when they arrived in Khartoum, they found no alternative to resettle in the shanty towns, where majority of displaced people and urban poor were living. They were confronted with many obstacles and they contacted with a mix of varied ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities. He further noticed that they suffer a lot because they live in low shelters, extreme poverty, poor-health facilities and absence of essential social services.

In the situation, they had to develop relevant coping strategies to survive in this deteriorated situation. Coping strategies are thus series of strategic actions based on a conscious assessment of alternative plans of action. Within the limited options they sometimes have, households in a poor socio-economic position choose the plans of action that are proportionately the most useful to them. This does not necessarily mean that these plans of action always serve the purpose they were intended to serve (Holzmann, 2003). The impact of conflict on women and girls has been noticeable greater than the impact on men and boys, largely due to gender specific violence and various forms of discrimination, which is multiplied in conflict situations. While women experience marginalized status in Sudanese society, IDPs women are even more marginalized in terms of socio-economic and cultural conditions.

In this regard, Pantuliano et al. (2011) commented: “For Darfuri IDPs, this has great implications on their living conditions. If they lack recognized housing, NGOs cannot locate them and provide them with healthcare and other services”. As for employment, hundreds of thousands of Sudanese civilians are jobless, so it makes sense that IDPs are in a more precarious situation, especially the males. They have virtually no chance of getting jobs. There’s a high level of discrimination that cannot be tackled in a concrete way, the whole system is based on favoritism and corruption. Even though the law prohibits all forms and sources of discrimination, still officials duck behind formal procedures and subject people to discrimination (El-Sanosi, 2012).

The IDPs in Khartoum State are totally suffering, because they live in poor shelters, extreme poverty, and poor health and lacking the social services (Nour, 2010; Pantuliano et al. 2011). There is an intra-household variation of coping with poverty and deprivation based on households having more than one income earning member (Abusharaf, 2003).

Displaced women, and especially female heads of households such as widows, are at increased risk of abuse, exploitation, coercion and manipulation because of their gender and status. Displaced women also face new environmental and family challenges that negatively affect their health and access to healthcare. Specific interventions aimed at displaced women are required to foster better health through access to work and long-term socioeconomic stability (Daoud, 2012). The operating environment in Sudan, where displacement and population movements occur continuously, is extremely challenging. Though many IDPs have returned in 2012 to their places of origin in Darfur, however, most return areas still lack basic services and infrastructure, and some 2.3 million people continue to remain displaced (UNHCR, 2013). Very little efforts have been made so far to gather information on the issues faced by the displaced women with the aim of improving their living conditions. Therefore, it seems imperative to collect information on the living conditions of the displaced women to help planners and policy makers to take measures to mitigate the issues and improve the situation. Present study is an endeavor in this direction and has the following objectives.

The objectives and purpose of the study

(i) Identify the socio-economic characteristics of displaced women in the study area.
(ii) Analyze the changes in the respondents’ livelihoods and their families due to resulted displacement.
(iii) Explore the survival strategies adopted by displaced women for their survival.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THE STUDY AREA

The research is descriptive, and cross sectional data collected through survey method in which respondents answered questions of the questionnaire administered through interview (because literacy was very low among respondents). For the reliability and validity of study questions were constructed properly, clearly and easily to comprehend.

The study was conducted in April 2013 in Alfath area of Omdurman Locality, Khartoum State. Given the transient and unsettled nature of displacement, the complete records could not be maintained, therefore, it was difficult to extract a representative sample. Hence, the purposive non-random sampling technique...
was adopted to select 90 displaced women (Darfurians). Data were collected during face-to-face interviews by using a pretested questionnaire consisting of closed ended and few open ended questions. Questionnaire was used as the main instrument to accommodate each sample unit of the study. Main points addressed by the questionnaire were: Socio economic characteristics of displaced respondents; changes of livelihoods; and strategies adopted by displaced women to meet their needs. Observation was also adopted for collecting primary data.

RESULTS
Analysis of the collected primary data revealed the following information:

Socio-economic and demographic characteristics

Table 1 indicates that 94.4% of the respondents are economically active and in age group 25-54. About 71.1% were illiterate or had no formal education while only 28.9 percent had completed basic primary education. The table also shows that some 70% of respondents were currently married and 30% widowed who lost their husband during conflict. Only 17.8% of the respondents were displaced with their husband while considerable percentage (82.2%) migrated with their daughters and sons and about 22.2% displaced with their daughters only.

Although the majorities of the displaced wives do not live with their husbands, some 85.9% headed their households as reflected by the table. Describing the reason(s) of their displacement, an overwhelming majority (97.8%) commented that they were compelled to flee their homeland due to the ongoing war and/or tribal conflicts.

Source of income

Table 2 shows that 71.1 of displaced women used to work as farmers (family labor) in their place of origin. The table also indicates that 74.4 works as wage labor after displacement, because they are illiterate and do lack the relevant skills and experience to secure public sector jobs. About 24.6 of respondents commented that they have no alternative than to join the informal sector as wage labor, hunt low paid jobs or work in self-managed as street vending. The table also shows that some 95.6% of displaced women income did not satisfy their family’s needs. This means that displaced families become part of urban poor. It is observed that the Darurian displaced women work as food, vegetable, tea sellers in the city markets and provide domestic service. They live in poor health, and are malnourished and seem vulnerable to various risks.

Social changes

Displaced women experienced new pattern of livelihood different from their previous livelihood, however, the positive and negative changes were experienced. As
Table 2. Frequency distribution of respondent according to the types of work before and after displacement, income satisfaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of work</th>
<th>Before displacement</th>
<th>After displacement</th>
<th>Income satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not work</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street vending</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage labor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to changes of the time and energy consumed in household chores, changes in food types, and number of meals per day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes of the time household chores</th>
<th>Before displacement</th>
<th>After displacement</th>
<th>Changes of food types</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fair time and energy consumed</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little time and energy consumed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of meals</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Return back home</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three meals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two meals</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One meal</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>84.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

regards consumption behavior of various households for energy (as depicted in Table 3), about 92.2% of respondents consumed energy for the less span of time as compared to their place of origin where they were spending energy for a longer period as stated by all respondents (100%). For having been exposed to the different communities of the area, the diet composition of about 35.6% respondents also got changed. About 35.6 of respondents stated that they used to eat different food from place of origin (more vegetables and fruits), while 64.4% were still continued eating their native food. About 56.7% of respondents restricted their meals to one meal a day, due to their situation of poor economic conditions and low purchasing power to buy enough food. In most communities affected by conflict, the displaced often find it difficult to go back and restart their lives as most of them had. Table 3 indicate that 84.4% of respondents didn't want to return back to their homeland areas cited reasons such as a lack of proper social service, lost properties and means of production, absence of adequate infrastructure and insecurity.

Coping strategies

Table 4 shows that all respondents used work on income generation as major strategy to cope with poverty. Entering more household members into the workforce is the main survival strategy of the displaced women. Sometimes, the female cook native foods at home with the assistance family members to be sold at street(s) and/or market for income generation. The table also shows that 91.1% of respondents adopt reducing expenditures and develop relevant purchasing patterns as another strategy for survival and to meet the family everyday expenses. About 88.9% of the respondents commented that they depend on buying low prices food items. About 86.7% indicate that they used to buy second hand clothes. The strategies to cope with the low incomes were also depending upon establishing the social network with the people coming from their tribes and native villages. Social networking plays an important form of a social capital for the IDPs to coping with the urban life. Therefore, the displaced women maintained both 'blood' networks and marriage networks in the city. Beside these kinship networks they have fictive network - based mainly on their district of origin. This type of network becomes social capital in the context of displacement to the city - by providing displaced related information and adaptation to city life, and by providing initial accommodation and employment information. After displacement to the city neighborhood
Table 4. Coping strategies identified by displaced women, expenditure and purchasing patterns and social network (N=90).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coping strategies adopted by displaced women</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on income generation activities</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure and purchasing pattern</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>91.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social network</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>88.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expenditure and purchasing patterns</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending money mostly for food items</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>91.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying food items with low prices</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying second-hand clothes at low price</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>86.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social network</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using kinship for social network</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using fictive kinship (village fellow)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>84.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making neighborhood based social network</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>82.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

where they live, it becomes important in terms of their social network. About 82.2% of the respondents have close relationships with their neighbours (Table 4). The poor mostly maintain their relationships with relatives, friends and village fellows who are living in the same community. About 84.4% of the respondents had connections with the people living outside their immediate neighborhoods (village fellow). It is observed that the poor displaced households who are living in the city for a long period of time have wider social network.

However, it is also observed that the Darurians (e.g. the Fur tribe group) have managed to retain the cohesion of their society, including networks and social capital, to a greater degree than other displaced groups from other parts of the country. This could be related to their relative cultural compatibility with host community (in the shanty areas). It is also a mechanism of maintaining their identity and solidarity to cope with their difficult situation as an urban poor segment.

**DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study reflect the complex interrelationships between factors affecting displaced women and their families, and the ways in which IDPs respond to these challenges. The results show that 82.2% of respondents have been left as the sole supporters of children and other dependents in a new environment where their skills are not very relevant for getting jobs. To meet their daily livelihoods need, many displaced women were reported to have resorted to vulnerable works in informal sector. These findings are in line with Bamfield and Horton (2009) who found that the displaced women developed different economic strategies to meet their needs and survived their poverty. Entering more household members into the workforce is the main survival strategy of the urban poor. This is why female participation in the urban workforce is considerably higher among the displaced women than among their rural counterpart. Expenditure and purchasing pattern is one of strategy developed to cope with their low income. Similar conclusion was reached by
Shahadat (2005), in her study on poverty, household strategies and coping with urban life in Bangladesh. She indicated that the urban poor rarely buy new clothes from the market places. Most of them get used clothes from relatives, landlords and employers. They sometimes buy cheap clothes for their family members from second-hand markets. Besides these cheap clothes, they buy used cookeries, furniture and other household goods from second hand markets at low price. Social networking plays an important role in coping with urban life since it works as social support.

The study findings also are in line with Rossiasasco (2003) in his study “Women as Heads of Displaced Households in Colombia” concluded that the displaced women face many problems. Among these, the most prominent one include: adapting to their new home while adjusting to the role of head of household, and displacement to capital cities of social, cultural and economic situations that are very foreign to them. Throughout this adjustment phase, they must take on a more dominant role than that to which they were accustomed to when their husbands were present.

The study results also show that the IDPs women in their host community experienced some changes in food habits (quality and quantity) and daily household chores that less time. However, in spite of difficult situation displaced women experienced, they still do not want to return back to their place of origin. This result is consistent with the results of survey they conducted by CARE and International Organization for Migration (2005), found that at least 36% of Khartoum’s IDPs do not intend to return to their home areas and are likely to remain in Khartoum. About 84.4% of respondents didn’t want to return back to their homeland areas cited reasons such as a lack of proper social service, lost properties and means of production, absence of adequate infrastructure and insecurity. Moreover, this finding is contradicted with Borton et al. (2005), they indicated in their study on internally displaced people in Angola squatter, Khartoum. They reported that when respondents were asked whether they would like to return to their original community or settle in a new place, more than half of them wanted to return to their original community. They face many hardships living in the city and since most of the respondents have property back in their place of origin they wanted to return, stating that survival is easier there.

Social networks assist many urban poor who are living in or at risk of poverty, helping them, at different stages of their life, to access things like information. In this regards, Williams (2010) believes that social capital allows more isolated individuals to benefit from other residents’ connections. This result is confirmed by the study findings which indicate that about 84.4% of the respondents had connections with the people living outside their immediate neighborhoods (village fellow). However, it is observed that the poor displaced households who are living in the city for a long period of time have wider social network. The study also reveals that the IDPs groups from Western Sudan (e.g. the Fur tribe group) have managed to retain the cohesion of their society, including networks and social capital, to a greater degree than other displaced groups from other parts of the country. This could be related to their relative cultural compatibility with host community (in the shanty areas). It is also a mechanism of maintaining their identity and solidarity to cope with their difficult situation as an urban poor segment.

Conclusions

The results obtained indicated that all of the respondents live in extremely poor conditions, characterized by high illiteracy rates, large numbers of dependents (53.3 have more than 6 family members), and very low income. The study also revealed that the displaced women were compelled to accept low paid jobs to earn money, and meet their household basic needs (74.4 works as wage labor). This is because of the absence of the husbands as breadwinners. Hence displaced women adopted different coping strategies to meet the basic needs of their families.

Displacement to urban centers does not create improved opportunities for a significant portion of city dwellers living in slums as squatters. They invariably live in poverty and have little access to employment in the public sectors. Therefore, most of the IDPs in Khartoum State have not been able to secure a sustainable livelihood in the city despite living for a long period of time.

The displaced communities are vulnerable in terms of their physical and social capital. They have little access to the city’s social and political structure which also shows their vulnerable situation. The displaced women are even more marginalized in terms of socio-economic and cultural conditions, especially female headed households such as widows, are at increased risk of abuse, exploitation, coercion and manipulation because of their gender and status. The study also concluded that the displaced women in Khartoum adopt several survival strategies to secure their family basic needs. These strategies include income generation by making more household members as wage labor in the labor market, cooking native foods at home to be sold at street(s) and/or market, reducing expenditures and developing relevant purchasing patterns such as buying low priced food items and second-hand clothes; and developing social network with the people from their areas and tribes to cope with the urban life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The concerned government authorities, NGOs, UN
agencies and the other organizations working with the displaced communities need to adopt the following measures and strategies to improve the living conditions of the IDPs:

(i) The government authorities need to increase the financial investment in infrastructure in the areas inhibited with IDPs to facilitate expansion of services needed in the peripheral areas of the city.
(ii) Displaced women have been able to develop and adopt certain basic strategies and mechanisms for their survival. It would be wise if all those coping measures are identified and further steps are taken to build on them to improve the situation.
(iii) The displaced women must be looked as the valuable human resource and to realize its positive potential, their capabilities and upgrade their skills need to be upgraded and enhanced through good educational and training programs to make them more useful productive.
(iv) Obviously internally displaced women are living in deep. In order to eradicate poverty, measures are needed to integrate them into the productive employment and the economic mainstream that ensures they are fully exposed to all the available economic opportunities matching with the qualifications and skills of the displaced women.
(v) Financial institutions can also help eradication poverty among the displaced women by giving them access to the savings and credit mechanisms. Similarly by organizing themselves in their own organizations, they can certainly empower themselves.

Conflict of Interests

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

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