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# **Capacity and coordination between national, district and subcounty levels of government, including the role of IDP representatives**

**Speech presented at the Brookings Institution Workshop on  
*The Implementation of the National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons*  
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The following presentation is based on a study conducted by the Refugee Law Project, Faculty of Law, Makerere University, on behalf of the Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. The report was launched in March of this year with a foreword by Walter Kälin, Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons.

We found that the existence of the IDP Policy is generally perceived to be progressive, but we also found numerous problems relating to its implementation on the ground. Given the short time available, I would like us to focus on a few key points; in many places the structures necessary for the policy's implementation are not fully in place, and many of those theoretically responsible for implementation of the policy are not aware of it; even where they are they have no money to do so, and humanitarian actors have stepped in to fill the gap, resulting in further coordination problems. I will close with a few comments on the fundamentals of the policy which were brought to our attention by a number of respondents.

On the whole, local government officials were poorly informed about the structures and responsibilities mandated by the Policy, and most camp commandants, camp management structures and IDPs themselves were completely unaware of the Policy.

Where they were aware, respondents expressed significant concerns about the structures mandated by the Policy for coordinating the response to IDPs. In particular, the lines of communication and coordination between the central committees under the OPM and the District Disaster Management Committees are unclear.

There appears to be inadequate coordination and leadership in the implementation of the Policy. The IDP Policy states that OPM should be the lead actor in assisting and protecting IDPs and should set guidelines for humanitarian actors. However, on the ground, the role of the government is seen largely as limited to providing security for IDPs through the UPDF and to posting staff to schools and clinics in the camps—partly due to the lack of funding I shall discuss further below.

Respondents in the districts reported that they had already established structures to coordinate services to the displaced population prior to the launch of the IDP Policy. Thus instead of assisting the districts to respond effectively to IDPs, it appears that the new structures might have simply added a burden on already overstretched and under-resourced local government officials. Additional meetings, committees,

and reporting responsibilities were seen as detracting from local government's ability to direct their energies to actually assisting IDPs. This general overview has to be nuanced in each location, as we witnessed considerable disparity across districts in terms of the implementation of the Policy, with the effectiveness of the disaster management structures clearly highly dependent on the capacity and commitment of the district leadership.

What was common to all districts, however, was the fact that lack of resources remains a fundamental problem. At the time of our research the district disaster management funds mandated by the policy had not been established. Without adequate support from central government, district officials have been left trying to raise support on an ad hoc basis directly from implementing partners, a task made particularly hard by the recent abolition of the graduated tax. As a result, and possibly compounding the problem, international organisations have assumed primary responsibility for the provision of humanitarian aid which, in turn, has generated its own logistical and co-ordination problems, particularly given the decision to make northern Uganda a pilot for the UN's new 'cluster approach' to co-ordination (and similar degrees of confusion surrounding this!).

I would like to close by drawing attention to some of the concerns expressed to us about the fundamental assumptions and purpose of the Policy as they relate to the relationship between local and national government. In particular, there were fears that not only had the Policy come in too late, but that it may serve to perpetuate the existence of IDP camps. Without any clearly articulated and corresponding agenda for ending the conflict, the policy was seen by many on the ground to further entrench both the conflict and the ongoing situation of displacement.

Some respondents regarded the IDP Policy as ineffective because it was not accompanied by a declaration from the national government that northern Uganda is a disaster area. Under the Constitution, the government must declare a national disaster in order to take emergency measures to protect and assist the affected population. However, the government has not only chosen not to do this, it has also maintained its stance that the war in the north is over and that the army has successfully neutralised the rebel threat. For those living in the midst of the conflict, such assertions are hotly disputed. At the same time, in much of the north the Government insists that the military must confine the population in camps for their own security. This apparent contradiction sends mixed messages on the government's stance regarding internal displacement. Because the Policy does not (and we would argue, cannot) address this contradiction, many respondents question whether it can serve to improve the conditions of the displaced population.

To summarise, despite a generally positive perception of the IDP Policy, significant problems remain with its implementation. There is inadequate funding for the structures provided for in the policy, and co-ordination and accountability at a district level, and between the district and central government, remain confused. While it is important to take into account the fact that the policy is still in the early stages of implementation, it is also clear that it is not a silver bullet and cannot succeed if the broader policy and legislative context within it is intended to operate—and for which national Government is responsible—is not conducive. In short, if the policy is to be implemented quickly and effectively and to make a difference to the lives of the thousands of IDPs currently living in IDP camps then this broader context also has to be considered.

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