

# LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN THE SHELTER AND SETTLEMENTS SECTOR: A COMPENDIUM OF CASE STUDIES



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

---

# LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN THE SHELTER AND SETTLEMENTS SECTOR: A COMPENDIUM OF CASE STUDIES

## CREDITS

### **Managed and written by**

Juli King

### **With support from**

Evan Anthony, Mohamed Hilmi, Eva Suarez, Cecilia Thiam, Omnia Abdalla, and Anaele Jergen

### **Copyedited by**

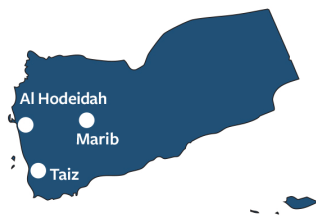
Liam Foley

### **Graphics by**

Diana De León

### **Contributing Organizations**

Action pour le Développement Social et Humanitaire  
Adigrat Diocese Catholic Secretariat  
Architecture Sans Frontières Nepal  
Altwasul  
Asociación Legión Honduras  
Association au Secours Humanitaire pour Développement Rural et aux Changements Climatiques  
Caritas Nepal  
Caritas Ukraine  
Kalkal Human Rights Development Organization  
L'Organisation des Visionnaires Dévoués pour un Développement de Haute Modernisation  
Nabd Development and Evolution Organization  
Organisation Catholique pour le Développement et la Solidarité  
Proyecto Aldea Global  
Somali Awareness and Social Development Organization



Altwasul for Human Development is a Yemeni civil society foundation founded in 2004. Altwasul works in the fields of food security, agriculture, health, education, water, environmental sanitation, protection, shelter, youth and women capacity building, life skills, and community care throughout all governorates of the Republic of Yemen. The foundation has contributed to programs that combat poverty and build the capabilities of the most vulnerable people.



**Organization type:** National NGO



**Assistance type:** Transitional shelter, settlement planning, infrastructure interventions



**Funding:** Direct from government donor, through INGOs, direct from private donor (foundations)



**Amount of funding:** Over \$500,000 USD



**Relationship type:** Local actor and local government partnership

# DURABLE SOLUTIONS IN YEMEN: ALTWASUL

## Project Summary

Between January 2020 and August 2024, Altwasul constructed 12 residential villages for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Taiz, Al Hodeidah, and Marib Governorates in Yemen. These included integrated health, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and education services. Altwasul constructed 881 housing units, five schools, four health units, nine mosques, and 12 water and sanitation infrastructure systems. Moreover, 723 houses had solar-powered lighting and 158 were connected to city power. In addition, Altwasul provided several heads of household with livelihood assistance in the form of sewing machines or livestock. This project equipped 6,167 individuals with a durable solution.



## Context

Before the outbreak of conflict in Yemen, many homes were solid concrete structures, made of blocks and cement, that provided security and stability. Basic services such as water and electricity were fairly consistent in urban areas but nearly non-existent in rural regions. Overall, there was an acceptable healthcare and educational system, and a relatively stable standard of living.

Since the escalation of the conflict in 2015, nearly 4.5 million Yemenis have been displaced. In 2018, several peace efforts aimed to ease tensions and facilitate humanitarian access, such as the Stockholm Agreement. Despite these efforts, the conflict remained ongoing in 2020, though there were no major escalations and displaced people relocated to the safer parts of their surrounding governorates. The highest numbers of IDPs were located in Marib, west Taiz, west Al Hodeidah, and Lahij. In displacement camps, IDPs live in extremely difficult conditions, in shelters made of tents and plastic sheets. They are continuously exposed to rain, floods, extreme temperatures, and fires. In addition, disputes with landowners over these camps further threaten the safety of the occupants.

As of August 2024, the displacement crisis was still ongoing with around 1.5 million people remaining in 2,382 displacement sites.

## Timeline



## Program Design and Implementation

### Program Design

In January 2019, Altwasul evaluated the impact of its emergency shelter interventions for IDPs living in the camps, which included distributed tents, transitional shelters, and non-food items (NFIs). The assessment revealed that families, which averaged five to seven individuals, were living in single rooms, that their shelters required constant maintenance or replacement, and that they were exposed to extreme temperatures and the risk of fire. Additionally, as some displacement camps were unofficial, IDPs were vulnerable to the demands of landowners to vacate the land. Many camps also required water trucking due to a lack of adequate water infrastructure. It was noted that the poor sanitation service exposed women and girls to health and protection risks and contributed to the spread of disease. Children in the camps also had little to no access to education services and were often compelled to work to contribute to the family's income.

#### Key Achievement

Through the "Residential Villages Project," Altwasul effectively addressed the challenges faced by IDPs in temporary displacement camps and contributed to durable solutions for displaced people by providing long-term housing with dignified living conditions.

In response to these findings and due to prolonged displacement, Altwasul designed a residential village with integrated basic services for IDPs in collaboration with active humanitarian organizations, local authorities, host communities, and beneficiaries. The residential villages offer comprehensive services including housing, education, WASH, and healthcare in the host communities in west Taiz, west Al Hodeida, and Marib.

Each village includes housing units, a permanent water source equipped with a solar system, a sewage network, a health unit, a primary school, a mosque, and a small playground for children. Each housing unit comprises two rooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom, constructed with blocks and cement, and a yard. In addition, each unit is equipped with a small solar energy system and a water tank. The Altwasul engineering team aligned the construction costs of the units to be comparable to the cost of a transitional shelter, approximately \$3,500 - \$4,000 USD, with an expected lifespan of 10 years.

This project was conducted in five phases. During the first and second phases, the shelters' roofs were constructed using zinc. In the next phases, the roofs were upgraded using wood and concrete slabs, which are more resistant to the environmental conditions. In the later phases, each household received an NFI kit and a solar energy system.

Basic services such as schools, health units, and water were accessible to both the IDPs and host communities, with the aim of increasing host community acceptance of the villages.



### Program Implementation

In some villages, the Altwasul team connected the existing basic services to the villages. Similarly, basic services such as schools, health units, and water were accessible to both the IDPs and host communities, with the aim of increasing host community acceptance of the villages.

To protect the IDPs' right to occupy the land and to avoid disputes with local landowners, the residential villages were constructed on lands that Altwasul had acquired by in-kind donations from local traders, community leaders, and local authorities. Although Altwasul was not able to give direct ownership to beneficiary families due to government restrictions, its ownership of the land ensures that no families are secondarily displaced. In addition, Altwasul and the beneficiary families signed contracts to document the family's legal right to occupy the housing unit, providing them security of tenure.

Following the construction of the residential villages, Altwasul handed over the operation of the newly constructed health units and schools to the local authorities. Moreover, the Altwasul team ensured that qualified IDPs were hired to work in the villages' schools and health units. Altwasul also adopted an economic empowerment initiative to enhance the resilience of displaced individuals. This included distributing livelihood projects, such as sewing machines and livestock. As of August 2024, 55 households were supported; however, this initiative is still being piloted.



## Exit Strategy

After the construction of the residential villages, Altwasul's exit strategy was composed of the following:

1. Periodic visits to the residential villages were conducted to ensure beneficiaries were residing in their assigned homes. Visits were used to prevent the renting of housing units to other beneficiaries without settlement cards, to protect vulnerable residents from encroachment by influential individuals, to perform monitoring and evaluation processes, and to measure the project's impact on the lives of the displaced individuals.
2. Community leadership was promoted through the selection of a village leader from among the IDPs to address issues, manage community services, and coordinate with relevant authorities.
3. Humanitarian and livelihood interventions were designed to enhance the residential villages' resilience.
4. The newly established health units and schools in the residential villages were handed over to the local authorities.
5. It is ensured that housing units continue to go to those with the highest need. If an IDP vacates the housing unit during the displacement period or chooses to leave due to improved circumstances, they will be replaced with another displaced person in coordination with the Executive Units for IDPs in the area, based on priority needs.

Altwasul also created an exit strategy in the event that displacement ends and the displaced communities are able to return to their place of origin:

1. The residential village land was designated for the project and cannot be disposed of by any party other than Altwasul or the local authorities in the area. Therefore, if, after the crisis ends, families want to stay on the land, Altwasul will negotiate with the government for them to remain.
2. Once conditions stabilize, a community committee will be formed to assess housing units. Families living in substandard conditions, which include living in makeshift shelters or dilapidated structures, will be prioritized for resettlement based on poverty criteria and needs.

## Affected Population

As of August 2024, 12 residential villages were established, comprising 881 housing units and benefiting 6,167 individuals. Altwasul targeted the governorates with the most IDPs and constructed the villages in the Taiz, Al Hodeidah, and Marib Governorates.

Altwasul coordinated with the Executive Unit for IDPs to create community committees in the camps. These committees drafted the initial lists of beneficiaries, which were endorsed by the Executive Unit. The selection criteria used included having registered with the Executive Unit for Camp Management, having been displaced from a conflict area, currently residing in a displacement camp, families with at least five members, the head of the household not having a fixed monthly income and having no criminal record, and the family not receiving permanent housing support from another source. Priority was given to larger families, families headed by minors, older persons, or widowed or divorced women, and families with persons with disabilities.

## Partners

- Kuwaiti government funding agencies provided funding for this project.
- International Islamic Charity Organization, Rahma International, Al-Safa Humanitarian Society, Nama Charity, and Tanmia Charity provided funding for this project.
- Local governorate and district level authorities issued field visit permits for the project team and helped coordinate with stakeholders for land allocation for the villages.
- The Executive Unit for IDPs contributed to identifying IDP camps and assisted in beneficiary selection.
- Governorate-level departments for public works and transportation issued construction permits and contributed to urban planning for the project.
- The Ministry of Public Health and Population and its governorate offices issued permits for health units and supported their operation.
- The Ministry of Education and its governorate offices assisted in the running of the schools.
- The governorate-level general authority for rural infrastructure projects coordinated and issues permits for well drilling.
- Internally displaced communities were consulted on the size and design of the villages and housing units.
- The Shelter Cluster assisted in beneficiary selection.



## Lessons Learned and Recommendations



### Shelter and Settlements Assistance

- **Conduct multisectoral needs assessments:** Conducting a multisectoral needs assessment and taking into consideration the cultural norms and habits of the community at the beginning of the project was essential for effectively designing the residential villages and meeting the beneficiaries' actual needs.
- **Prioritize sustainability:** Finding sustainable alternatives for the IDP community's basic services is essential to avoid an excessive load on the host community's resources. This minimizes the risk of disputes over resources and services between host communities and IDPs. Solar energy systems are one such example.
- **Integrate durable solutions:** Building schools, health units, mosques, and sanitation infrastructure supported in establishing a stable and balanced environment that improved IDPs' psychological and social health. Additionally, ensuring livelihoods and market access for IDPs ensures they don't become reliant on assistance.
- **Engage with government and local authorities:** The government and local authorities are central to the land allocation process. Humanitarian actors must engage with them to obtain the required permission.



## Local Leadership

- **Promote mentorship:** Pairing local organizations with experienced international actors builds leadership and decision-making skills through mentorship.
- **Leverage local actor knowledge:** Local actors leading needs assessments and response planning leverages their deep knowledge of the affected communities.
- **Provide direct and flexible funding:** Advocating for more direct funding from international donors to local actors both minimizes the need for intermediaries and enables local actors to lead response efforts. Flexible funding allows local actors to adapt and scale their interventions as needed, based on real-time feedback and challenges.
- **Deepen local actor influence:** Local actors should be included in national or subnational clusters, working groups, and steering committees where strategic decisions are made. Moreover, local actors co-chairing or leading coordination platforms strengthens their influence on strategy and policy.
- **Expand local actor participation:** Increasing the participation of local actors in international conferences and events gives them a chance to share local insights, advocate for communities, and influence global policies for more inclusive humanitarian responses.



## Contact

To contact Altwasul directly, please email Anas Qasem, Chief of Partnership and International Cooperation Sector, at [anas.qa@altwasul.org](mailto:anas.qa@altwasul.org), Mohamed Farhan, Partnership and Grants Manager, at [moh.farhan@altwasul.org](mailto:moh.farhan@altwasul.org), and Tawfeeq Hussein Saleh, Grants Manager, at [tawfeeq.h@altwasul.org](mailto:tawfeeq.h@altwasul.org).