

Shelter Cluster in Yemen – Situational Analysis

Overview

Since the armed conflict in Yemen officially began in March 2015, families have suffered under a brutal conflict with more than 70,000 civilian's casualties with at least 18,000 civilians, verified by the UN¹, as killed. The conflict in Yemen entered its fifth year in March 2019 and it remains catastrophic and continues to be one of the world's worst humanitarian crisis which has torn the nation apart and set back the standard of living by decades.

More than 24 M or 8/10 Yemenis need some sort of humanitarian assistance with 60% having acute needs. A further 3.3 M have been internally displaced an increase of 84 % from 0.5 M in May 2015 and an increase of 19% from 2.7 M at the beginning of 2018. Out of the IDP population, 57% are children, 19% women and 6% elderly². About 10 M people are a step away from famine, and the country witnessed one of the worst cholera outbreaks in history. Poverty rates have increased dramatically, with an estimated 81% of the population below the poverty line which represent an increase of 30% since 2014. Reports indicate that less than 30% of the population have access to regular/sustainable income in 46 % of districts assessed³.

About 70% of the population is without access to adequate drinking water, one in three people are unable to meet their basic food needs, 20% in need of Shelter/NFI/CCCM support⁴ with more than 2 million children out of school. For many Yemeni children, all they have known is war. Their grim circumstances have had an extreme effect on their mental, physical, and social health jeopardizing their future.

The Shelter/NFI/CCCM situation deteriorated over the past 4 years as a result of the intensified conflict and shift of frontlines, coupled with insecurity and recurrent natural disasters in addition to the alarming deterioration of the Yemeni economy including depreciation of the local currency, unprecedented increases in the price of fuel and high inflation rates resulting in increased prices of basic commodities in local markets including household items and shelter materials.

On the ground, and especially close to the frontlines, humanitarian space is often severely restricted. Many humanitarian actors struggle to maintain sustained access to conflict affected populations in different parts of the country such as Bakil Al Mir, Haradh, Midi and Hayran districts of Hajjah governorate, Kamaran and Ad Durayhimi districts of Al Hudaydah governorate and Baqim, Shada'a and Al Dhaher districts of Sa'adah governorate. The battle for capturing Al Hudaydah port City threatened functionality of its port which is considered the gateway for 80% of humanitarian supplies, fuel and commercial goods into the country.

Natural disasters such as floods and cyclones forced over 42,000 people to leave their homes in 2018 and restricted access to education for more than 40,000 students who were affected by cyclones in Hadramaut, Al Maharah and Socotra governorates. Whereas regular flooding has traditionally been beneficial for agricultural practices in Yemen, high-magnitude flooding often leads to loss of lives, agricultural land, death of animals, and destruction of shelter and infrastructure as a result people are more likely to live in unsafe structures and hazardous locations, and often without any income. These disasters added massive and urgent shelter requirements to the already vast and chronic shelter situation of affected populations especially in locations prone to frequent disasters such as Socotra, Hajjah, Hadramaut, Al Mahrah, Shabwah, Amran and Al Jawf. It is much harder for these families to replace lost homes and get back on their feet after disasters.

Current dynamics of displacement shows that 74 % of IDPs were most commonly found living in private settings. Of those living in private setting, 43% live in rented accommodation and 22 % live with a host family. This is a change from 2015 where 77% of IDPs were staying with host families. It is likely that with scarce resources all around it has become harder for families to host additional members in their homes. The protracted nature of displacement is straining the ability of IDPs and their hosts to cope, making them increasingly vulnerable. The situation is compounded by the impact of the economic decline on households, including loss of livelihoods, non-payment of salaries and disruption of social protection programs. Governorates of Hajjah, Hadramout, Al Hudaydah, Taizz, Amran, Al Bayda and Ibb had the highest relative IDP population, with IDPs making up over 20 % of the host community meaning that host families who were already on the margins of poverty have been forced to accommodate other families in their homes with at least three persons per room pushing them further into poverty.

¹ HNO (Humanitarian Needs Overview) 2019

² MCLA (Multi Cluster Location Assessment) 2018

³ MCLA 2018

⁴ HNO 2019

There has been an 84% increase in needs from 1.2 M people in 2015 and 24% increase from 5.4 M in 2018 to 6.7 M in 2019. For people with acute needs an increase of 67 % since 2015 or 4.5 M in 2019 an increase of 42% from 2018. The Shelter/NFI/CCCM Cluster target remained at 3 M people for 2018 and 2019.

Impact

As a result shelter remains a major humanitarian issue and priority concern as hundreds of thousands of IDPs live, often since the beginning of the conflict, in makeshift shelters using inadequate materials to construct their shelters such as plastic bags, cardboard, clothes and leaves in areas without adequate access to basic services.

Shelter needs: the most frequent issues are overcrowding, families unable to afford rent payments, and the high cost of shelter materials in the local market. **Emergency shelters** are also not robust enough to withstand the 6 months they should last for due to multiple displacements, and harsh climatic conditions. Shelter programs supporting safe, appropriate, more sustainable shelter solutions identified by the beneficiaries' through stronger engagement on their needs and resources remain limited. Due to the fact that WASH, Health and Nutrition can have more immediate consequences on life, shelter assistance needs to be provided within an 'integrated response' framework with other priority needs so that IDPs are not forced to choose between their own immediate priorities. **IDPs in rented accommodation** struggle to pay rent on time, fall into debt and risk eviction or exploitation by their landlords, common in Amanat Al Asimah, Al Hudaydah, Taizz and Amran governorates. Longer-term needs are found among those communities requiring resilience support to help reduce dependence on negative coping strategies. 81 % of IDPs have been displaced for over a year and their long term shelter needs become more pressing with each passing year.

NFI needs: IDPs often flee their homes with little more than the clothes they are wearing which leave them without basic lifesaving NFIs required for their survival in displacement location. The most frequent issue reported is lack of basic household items in the local market, and when available families don't have the means to purchase them and lack of lighting in their shelters. Many IDPs reported worn-out NFIs due to the harsh weather conditions and overuse in their displacement locations and lack of replacement.

IDP Hosting Sites: There are approximately 465,300 IDPs living in almost 1,300 hosting sites (spontaneous settlements and collective centers). These IDPs, as a last resort had to reside in IDP hosting sites and are considered among the most vulnerable populations requiring assistance as they have no means to support adequate shelter solutions. Their situation is extremely alarming and continues to deteriorate if durable solutions are not found or basic multisector integrated services provided. These sites are established arbitrarily on publicly or privately owned land without prior site planning or security considerations. Services at these locations are often limited, and residents face significant challenges to survive. IDPs in these sites often cite amongst their biggest challenges lack of access to dignified assistance, feeling unsafe, lack of privacy, limited representation of their needs, limited freedom of movement and harassment from other IDPs or the host community. Lack of management of these sites and thus limited to no basic services and sub-standard living conditions present severe protection and safety concerns already experienced by most inhabiting IDP Hosting Sites.

More families are exposed to protection risks such as marrying off their younger daughters, after living yet another year in sub-standard shelter conditions. Other protection risks are exploitation, harassment and gender-based violence. The continued sub-standard services in IDP hosting sites as well as the inability of heads of households to provide for their families are increasing the likelihood of aggressive behavior and domestic violence. Women and girls are, especially, bear the brunt of the consequences of the lack of privacy, safety and proper living conditions in IDP hosting sites as well as in host communities. Additionally, female and child headed displaced families continue to be at greater protection risks. The provision of adequate psychosocial, shelter, household items, health and WASH services that respond to the distinct needs of IDPs from various gender and age groups are also among the challenges in IDP hosting sites and host communities as a result of the conflict.

Host Communities: Generally displacement is considered as the main factor impacting host communities who are often poor themselves increasing the strain on already limited public services and infrastructure and increased pressure on depleted resources. Given their already precarious situations, hosting can rapidly deplete their meagre resources and propel them from extreme to chronic poverty. The highest IDP populations are located in Hajjah, Hadramout, Al Hudaydah, Taizz, Amran, Al Bayda and Ibb governorates accounting for over 20% of the host community and 47 % of the total IDP population. These are areas where high levels of IDP presence are likely to place severe strain on local services and raise tensions between host community members and IDPs where already-scarce resources are further stretched by the newcomers.

Returnees: Over one million returnees have been back to their homes over the past years in the major areas of return such as Aden, Amanat Al Asimah, Taizz, Shabwah and Lahj Governorates and close to 90 % returned more than a year ago. However at least 10 % of returnees do not have shelter or are settled in makeshift shelters while 6 % reside in IDP hosting sites due multiple factors including damage to their homes, security and safety and limited access to basic services and livelihood opportunities. Since HLP (Housing, Land and Property) issues are common issue in Yemen so returnees usually struggle to access their land or housing which puts them in life and health-threatening situations, undermines their dignity and can expose them to a range of serious protection risks, including sexual and gender based violence.

Marginalized groups (Muhamashin): Targeting these groups during conflicts frequently occurs as a panacea for pre-existing discrimination against them. However the conflict has significantly contributed in exacerbating discrimination and abuse against these communities and risks of rejection and isolation by the community. As the marginalized groups struggle to find landlords willing to rent housing to them or even receive acceptance of the local communities adjacent to which they settle, they also struggle to access essential services such as healthcare or earn a living. They are regularly on the receiving end of discriminatory acts while they continue living in abject poverty in the most basic of shelters. While farming used to provide the main source of income especially in rural areas, it has been negatively impacted by the conflict and many have resorted to begging.

Persons with special needs: Studies carried out by HI (Humanity and Inclusion) found that 86 % of people with disabilities and other vulnerable people experience problems accessing services provided by the humanitarian community e.g. physical access, economic barriers, social or cultural barriers, discrimination, lack of information, unavailable support services and safety during travelling to and from assistance sites. Further alarming treatment and state of those with disabilities and special needs, include fear of eviction and harassment from the local communities with whom they share already scarce resources.

CFM (Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms) are often ineffective which put a barrier for affected population to share their voices/views. Community members sometimes fear losing assistance if they complain. Complaints against community leaders pose another challenge to feedback mechanisms. Normally it takes considerable time to build trust and confidence in the transparency of the process, especially in places where conflict led many people to doubt that such a process can exist. Literacy rates are historically low in rural areas which put particular challenge in managing confidentiality when most feedback is given verbally. Establishing CFM without prior consultation with affected population also results in the mechanisms not meeting the needs of the target population.