

Using public schools as shelter for IDPs in Yemen

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The two years of conflict in Yemen have created 3.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 20% of whom live in spontaneous settlements or collective centres, including public buildings. Schools top the list of the public buildings that are frequently occupied by IDPs in Yemen. The bulk of the initial displacement happened at a time when education was put on hold due to the war, permitting the idea of IDPs staying in schools as a 'temporary' solution which has unfortunately turned out to be more permanent than anyone thought it would be. The initially small number of IDP families living in these school buildings has functioned as a 'seed' for more IDPs to come and live there.

What has happened is that schools housing IDPs could not open their doors to students when school did re-start. This has led the host community to blame the IDPs for their children not going to school or having to walk further to attend school elsewhere. IDPs in public high schools have stated that the host community and local authorities, including school management, are very hostile to them. In one incident, a school principal used armed men to force 15 out of 21 IDP families out of her high school for female students, and is threatening to kick out the remaining families soon. She and the host community would not tolerate the presence of IDPs – including mature and young men – in the same place as teenage girls.

In another high school for boys in the same city, the local authority has threatened to shut down a shelter project provided by one of the international non-governmental

organisations if the IDPs are not moved out of the school. The school principal has said that he cannot continue running a school full of teenage boys with IDP young women in the school. On the other side, IDPs themselves have expressed their discomfort being in the school. Male heads of families have said that they cannot go to search for work, although the market is right next to them, since they do not feel they can safely leave their families in a school full of young men.

Given the protracted displacement, most IDPs now living in schools have managed to organise themselves and develop a system with shelter managers and IDP representatives. This also means that these IDPs are in a good place to articulate their needs clearly and precisely. IDPs in schools, especially those who have been living together for quite some time and have some such system, should be consulted in matters that concern them; for example, with regard to the boy's school mentioned above, involving the IDP representative in discussions about moving the IDPs to another building helped to minimise the inevitable tensions and concerns.

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School being used by IDPs, Ibb, Yemen.



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