

Demographic Changes and Population Vulnerability linked to the conflict in Sudan.

Abstract:

Background:

Since Mid-April 2023, Sudan is experiencing an unprecedented war; between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The human cost of the ongoing conflict is very heavy, and according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), over 15,000 civilians have been killed, thousands injured, and at least 7.5 million people forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in other parts of the country or in neighboring countries, namely, DRC, Egypt, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tchad, and Eritrea among others. The conflict has also seriously damaged the country's infrastructure. Public and private entities including health facilities, schools, government buildings, production facilities, banking system, communication systems, roads, and bridges as well as productive private properties are currently not functioning. Equally important, millions of people have lost their assets, employment and income sources further increasing their vulnerability and resulting in limited access to basic commodities and services and exposing them to food insecurity and diseases. A study was conducted in October 2023 to assess and provide evidence on the living conditions of the internally displaced populations (IDPs) and the relationship between armed conflict, demographic changes, and vulnerability among the most vulnerable displaced people in Sudan.

Methods:

The study employed a mixed-method approach using primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected in October 2023, through a house-hold survey questionnaire administered to 2,575 Sudanese households identified at host communities to estimate changes in household welfare after displacement and to assess their consumption level in new destinations. Field work was done through youth volunteers from all the eight localities of Gezira State using Kobo toolbox via smart phones. The questionnaire includes data on number of resident and IDPS, demographic and socio-economic data, health, education, income sources and other aspects of living condition covering 103 clusters in the eight localities of Gezira State in central Sudan. The selection of households in the cluster was made at random using systematic random sampling. The survey was augmented by desk review focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and literature review that focused on available services and proximity of IDP to these services, as well as assistance they are receiving. Further,

Findings:

The total population of Gezira State is estimated at 10 million persons in 2023 including an estimated 4.2 million persons displaced from Khartoum and other states following the erupt of the

conflict in Khartoum. The sex ratio was estimated at 100 females per 98 males. The proportion of the population aged below 15 years old constituted slightly less than half of the total population (44 %), those in productive category (labour force) are 54%, while those are 65+ constitute only 2% of the IDPs population. Consequently, the dependency ratio is established at around 40%. The urban IDPs population estimated at 77%, while those residing in urban areas is 23%. The average household size of displaced people in Gezira is 10 person which is significantly higher than average at the national level which is estimated at 6 persons per household.

The case study of Gezira State conflict in Sudan is used demonstrate the impacts, including poor general living conditions, inadequate health services, disruptions of children's schooling as well as discontinuation of their parents' livelihood and income sources and hard economic conditions. Findings also reveal insufficient assistance and IDPs' feeling of isolation, with coping strategies including dependency to social network, capitalizing on the social ties with relatives and friends for assistance, though not enough. Additionally, the paper also touches on the consequences of displacement on redistribution of population in the country, taking into consideration age, sex , population density and disability status and other socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.

Conclusion and recommendations:

There is a growing attention on studying the relationship between armed conflicts and demography as an emerging field of research that also carries important political dimensions and implications. Conflicts adversely affect the redistribution of population within the country as well as affecting their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics particularly age and sex and population density of sending and receiving areas, as well as jeopardizing their livelihoods, and exposing them to health, violence, and environmental hazards.

The paper recommends more attention to be paid to post-conflict youth boom in certain areas and its associated political, social, and economic consequences. Policymakers need to consider the large groups of young people in in conflict-affected areas to mitigate the high risk of political and social violence resulting from the economic blockage of these young people. There is a need to further support in intensify programs aiming at providing alternative opportunities for youth in rural areas, especially in light of the decline in and loss of income sources and wages. The paper also calls on demographers and researchers to conduct more similar surveys in conflict situations to show how demography and armed conflict affect each other.

