

Displaced girls' participation in local youth life

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Daily life in the nine spontaneous IDP sites in and around the town of Dungu in Haut Uélé District in the Democratic Republic of Congo is characterised by peaceful co-existence and a mutual willingness to share the sometimes scarce resources. But although the IDPs and the host communities have related cultural practices and a shared language, the host community seems unwilling to allow the IDPs to integrate.

IDP girls explain that they naturally have contact with host-community contemporaries at school, in the market, at dances or football matches, when drawing water, and through manual labour performed for families in the host community. Nonetheless, a majority describe being dismissed because of their IDP status, which is aggravated by prejudices of the more urban host community against the mainly rural displaced population. Despite having lived in Dungu town for two to three years, none of the girls has friends in the host community. "I resent being a displaced girl because I am discriminated against by other girls, even though they are like me and of the same age as me." (16-year-old girl)

IDP girls consider the classroom as a neutral space where they are judged against the same standard as the host community students. But the need for IDP girls to engage in manual labour to pay school fees stigmatises them even in the school environment and most of them have at some time had to suspend their schooling for long periods because of displacement and subsequent impoverishment. Some of the IDP girls wish to make friends in the host community; others are discouraged by their experiences and prefer to stay amongst their friends in the IDP community. In addition, the IDP girls' parents often prohibit them from seeing host community boys and girls, fearing that the girls will learn bad manners, and even prostitution, from the 'city' youth.

Greater dialogue is needed from the outset between displaced and host community leaders to avoid stigmatisation and prejudice; this could be backed up by joint activities such as mixed IDP-host community sports teams, theatrical productions and concerts.

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