

Livestock settlement interventions for Malian refugees in Mauritania

The deterioration of the humanitarian situation caused by military action in Mali in mid-January 2012 and continuing instability into the beginning of 2013 had a significant impact on large populations of civilians. By November 2012, approximately 354,000 people had been forced to flee their homes, including some 155,000 refugees hosted in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, and Togo. By May 2013, over 74,000 Malian refugees were located in the Bassiknou area in Mauritania.

The displaced people were living in extremely difficult conditions, dependent on humanitarian aid and the solidarity of the host families and friends. Furthermore, their arrival exacerbated the effects of the drought that already threatened the local population and their herds and put continued pressure on the livelihoods and sustainability of the local communities.

An assessment visit to the Bassiknou region by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) found that grazing rights regarding the refugees' herds were a major concern for local communities and potentially a major source of conflict. Discussions resulted in the implementation of an alternative schedule that guaranteed separate grazing areas, thus reducing the possibility of interference by other herds and reducing possible conflict between refugees and local populations. IOM Mauritania also provided intensive veterinary care to protect livestock against diseases associated with malnutrition and drought, with a target of vaccinating 2,400 animals.

IOM's experiences in Bassiknou highlighted the importance of situation analysis and needs assessment prior to intervention, as well as the need to establish discussions with host communities. The creation of discussion channels made it possible for the local population to express their fears and concerns regarding the situation with the refugees, and solutions were agreed collectively with a long-term perspective. This case study also highlights the central role of site selection as part of settlement planning for both humans and livestock.

Source: Shelter Centre, personal communication, 2013.