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IDPs remain vulnerable as obstacles to return and reintegration persist

Although confusion still reigns over the number of people internally displaced in Senegal's Casamance region, ranging anywhere between 10,000 and 70,000 people, continuous return movements have been reported. These have mostly been spontaneous and unassisted. Better security cooperation between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, coupled with the peace agreement signed in December 2004 between the Senegalese government and the separatist Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC), has encouraged these returns, but insecurity persists. Armed clashes between factions of the MFDC, in Bignona department near the border with Gambia, highlight the weaknesses of the peace process. Rebel attacks against civilians returning to districts further south, along the southern border of Casamance with Guinea-Bissau, were also reported in the first few months of 2008.

Temporary movements of people to safe areas nearby following violent attacks are a common pattern. As the vast majority of IDPs in Casamance seek refuge with family, friends and host communities, they are often unable to ensure livelihood opportunities for themselves and their families. In areas of displacement, the food security of IDPs has been particularly affected by rising food prices and limited access to farming land. Many commute to home areas as far as the intermittent violence and landmines permit, in order to tend to their crops. Social and psychosocial problems are also prevalent among IDPs.

In other areas where IDPs have returned, the legacy of the long conflict has continued to hamper their sustainable reintegration. Infrastructure and services remain limited, and the presence of mines has prevented them from farming again. The government, with the support of local and international partners, has launched a series of recovery and reconstruction programmes in the region. Much, however, still needs to be done to extend humanitarian mine-clearance operations and address land-related grievances. The consolidation of a sustainable peace will depend on the capacity and willingness of the government and the MFDC to abide by their commitments. Recovery and reintegration efforts, however, should not depend on political successes.

Background and causes of displacement

Senegal's southern Casamance region, bordered to the north by Gambia and to the south by Guinea-Bissau, has been the scene of protracted low-intensity conflict, which has continued since 1982 despite various peace agreements. A disputed land rights reform, cultural discrimination and limited employment opportunities in the 1960s and 1970s led to the renewed formation of the Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance (*Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance*, or MFDC) as a separatist movement. The government's clampdown on mass protests in the town of Ziguinchor in December 1982 and December 1983 led to an open insurgency, and as channels for peaceful protest were closed off, the MFDC established an armed wing, Atika (P. Chang, March 2008). Violent demonstrations continued throughout the 1980s and Atika started organising attacks on both military and civilian targets in the region in 1990, thus initiating the "military phase" of the conflict (A. Manley, November 1998). The consequent large-scale army deployment fostered a cycle of sporadic violence and human rights abuses by both sides. The region became increasingly unsafe and isolated from the rest of the country.

Although the MFDC has a strong ethnic Diola component, researchers have preferred to interpret the conflict as a result of social and geographical marginalisation (CODESRIA, 2004). The conflict was initially confined to Ziguinchor region and it only spread into western parts of Kolda region from 1995. By the mid-1990s, inhabitants of large areas along the border with Guinea-Bissau had fled their homes as a result of MFDC incursions and the government's counter-insurgency operations. Access to land became more difficult as rebels began planting anti-personnel mines along the border with Guinea-Bissau in 1997 to protect their bases. From 2001 to 2003, sporadic but violent clashes between the army and the MFDC continued to cause short- and longer-term displacement.

Although clashes between the MFDC and the Senegalese army have decreased in number and intensity in recent years, inter-factional fighting within the MFDC has increased (P. Chang, March 2008). The main historical division has been between the Northern Front (*Front Nord*) and the Southern Front (*Front Sud*), named after their original areas of operation north and south of the Casamance River. Numerous subdivisions within these two groups have also hindered attempts at peace (USAID, 1 June 2006). Plagued by factionalism and a lack of political strategy, the MFDC has failed to unite the people of Casamance behind it (CODESRIA, 2004) and it has moved from attacks on military targets to violence with an impact on those same people, for example by restricting access to farming land and undertaking armed robberies (Chatham House, December 2004).

Taking advantage of favourable regional and international circumstances, president Abdoulaye Wade has changed the government approach to the Casamance conflict (V. Foucher, October 2003). Since his election in 2000, Wade has tried to negotiate more or less directly with the armed elements of the MFDC, sidelining to some extent the separatist political wing, and the peace process has made significant progress. On 30 December 2004, the government and the MFDC signed a peace agreement which

provided for the parties “...once and for all to give up armed struggle and the use of violence” (AFP, 30 December 2004). However, a faction of the Southern Front of the MFDC rejected the agreement, and occasional armed skirmishes, violent attacks and political killings continued (VOA, 14 May 2007; IRIN, 5 December 2006). In December 2007, with the region in a state of “neither war nor peace” (IRIN, 27 December 2007), the president’s envoy to Casamance was killed, the last of three political assassinations between 2006 and 2007, provoking fears of a setback in the peace process (AFP, 21 December 2007). Violent attacks against civilians and armed clashes between the MFDC and the Senegalese army have continued in the first months of 2008.

Varying IDP numbers reported

Given the complexities inherent in the patterns of displacement in Casamance, reliable statistics on the number of internally displaced people have always been scarce. The overall number of people internally displaced varies according to the source. Most current estimates range between 10,000 and 70,000.

According to a 2003 World Food Programme study, there were in total 64,000 internally displaced people in Senegal; 47,000 were in Ziguinchor region and 17,000 in Kolda region (WFP, 27 August 2004, p.5). Other sources cited a figure of 50,000 people who had fled their homes since the conflict broke out in 1982 (IRIN, 3 January 2006). Another report estimated that around 240 villages have been deserted since 1988, representing a total of around 100,000 people displaced within and outside Senegal (WFP, June 2007). A further 10,000 people were reportedly displaced because of fighting between the army and the MFDC in October 2006 (IRIN, 16 October 2006). Citing similar numbers, the US Department of State reported that approximately 60,000 remained internally displaced in the country at the end of 2007 (USDOS, 11 March 2008), while OCHA’s Regional Office for West Africa suggests that from 40,000 to 70,000 IDPs remained (UN OCHA by email, 21 April 2008).

However, according to primary data collected by the German Technical Cooperation (ProCas-GTZ), around 70 per cent of some 35,000 IDPs had returned as of March 2007 to Diouloulou, Fogy, Oussouye, Nyassia, Goudomp, Tanaff and Dioulacolon, leaving some 10,000 people still internally displaced from those areas (ProCas-GTZ by email, 28 April 2008). Similarly, the Association pour la Promotion Rurale de l’Arrondissement de Nyassia (APRAN) estimated that some 26,000 IDPs had returned in Ziguinchor, Bignona, Kolda and Oussouye departments as of December 2007.

Implementation of a government survey to shed light on the numbers and situation of IDPs in Casamance is awaiting funding. The National Agency of Statistics and Demography will initially study the two districts of Niaguis and Nyassia in Ziguinchor department. The survey, which could potentially be extended to those areas left out of the 2002 national census for security reasons, will include some socio-economic variables. However the study has been suffering from a lack of funding and its implementation, originally planned for February 2008, has been delayed.

Patterns of displacement

The vast majority of displaced people in Casamance seek refuge with family, friends or host communities. While there are no reliable statistics available on the number of host households, it is estimated that almost 80 per cent of IDPs have sought refuge with family and friends (WFP, June 2007). The initial destination is based on the need to find a safe haven in the vicinity, and only subsequently do people tend to move to where family and friends have already settled (ProCas-GTZ, May 2008). A 2001 study on urban IDPs in Ziguinchor found that some of the displaced people had come to the town only after their first area of displacement had become unsafe itself (M. Evans, April 2007). Others seek shelter in major towns; Ziguinchor is estimated to have received between 14,000 and 38,000 people (M. Evans, April 2007). Small numbers of IDPs have also very temporary accommodation at Kandé reception centre on the outskirts of Ziguinchor. Many appear to return to their homes after violence has subsided, while others have ended up in a cycle of “pendulum” displacement as they commute to their home areas by day and leave as the night falls. This strategy has allowed them to tend their orchards and engage in those agricultural activities that do not require their constant presence.

In Ziguinchor, IDPs have generally tended to cluster by village of origin. For those arriving from the east, the main reception areas include certain eastern suburbs of the town such as Kandé, Alwar and Tilène. In general, the geography of IDP clustering has tended to follow pre-existing patterns of settlement. In the areas of Alwar and Kandé, for example, IDPs tended to stay with family members who had settled in the area as land had not yet been parceled when they had first arrived. Displacement movements into the city have thus followed normal patterns of urban migration, complicating the identification of IDPs in the city. However, unlike voluntary migration, the conflict has also forced the most vulnerable to move, including children, the elderly and the sick (M. Evans, April 2007).

Humanitarian and protection concerns

The Casamance conflict has generated different types of vulnerable groups. In addition to groups in the main current conflict areas (mainly in the Fogny area, near the Gambian border, in the rural communities of Djibidione, Diouloulou, Oulampane, Djinaki, Suelle and Sindian), IDPs in southern parts of Ziguinchor region and in Kolda region present specific vulnerabilities. In rural areas, feeble incomes as well as lack of access to credit and to social services are pronounced among internally displaced people (WFP, June 2007). While they have quickly tried to be self-sufficient by engaging in farming, they have contributed to the pressure on land in their host areas already impoverished by overuse and poor rainfall. Lacking in most cases the necessary agricultural tools, they have not been able to produce enough food for the family (WFP/CARE, October 2007).

In towns, particularly in Ziguinchor, limited access to land has had an impact on IDPs' access to food (APRAN, April 2008). Internally displaced people have farmed land owned by their family members or tried to rent land. In the latter case, the cost and the

shortage of rice paddies in and around Ziguinchor have constituted a major obstacle to ensuring livelihood opportunities (M. Evans, April 2007).

Both rural and urban consumers in Senegal were affected by high food prices following a poor harvest in 2006 and increasing cereal prices on the international market (FAO, April 2008). People have already taken to the streets in the capital Dakar to protest against food prices (Reuters, 26 April 2008). In this general context, IDPs remain particularly vulnerable given their impoverishment due to their displacement.

The NGO APRAN has also identified particular social and psychosocial problems affecting internally displaced people living in Casamance's towns. Among the most common, respondents reported increasing levels of stress, rising divorce rates and concerns over their loss of dignity (APRAN, April 2008). Gender-based violence is believed to be widespread, but it tends to go unreported for reasons including shame, social stigma and fears of reprisals, and there is no reliable data of its incidence in the region. However, organisations working in the area have been able to ascertain the extent of the phenomenon around the villages of Youtou and Effok in the rural community of Santhiaba Manjack (WFP, June 2007). Women heads of households are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

On a positive note, there were no reports of IDPs being disenfranchised during the presidential and the parliamentary elections held in February and June 2007. The government has reportedly always tried to facilitate the vote of internally displaced people in Casamance (ProCas-GTZ, May 2008).

Obstacles to IDPs' return and reintegration

According to the evidence in the absence of any in-depth assessment, IDP returns have mostly been spontaneous and unassisted (IRIN, 3 January 2007). The majority of the returnees have faced obstacles to their full reintegration, while a number of IDPs were in 2007 still prevented from returning to their homes. Although all-out armed conflict seemed to be over, communities were vulnerable to violent crime and still caught up in occasional armed skirmishes (IRIN, 27 December 2007).

The area to the south of the Casamance River, once the theatre of most of the fighting, achieved some stability by 2007, but reports of violence persist in 2008. Disturbing security incidents involving kidnappings and mutilations have been reported along the border with Guinea-Bissau, where MFDC rebels have started to use violence to prevent villagers from accessing their land and homes. In March 2008, some villagers were reportedly kidnapped close to rebel bases (IRIN, 20 March 2008), and in May 2008, villagers were attacked and mutilated while collecting cashew nuts in the forest near the village of Tampe (BBC, 9 May 2008; IRIN, 8 May 2008). Such incidents can be attributed to MFDC elements who fear encroachment on what they perceive to be their territory by the Senegalese army, or consider that returns proceeding without adequate consultation and negotiation with them violate the terms of the 2004 peace accord (M. Evans, by email 18 June 2008).

Meanwhile, the situation has worsened to the north of the Casamance River, towards Gambia, where violence has increased in recent years even as it has subsided along the Guinea-Bissau border. In the first few months of 2008, the army was reportedly attacked twice by the MFDC in northern Casamance (IRIN, 21 May 2008).

The threat posed by landmines is another obstacle to return and reintegration. Roads and tracks around Ziguinchor as well as areas of Oussouye and Bignona departments have been heavily mined during the course of the conflict (Manley, November 1998). In a study conducted by UNDP and covering some 251 villages of the Casamance region, 93 villages were identified as being heavily affected by landmines and unexploded ordnance, while 60 others were abandoned. The Emergency Landmine Impact Survey of Casamance (ELISC) carried out by Handicap International and UNDP between October 2005 and May 2006 found that the departments most affected were Ziguinchor, Sédhiou, Oussouye, Kolda and Bignona (ICBL, October 2007). Civilians were killed or injured while collecting wood, water or food. Until 2006, when 13 civilians and five army soldiers were hit, casualties from landmines or explosive remnants of war had been steadily declining. All 2006 casualties occurred in the Ziguinchor region, mostly in Niaguis district (ICBL, October 2007). Casualties continued to be reported in 2007 and 2008 (Le Quotidien, 12 February 2008), while humanitarian demining operations proceeded slowly.

The Senegalese army has demined pockets of the region and in December 2006 launched a demining programme along the borders with Gambia and Guinea-Bissau with the assistance of the Moroccan army. Elements of the MFDC, however, reacted with force to stop the operations (IRIN, 9 May 2008). As highlighted by the NGO Geneva Call, it is important as a first step to engage the MFDC's military factions in allowing neutral actors to undertake humanitarian demining and mine action activities, such as victim assistance and mine-risk education (Geneva Call, 2008, pp.10-11). Humanitarian demining operations should not depend on the final resolution of the conflict (Geneva Call, October 2006).

Most villagers identify the reconstruction of basic infrastructure as one of the preconditions for a sustainable return and reintegration (USAID, 1 June 2006). The conflict has caused the abandonment or destruction of buildings, the collapse of the agricultural economy and of social services such as health centres and schools (IRIN, 24 January 2008). Much of the population remains isolated because of a lack of roads and the consequent difficulty in accessing markets, schools and health centres. The climate of "neither war nor peace" has prevented the implementation of full-scale recovery programmes. In many cases, reconstruction efforts have been spontaneous and villager-initiated (Le Soleil, 1 April 2008).

Where sponsored by local or international organisations, reconstruction has in most cases been accompanied by conflict prevention and resolution measures. Land ownership disputes continue to result from the 1960s land reforms and from the local perception of having lost the land in favour of "northerners" (the Casamance name for people from

Senegal north of Gambia). Population movements have complicated access to land and recognition of land rights even further (USAID, 1 June 2006).

National and international response

The government has responded to the forced displacement resulting from the fighting in Casamance. It provided prompt resettlement assistance to some of the affected families, and in June 2001 launched, with the support of donors and other humanitarian agencies, the Programme for Revival of Economic and Social Activities (PRAESC) in Casamance. PRAESC consists of demining operations, demobilisation of combatants, reconstruction and community development linked to reintegration, and longer-term sustainable development activities. It is intended to support the peace process and promote social cohesion and it falls within a more global development strategy directed towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. PRAESC is implemented in cooperation with the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other implementing partners, as well as national and international non-governmental organisations.

WFP is engaged in a sustained relief and recovery operation in Casamance. The activities planned for 2008-2009 include food for work schemes to encourage the durable return of populations to their homes and promote their self-reliance, and the provision of school meals to encourage school attendance and contribute to restoring livelihoods (WFP, 2007). The impact of WFP's programmes has been limited by poor support from donors, with only around 30 per cent of its appeal funded as of May 2008 (WFP, 25 May 2008).

Donor response to aid appeals has generally been limited, although it has improved in the last few years. USAID, one of the major donors in the region, has been funding peacebuilding activities in northern Casamance since 1999. The strategy chosen was to implement a large-scale programme covering many sectors, reportedly helping the return of other donors to the region (USAID, 1 June 2006, p.57). The programme was designed to provide substantial development support to the region to promote both peacebuilding efforts and a sense of normality among communities.

The World Bank has committed some \$20 million in national programmes for the demobilisation of combatants, the reintegration of combatants, IDPs and refugees, and the reconstruction of infrastructure in areas of return (OCHA by email, 21 April 2008). The German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) has been one of its main implementing partners, supporting the state reconstruction programme and linking it with the political peace process. GTZ has worked mainly in southern Casamance to introduce conflict resolution structures and mechanisms.

Because of limited access to border areas in Casamance, most of the relief and recovery programmes are carried out by local NGOs, which have engaged in a broad spectrum of activities, from food distribution to reconstruction and peacebuilding, resulting at times in limited strategic and planning coherence (USAID, 1 June 2006, p.56). Although sought after mainly for their local knowledge and access, local NGOs have reportedly benefited

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from partnerships with international NGOs, and they have also succeeded in improving their administrative capacities, thus obtaining direct funding arrangements with major donors like USAID.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) resumed its presence in Fogy, northern Casamance in April 2008, after a mine accident in Lefeu killed a delegate and injured three other staff in September 2006 (ICRC, 11 April 2008). The Senegalese Red Cross, meanwhile, has been consistently present in Casamance and active in delivering humanitarian relief throughout the conflict period.

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About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations. At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org

Media contact:

Frederik Kok

Acting Head of Monitoring and Advocacy Department

Tel.: +41 (0)22 799 07 12

Email: frederik.kok@nrc.ch

IDMC

Norwegian Refugee Council

Chemin de Balexert 7-9

1219 Geneva, Switzerland

www.internal-displacement.org

Tel: +41 22 799 0700

Fax: +41 22 799 0701