Sites hosting internally displaced people in Sudan: ISCG Guidance on mitigation, response and way forward

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Background, purpose and objectives

With the dramatic increase in internal displacement in Sudan, the number of 'gathering sites' sheltering IDPs across the country continues to grow. Thought to be an immediate stop-gap for a short-term and temporary problem, there are increasingly common concerns emerging from across the country on how to respond in such sites, how to deal with specific dilemma, notably in relation to schools, and protection risks and the future outlook of using such sites given the displacement situation is likely to stay. It is also the growing number of such sites that has triggered the re-activation of the Site Management sector in Sudan, recognizing the need for site-level information and coordination of the response. It is against this background, and the inter-linked site management, protection and shelter concerns that arise in this context, that the national Site Management, Protection and Shelter/NFI sectors have taken the initiative to prepare this technical guidance jointly with the national ISCG.

Overall purpose: This guidance note sets forth a simple typology of these various sites to promote a coherent understanding and consistent use of terminology in the response. It further identifies main common consequences of such site-based sheltering of IDPs and sets forth (1) measures to mitigate against the further establishment and proliferation of such sites, except as a measure of last resort; and (2) provides guidance for the immediate humanitarian response at such sites, as well as for the medium- and longer-term response, notably in relation to site consolidation, relocation and longer-term development planning, underscoring the importance of the early engagement and operational involvement of development organizations to address the challenges caused by the use and proliferation of such sites.

Scope: This guidance note is focused on sites sheltering IDPs – colloquially often referred to as 'gathering sites'. It does not address the situation of IDPs living in residential areas (e.g., neighborhoods in cities, towns and villages), i.e., IDPs living in host communities or in rented accommodation.

Objectives: This guidance note pursues the following objectives:
1. To promote a coherent understanding and use of terminology in the humanitarian response.
2. To mitigate against the proliferation of sites.
3. To address short-, medium- and longer-term consequences of site-based sheltering of IDPs, including:
   - Guidance on addressing immediate humanitarian needs and protection risks in sites.
   - Guidance on addressing the eviction risks affecting IDPs sheltering in schools, as well as more general eviction risk mitigation measures.
   - Guidance on addressing medium- to longer-term consequences, including the need for an evidence-based strategy; on consolidation and relocation and considerations for longer-term options to address the site situation through development solutions.

Objective 1: Typology for coherent understanding and consistent use terminology

To promote a coherent understanding and consistent use of terminology, the following typology categorizes the various sites where IDPs seek shelter in three groups, which can be found in urban, peri-urban and rural areas:

Collective Centers	Spontaneous settlements	Camps
Collective Centers serve as communal facilities that are often set up spontaneously to house displaced populations on a temporary basis. Although not designed for residential use, these structures are re-purposed to provisionally shelter people due to circumstances. This category includes public buildings such as schools, community centers and other public or private structures, as well as abandoned or unfinished buildings that have originally been intended for private, public or commercial use. Such centers are not typically equipped for long-term habitation and often lack basic residential amenities and essential services. Moreover, their use can also interfere with or disrupt the original function, such as in the case of schools. The absence of secure tenure also poses a constant threat of eviction, making it challenging to invest in improving living conditions.	Spontaneous settlements arise independently, without the direct intervention of humanitarian organizations or government entities. These areas are often densely populated and feature makeshift shelters built from whatever materials available nearby. This category also includes unsheltered spaces like parks, fields, vacant lots, or any other open areas where IDPs sleep in the open or seek shelter under trees or other minimal covering. The lack of privacy and protection against weather impact, structured facilities, for example for water and sanitation, as well as other essential infrastructure and basic amenities make such settlements vulnerable to a range of environmental, health, and safety hazards. In addition, the lack of secure tenure poses a constant threat of eviction and hampers efforts to improve living conditions.	Camps are planned settlements that are often established in collaboration with humanitarian organizations and are recognized by the government. Camps feature a structured layout, including delineated plots, shelters, and communal facilities. They typically offer organized provision of essential services such as healthcare, education, and sanitation, and have a higher degree of tenure security than other sites. Typically administered by authorities, and managed and overseen by humanitarian entities, residents of camps often rely heavily on aid for their daily needs and sustenance, risk to contribute to protracted displacement and require substantial resources over extended periods of time for maintenance, which are not generally available.

Common consequences of IDP-hosting sites

The scale and pace of the new internal displacement has meant that large numbers of people arrived in areas of displacement within short periods. Many IDPs have fled to main population centres in host states oftentimes overstretching the available urban capacities for accommodation and public services. While the majority of new IDPs are staying in communities, especially those with no family or communal links as well as those with insufficient assets to rent, have often no choice but to live in a site. Schools, university dormitories, abandoned public and private buildings, mosques as well as open spaces are among the main types of sites hosting IDPs, which are either collective centers or spontaneous settlements.

The use of such sites for shelter can come with imminent consequences for the safety, health and wellbeing of the residents and communities and often bring persistent long-term problems:

Imminent risks:
- Overcrowding, lack of privacy, limited to no WASH facilities, lighting and electricity, as well as no security set up to govern the access to such sites, increases protection risks, in particular GBV risks, as well as concerns related to theft and other criminality. In addition, the limited space, overcrowding and limited services have been cause of tension and disputes among residents.
- The risk of forced eviction from such sites is common, in particular where sites with an ulterior purpose (e.g. schools) are being used to shelter IDPs, as well as from privately owned facilities. Forced evictions re-displaces IDPs, while the eviction risk causes distressing uncertainty over where to live.
- Many sites host people with specific needs, such as people with severe health conditions, living with disabilities, trauma or other forms of psycho-social distress for example. The living conditions at the sites are not suitable for such groups and their specific needs, and can aggravate them.
- For private-owned structures or privately managed sites, there is a risk of 'gate keeping', where private individuals or groups managing such sites control access to the sites and constrain the freedom of movement of the residents. Such situations are also conducive to exploitative practices.

- Where schools are used for sheltering IDPs, this can lead to the disruption of access to education, and potentially cause tension with the host communities whose children are affected by that.
- Health concerns emerge due exposure to weather impact, including heat, wind, sandstorms, rains in sites with poor shelter conditions in particular; due to overcrowding, as well as limited possibilities to maintain personal hygiene and lack of access to sanitation facilities translating in open defecation.

Consequences with longer-term impact:
- Humanitarian assistance and services at sites (over communities) can become a pull factor for additional IDPs to join sites. This perpetuates and contributes to the proliferation of sites. The disparity of assistance and service provision between sites and communities can also lead to social tension.
- Site-based hosting arrangements tend to cause humanitarian dependencies more quickly due to the high reliance on handouts as opposed to self-reliance. In addition, sites may end up being a concentration point for extremely vulnerable individuals or persons without other means to survive, creating long-term dependencies. This leads to more protracted displacement hindering durable solutions opportunities.
- Humanitarian assistance and services provided at sites can create and compound actual or perceived inequalities vis a vis host communities, especially in poorer, underserved or conflict-affected communities, thus potentially further rupture social fabric and trigger conflict and/or create grievances peaceful co-existence and social cohesion.
- Site-based sheltering comes with a significant mental health toll for the individuals concerned that can reduce their ability to cope and to seek ways of self-reliance. The mental health impact of the resort to 'gathering sites' for sheltering IDPs contributes to their perpetuation and protracted nature of displacement.
- The growing and often uncontrolled mushrooming of such IDP-hosting sites can lead to the proliferation of urban or peri-urban slums.
- The growing and/or uncontrolled of IDP-hosting sites as well as protracted displacement could distort local economies and lead to increased prices for services and goods negatively affecting host communities and potentially triggering human security risks among both host communities and IDPs.

Objective 2: Mitigation measures to address the proliferation of sites
Such sites were thought to be a quick fix to the problem of the limited sheltering space for new IDPs, based on the assumption that displacement would remain limited and of short-term nature. With current knowledge, course correction is needed given the continuous displacement flow and its lasting nature. As a first step, it is imperative to try as much as possible to curb the creation and multiplication of such 'gathering sites' given the above outlined consequences and dilemma, requiring concerted efforts from authorities, communities, and humanitarian actors. Below key points should be used by humanitarian actors to guide their own work, as well as for advocacy with authorities and for community outreach:

For authorities:
- Maintain the general policy of not establishing such 'gathering sites' and find accommodation arrangements in the communities, where possible.
- Regulate the rental policy, in particular the rental fees, to enable a greater resort to the use of rented accommodation by IDPs.
- Support and strengthen the public services in main hosting areas to increase the hosting capacity and promote peaceful co-existence, conflict prevention and social cohesion.
- Proactively enable humanitarian assistance and services through a community-based approach benefiting displaced populations and communities hosting them.

- Develop a strategy on the way forward with 'gathering sites' for the medium- and longer-term for a more sustainable approach, considering the prevailing and anticipated displacement situation, while maintaining a contingency plan for potential new large-scale influxes.

For local community:
- Local community to continue to support IDP families who have been living with the host communities.
- Local community and community-based structures to collaborate with local authorities and humanitarian sector to find alternatives to gathering sites prior to the set-up of the site.
- Local community and relevant authorities to advise, inform and support humanitarian sectors in understanding and identifying potential protection risks (including GBV) for both host community and IDPs and identify mitigation measures.
- When the sites are already set up, intervention in the sites should be considered for temporary measure/nature. Efforts should be made jointly together with local authorities, IDP communities and humanitarian actors to find viable alternatives option which are more sustainable.
- Local community should coordinate closely with local authorities when the establishment of such sites becomes unavoidable.
- Local community should avoid using public buildings that society would require in the foreseeable future such as schools and universities as a place of gathering site.

For humanitarian actors:
- Adopt a response approach that addresses humanitarian needs irrespective of the shelter situation and location.
- Implement a community-based approach to the humanitarian response for a more equal access to assistance and services where needs are the same or similar between IDPs and host communities.
- Provide support and capacity development to host communities for them to continue to extend their role as host and first-line responders.
- Provide any form of individual or household-level assistance in communities based on clear and transparent prioritization and targeting criteria that ensure provision of support to individuals and households most at risk or with specific needs. The 'do no harm' principle must guide such interventions, so as not to inadvertently contribute to communal tensions, exploitation and abuse. In particular, shelter enhancements or use of cash for rent must be accompanied with legal agreements and compliance and protection monitoring.
- Analyze potential protection risks, including but not limited to GBV, due to different norms and social values between IDPs and hosting communities and integrate prevention measures into response.
- Support efforts by authorities to develop a strategy on the way forward with the 'gathering sites'.
- Do not advocate for the creation of sites or camps. This remains a measure of last resort only, when all other alternatives have been explored and exhausted.

Objective 3: Addressing short-, medium- and longer-term consequences of site-based sheltering of IDPs

1. Addressing immediate humanitarian needs and protection risks in sites.

The Site Management Sector maps and assess sites using agreed tools. The findings of the mappings and assessments are multisectoral and identify critical response gaps, and can therefore inform the humanitarian response across all sectors in the sites. This section provides overarching guidance for the humanitarian response in the sites given above outlined negative consequences and risks associated with site-based sheltering of IDPs and to bring a degree of coherence into the response, as well as considerations for prioritization of sites.

General considerations for the humanitarian response in sites

- The response in the sites should be done in close collaboration between humanitarian organizations, local authorities, IDP communities sheltering in the sites, as well as host communities and eventual community structures supporting such sites.
- The humanitarian response should be informed by the gap analysis from the site management sector, or alternatively other independent humanitarian assessments. Mitigation of protection risks should be integrated in all sectoral responses.
- The humanitarian response should leverage, strengthen and build on the response by the communities themselves, and work with existing community structures where possible.
- Local authorities and police forces to establish security measures at such sites and its environs, e.g. through regular patrolling, as needed to protect against theft and other risks. Humanitarian organizations should provide sensitization on humanitarian and do no harm principles.
- Humanitarian responders need to examine adherence to the humanitarian principles for the response in the sites, and carefully manage potential risks of politization of the response.
- The humanitarian response at large should aim at contributing toward peaceful co-existence and social cohesion between the IDPs living in the sites and the host community to mitigate risks, tensions or conflicts from arising. In addition, community-based dispute settlement should be provided by protection organizations and community-based protection structures trained on such conflict resolution within IDP sites, within host communities as well as between both.
- Existing facilities and services in local communities such as administrative services, health centres, schools should also be accessible to IDPs living in sites and humanitarian agencies should not establish parallel services rather support existing services and facilities to build capacity, strengthen and increase their absorption capacity.
- Community outreach, information provision and messaging should be agreed through state-level coordination structures to ensure coherence.
- For humanitarian assistance and service provision at a site that require alteration of existing structure/facilities, a prior written permission must be obtained from the owner.
- All response should be coordinated through the sectoral sub-national working groups and State-level-ISCG, and humanitarian partners are requested to regularly submit their reports to the respective sectors to facilitate sub-national coordination better.
- PSEA and AAP are collective responsibilities that should be duly incorporated in all phases of programming in all the sites as well.
- Humanitarian response should be planned in such a way that it contributes to sustainability, and enables a shift toward area-based approaches and that it catalyzes durable solutions as far as possible.

Considerations for prioritizations of sites for the humanitarian response

Since it will not be possible to respond to the identified needs in all sites due to lack of resources, access constraints and capacity of humanitarian responders, prioritization will be needed. Below proposed criteria aim to guide organization's prioritization. It is advisable to discuss site prioritization in state-level ISCGs for harmonized approaches. Responders are encouraged to communicate their prioritization both to local authorities and communities alike for transparency purposes.

It is proposed to prioritize interventions in sites that meet as many of below prioritization criteria as possible, also considering the intervention type. It is important to differentiate between interventions that address needs of the displaced at large versus interventions that are tailored to mitigate and/or address specific protection risks or humanitarian needs that are more related to a particular age, gender, group or individuals with specific needs.

- Sites with sustained humanitarian access and in a safe and secure location.

- Sites hosting large number of displaced population (relevant to humanitarian interventions addressing humanitarian needs at large)
- Sites hosting large numbers of persons with specific needs (high levels of protection risks and vulnerabilities)
- Sites that are recognized/managed by authorities.
- Sites with limited eviction risks.
- Sites with additional absorption capacity (e.g. for site consolidation) and that have development potential.
- Sites where interventions do not create friction with local communities rather support peaceful co-existence and social cohesion.
- Sites that are not at risks to be affected by environmental hazards (weather, climate changed or human- induced)

2. Addressing the eviction risks of IDPs sheltering in schools and general eviction risk mitigation

This section provides specific guidance addressing the pressing concern related to IDPs sheltering in schools, alongside more general eviction risk mitigation measures.

Addressing eviction risks of IDPs sheltering in schools

Many sites currently used for sheltering IDPs are schools. With the schools reopening, risks of evictions and ensuing homelessness of the displaced people, as well as re-displacement are high. At the same time, such accommodation arrangements disrupt or suspend learning for children, exposing them to a host of risks and negative coping mechanisms. In addition, consequences may include a deterioration/damage of school buildings and equipment, including school WASH facilities, as well as a reduction the availability of education infrastructures, also used for communal events, impacting on host communities.

The following guidance provides steps to address this dilemma for an interim solution. Ultimately, medium-to longer-term approaches outlined below will be required to address this situation more sustainably.

- Agree with state-level authorities on the need for an interim solution, which, given the imminence of the school opening, will require a pragmatic arrangement that balances these two objectives – shelter and education, and devise a respective plan led by state-level authorities.
- Agree on the need for a compromise to mitigate both, homelessness and re-displacement as well as interruption of education and school dropouts, which means that any interim solution will need to pursue the following two goals: 1. To create additional alternative space for IDP sheltering; and 2. To create additional alternative options for schooling.
- Determine the number of schools currently used for IDP shelter and the remaining schooling capacity, as well as the schooling needs by locality. The site mapping undertaken by the site management sector can inform this baseline analysis.
- Explore realistic options for the creation of additional space for IDP sheltering. These may include:
  - Exploring community-based shelter options in consultations with IDP and concerned host communities.
  - Utilizing sites with additional space for sheltering. (site consolidation)
  - Making available other public or private buildings that are suitable for human habitation. (relocation)
  - Exploring rental opportunities with respective rent control guarantees negotiated between authorities and landlords.
- Explore realistic options for additional alternative options for schooling

- o Consider the merging of schools. This option will only be effective if the schools are not too far from each other.
- o Consider the utility of introducing shifts in schools to cater to the education needs of more children with less education facilities.
- o Consider transferring teachers from schools used by IDPs as shelters to running schools, in particular where a shift-approach is introduced.
- o Explore the opportunity of expanding existing school capacities (expand school facility, additional furniture etc), and explore alternative additional spaces that can be used for schooling.
- o Establishing the alternative learning spaces such as Temporary Learning Spaces (TLS) around the school location to be used for learning as well as the schools that are being used as shelters for the displaced persons if not fully occupied.
- o Increase schooling capacities through the provision of safe learning spaces by exploring availability of public utilities such mosques, through the school Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs), community leaders and religious representatives' engagement with the relevant stakeholder to have these utilities used as for temporary learning.
- o Explore the feasibility of e-learning.
- Develop a state-level action plan considering the baseline information and the options for additional shelter capacity and additional school identified as feasible at state-level.
- The establishment of camps should not be considered as part of identifying an interim solution.
- Include medium- to longer-term considerations in the action plan for a more sustainable solution, considering below section 3.

General eviction risk mitigation measures

Eviction risks, including risks of forced evictions, from various 'gathering sites' may increase with time. The following general eviction risk mitigation measures will therefore be put in place:

- The Site Management sector, supported by the Protection sector, to develop and maintain a joint eviction risk matrix based on the site mapping and assessments.
- All humanitarian partners across all sectors should report cases of evictions and indications of eviction risks, e.g. verbal threats or formal/informal notices, to the site management or protection sectoral focal point at state-level for adding to the matrix.
- Community sensitization on their rights and on what to do in the event of an eviction risk should be carried out. Respective information will be made available through the Protection sector.
- All humanitarian actors should advocate for the prevention of any forced eviction, as such evictions are unlawful and constitute a rights violation.
- With regards to lawful evictions, advocacy should centre on the adherence to due process in notifying and carrying out the eviction, including guarantees that the affected population is not rendered homeless.
- Legal aid should be made available by protection partners to IDPs at risk or affected by a (forced) eviction.

3. Addressing medium- to longer-term consequences

It is expected that the IDP situation is likely to continue for a longer period with above outlined longer-term consequences of site-based shelter arrangements. There is a need to introduce medium- to longer-term considerations into the response to identify a more sustainable way forward with the growing number of 'gathering sites' and involve development organizations from the onset. Some of these considerations such as for s relocation, including site consolidation, also relate to the need to address the prevailing eviction risk from schools, but to which more longer-term considerations should apply so they can transform into a durable solution over time, beyond serving as interim solution.

Relocation and Site Consolidation

Relocation of IDPs from sites to another site (site consolidation), to the host community or another location may be necessary in some instances to enhance living conditions and/or to address an identified risk. In addition, site consolidation can help to maximize the impact of a response as a biproduct; this can however not be a primary purpose for a relocation.

The following key considerations apply when a relocation becomes necessary for valid purposes:
- Relocations, including site consolidation, should be purely pursued for above mentioned purpose, to enhance living conditions and/or address an identified risk.
- Relocations, including site consolidation, should be led by local authorities in coordination with the Site Management sector, where applicable and capacity permits, and humanitarian partners.
- Concerned communities should be consulted and informed about any relocation and site consolidation plans and their views and priorities incorporated in such planning.
- Humanitarian organizations should not engage with the IDP community in premature discussions about relocation, and not participate in any forced relocations. Communication with communities on such relocation exercises should occur based on agreed upon community outreach and information messaging.
- Local authorities should look for options for relocation and site consolidation, and should share the details with the IDPs and humanitarian sectors through the A-ISCG as well as the Site Management sector where active.
- IDPs should be consulted and given opportunity to choose from available options, or pursue an option of their own choice.
- Relocation to the host communities (hosted, free or on rent) is preferred, however this may not be feasible where host community is not willing or able to host more IDPs.
- In case relocation to an existing site (site consolidation) or a new site is the only available option, in addition to willingness of IDPs to move to the new/alternative location, an independent multi-sectoral humanitarian assessment to confirm safety, suitability and adequacy for human habitation, absorption capacity, availability and accessibility of services etc is needed.
- When assessing the alternative site or new location, tenure security should be confirmed. On the land tenure, such agreement should be put in place to prevent further eviction and ensure sustainability of the relocation/consolidation. The development potential of the site should also be considered, and (continued) access to markets and public services ensured so as not to cut off concerned IDPs from self-reliance possibilities.
- IDPs should be given sufficient time to prepare themselves for the move, and be kept abreast of the plans and timelines throughout the process.
- Services provided by humanitarian agencies should not be discontinued until IDPs move to another location; while in the place of destination, basic services and assistance provision should be in place/planned for ahead of the relocation. This does not necessarily require site-based service provision, but access to available basic services in the vicinity of the future site.
- A risk analysis should be conducted to inform a decision on a relocation. A risk mitigation plan should be in place and implemented for identified risks.
- Resource constraints for relocation of IDPs should be considered from the onset of a planning for such a relocation, as in particular relocation to a new site is costly and may not be feasible.
- Establishment of an IDP camp should be avoided and be considered as a last resort only.

Longer term approach: Development solutions transforming 'gathering sites'

The proliferation of 'gathering sites' ultimately is a manifestation of insufficient space for human habitation requiring urban planning and development solutions. Longer term approaches to transform 'gathering sites' for more sustainability should be explored jointly with the communities, authorities, humanitarian and development organizations, as well as the private sector. This will contribute to the development of the town or village, enables durable solution opportunities for the displaced, reduces aid dependency and benefits the local population and authorities.

An assessment determining the viability and feasibility of transformation of existing sites for example into additional urban space or peri-urban areas through extension of public services (e.g. spatial profile) would need to inform such a longer-term transformation strategy, also requiring systems analysis, development financing and long term action planning for interventions.

The following steps for medium- and long-term solutions are suggested:
- Consult with the local government and stakeholders on their intentions and plans for medium-/long-term solutions.
- Conduct urban spatial profiling to better understand the area hosting IDPs to inform medium- and longer-term planning.
- Analyze implications for housing, land and property issues of any medium/long-term solutions to avoid tensions.
- Support to organization and involvement of communities (IDPs and host communities) in the identification, planning and implementation of medium/long-term solutions.

If/where the development of additional urban / peri-urban areas is an acceptable option to the local authorities:
- Provide capacity building to the relevant local authorities in urban/spatial planning and land administration.
- Support the government authorities in adopting mechanisms for affordable financing for housing and basic services.
- Support government authorities in identifying suitable areas for medium/long-term accommodation of IDPs with a perspective of developing new urban/peri-urban areas. The criteria for selecting these sites needs to be agreed with the local authorities and stakeholders, but should include at a minimum: land free of disputes/conflicts and other risks (e.g. explosive hazards); legal clearance of land; access to existing urban centres for services and livelihoods; access to basic services; security; and low risk of natural disaster (e.g. flood), to enable a durable solutions in line with the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for IDPs.