



Refugees water a vegetable plot at Hagadera Refugee Camp in Dadaab, Garissa County, on September 16, 2018. Refugees are potentially an economic resource grossly underutilized in camps like Dadaab and Kakuma. PHOTO | FILE | NATION MEDIA GROUP

NEW THINKING IS ESSENTIAL IN HANDLING GLOBAL REFUGEE WELFARE

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Since 2017, the Nairobi Declaration and Plan of Action has given rise to a new humane framework, hailed globally as a regional model of hospitality and response to refugees in the Horn of Africa. However, the spotlight is now on the effectiveness of this model, and the web of partnerships that support it.

We live in an increasingly inhuman world where resurgent populism, intolerance and anti-migration policies have weakened the existing humanitarian system and eroded the care and protection of the world's growing number of refugees. Globally, forced displacement is at its

all-time high. By 2017, more than 68.5 million people (about 0.9 per cent of the world's 7.3 billion people) had been forced to flee their homes and communities in search of safety and dignity. Regionally, by August 2019, seven countries in the Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Ethiopia,

Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda) hosted over 4,070,336 refugees and almost twice the number of IDPs. By and large, guns in previous theatres of war have fallen silent but the numbers are not going down. In its Country Refugee Response Plan for January 2019 to December 2020, Uganda projects its refugee caseload to hit 1.73 million refugees. The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (Igad) decided to act and reverse the trend.

IGAD'S RESPONSE

On March 25, 2017, President Uhuru Kenyatta hosted a Special Igad Summit that came up with the 'Nairobi Declaration' and agreed on a Plan of Action on durable solutions for refugees and re-integration of returnees in countries previously affected by civil wars, particularly Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. Over the past two years, the Nairobi process has given rise to a new humane framework, hailed globally as a regional model of refugee response.

The spotlight is now on the effectiveness of this model, and the web of partnerships that now support it.

On September 15-18, the Igad Council of Ministers for refugees convened in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to consider and adopt a report by experts on the progress the region has made in implementing the Nairobi Plan of Action.

The Igad process reflects a radical paradigm shift in the global humanitarian system, which has become necessary to effectively respond to some of the world's most profound and protracted displacement crises.

It soon dawned on world leaders that the wheels were coming off the extant humanitarian system, and it needed reform.

NEW OFFICE

In 2016, the United Nations adopted the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, which laid

out a vision for a more humane, predictable and comprehensive response to displacement crises, known as the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

In turn, the rollout of CRRF threw up vital lessons that informed the Global Refugee Compact (GRC), affirmed by all UN Member States on December 17, 2018.

With this shift, it is not business as usual for traditional humanitarian actors. The new deal requires the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, to adopt new concepts, innovative approaches, and forge strategic partnerships to meet its mandate and responsibilities of protecting refugees in an increasingly inhumane and polarised world.

In the Horn of Africa, the refugee agency has created a new office of Special Envoy on Refugees in the Horn of Africa.

Currently steered by the Kenyan diplomat and politician, Mr Mohamed Abdi Affey, the office is galvanising a new regional humanitarian diplomacy on refugees and providing a vital regional link to global processes.

IGAD PROTOTYPE

At the continental level, a new partnership between the African Union and UNHCR is driving consensus in favour of protection of asylum space in Africa.

In its February 2019 Summit, the AU declared 2019 "The Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons", and its February 2020 summit will receive a progress report on forced displacement.

The new way of responding to refugees has also engendered a radical shift from 'pure' humanitarian responses to incorporate development responses. This has resulted in what is widely described as the Humanitarian-Development Nexus model, now in vogue.

The Igad's humanitarian prototype reflects this shift, which refocuses attention on development of refugees and the communities that host them. The development turn in humanitarian interventions approach reflects the aspirations of African Agenda 2063 on a prosperous, just, and peaceful continent.

SCARCE RESOURCES

Globally, it reflects the promise of development in the UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to minimise risk and vulnerability in societies, leaving no one behind.

The shift follows the recognition of three realities

First, that humanitarian theatres have become complex and multifaceted, blurring the traditional line between short-term humanitarian relief and longer-term development.

The humanitarian system is overstretched and visibly unable to cope with growing numbers and needs of forcibly displaced people.

Second, resources for humanitarian interventions remain scarce despite the size of resources having increased by nearly 400 per cent over the past decade. Therefore, additional support has to be sourced from other sectors.

Third, development thinkers are urging a rethink of the refugee persona.

COOPERATION

After all, refugees may not be the burden they are thought to be. They are potentially an economic resource grossly underutilized in camps like Dadaab and Kakuma.

Fourth, chances of realising the three canonical durable 'solutions' (repatriation, resettlement or local integration) are diminishing. The situation is complicated by resurgent populism, racism and anti-migration sentiment across Europe and North America.

To stem migratory pressures, Europe is deepening development cooperation with regions and countries of origin and transit of flows. Responses have also shifted attention to the refugee-hosting communities, drawing attention to the impacts of welcoming refugees and IDPs for decades.

One of the most innovative development intervention in the humanitarian sector in the Horn of Africa is the World Bank's Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project (DRDIP), a multimillion-dollar initiative that targets development interventions in refugee hosting areas in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.

EVALUATION

After Addis Ababa, all roads lead to Geneva where the First Global Refugee Forum (GRF) will take place on December 17-18, 2019.

The Forum provides a useful platform for Igad and other stakeholders to review what has been done to strengthen international solidarity and responsibility sharing on refugees.

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