

Shelter and Settlements Sector Update

OCTOBER 2013

SECTOR OVERVIEW

USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) remains at the forefront of the humanitarian community's shelter and settlements (S&S) activities, all of which revolve around a common goal: the expeditious and appropriate provision of covered living space to adequately shelter displaced populations, while also promoting safer and healthier settlements. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2013, USAID/OFDA provided nearly \$26 million in humanitarian shelter assistance and shelter-related risk reduction activities, including nearly \$24 million for shelter interventions in 14 countries and approximately \$2 million for global and regional S&S initiatives. USAID/OFDA also continues to contribute to the international humanitarian community's broader S&S strategic framework, including participation in the Shelter and Settlements Working Group (SSWG)—an open membership group hosted by InterAction—and support of the annual *Shelter Projects* report, spearheaded jointly by the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT).

POST-DISASTER "SIX-YEARS-ON" S&S ASSESSMENT IN BANGLADESH

In 2007 and 2009, two major tropical cyclones hit Bangladesh, resulting in widespread destruction. In November 2007, Cyclone Sidr ravaged southern Bangladesh with winds close to 220 kilometers per hour (kph), affecting 8.9 million people living in 31 of the country's 64 districts. Sidr killed approximately 4,200 people and injured 55,000 others, while destroying nearly 564,000 homes and damaging 955,000 more. A year and a half later, Cyclone Aila struck Bangladesh with up to 120 kph winds, affecting approximately 3.9 million people in 11 of the same districts previously impacted by Sidr. In total, the storm killed 190 people, injured more than 7,000, and damaged or destroyed nearly 600,000 homes.



Raised, reinforced plinth shown above was a major feature of risk reduction elements incorporated into transitional shelters. (Photo by Rob Friedman, USAID/OFDA)

In the aftermath of the storms, USAID/OFDA funded partners Catholic Relief Services and Caritas to provide approximately 4,000 transitional shelters (t-shelters). During a July 2013 assessment of USAID/OFDA's response, a USAID/OFDA S&S advisor visited communities in Bangladesh's heavily affected Khulna Division, finding that all assessed shelters constructed after Cyclone Sidr remained occupied by original recipients and sustained no structural damage as a result of Cyclone Aila, while shelter recipients reportedly repaired any minor cyclone damage without external assistance. Notably, many surveyed beneficiaries gradually upgraded their shelters in the years after the cyclones by improving flooring, replacing bamboo mats in walls with corrugated iron sheets, and adding new living spaces such as kitchens and bedrooms. USAID/OFDA's assessment confirmed the utility of t-shelters as a platform for both disaster risk reduction (DRR) programs and the facilitation of a longer-term, housing recovery process.

POST-DISASTER "TEN-YEARS-ON" S&S ASSESSMENT IN GOMA, DRC

USAID/OFDA's first conceived, designed, and implemented t-shelter project followed the January 17, 2002, eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano near Goma, a city in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Lava and ashfall damaged or destroyed housing across the city and left up to 105,000 people in need of shelter.

With thousands of jobs lost and the urban and regional economy devastated, USAID/OFDA worked with other humanitarian agencies to mount a rapid response in Goma, including a program that incorporated several DRR elements to enhance self-sufficiency in disaster preparedness and strengthen resilience using t-shelters. USAID/OFDA provided 5,000 families in Goma with t-shelters within nine months of the eruption. Other humanitarian actors embraced USAID/OFDA's strategy, providing an additional 10,000 families with similar housing support.

In 2012, USAID/OFDA conducted a "ten-years-on" assessment in Goma and found that approximately 90 percent of the 5,000 t-shelters provided in 2002 had evolved into permanent housing by 2004, with nearly 100 percent of those t-shelters becoming permanent housing by 2012. The vast majority of beneficiaries had also transformed their t-shelters into permanent housing using their own funds—a substantial achievement that illustrates how transitional shelter provides opportunities for displaced populations to engage in the longer-term, housing recovery process.

USING DEBRIS MANAGEMENT PLANNING TO PROMOTE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA continues to support ongoing debris management activities in Bangladesh and Nepal, led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), respectively. In July 2013, USAID/OFDA participated in several activities leading to the first-ever draft post-disaster, debris management plan for Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital city, and provided technical assistance for IOM's debris management planning process in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu.

GLOBAL S&S LIBRARY

USAID/OFDA is working to create an S&S library in partnership with the Geneva-based Shelter Center. Current plans feature the launch of a revised website during the biannual sector forum's Shelter Meeting in late October 2013, which USAID/OFDA and Habitat for Humanity are hosting in Geneva, Switzerland. The library will serve as a clearing house for knowledge in support of humanitarian operations, complementing other information currently disseminated through several other libraries and resources such as ReliefWeb. Using custom-designed software, the library will support effective post-disaster coordination worldwide by storing, classifying, and disseminating key S&S resources in multiple languages.

TRAINING AND OUTREACH

USAID/OFDA's S&S team seeks not only to provide effective support in the wake of humanitarian emergencies, but also to disseminate best practices. In September 2012, USAID/OFDA inaugurated its one-day S&S sector training course. More recently, USAID/OFDA developed a guidance note on humanitarian S&S principles to better facilitate the conception, design, and contextual understanding of S&S activities. In addition, USAID/OFDA continues to work closely with the InterAction SSWG on the design of both a one-week and one-month training course on S&S issues. Finally, USAID/OFDA supports the annual *Shelter Projects* report prepared jointly by UNHCR, IFRC, and UN-HABITAT. (See USAID/OFDA's latest contribution to the report, summarizing the Goma S&S assessment mentioned above, [here](#).)

USAID/OFDA HUMANITARIAN S&S GRADUATE STUDENT FELLOWSHIP

USAID/OFDA awarded its first-ever graduate student fellowship in June 2013, as part of larger efforts to improve S&S sector programming, increase awareness of the sector in North America, and expand career options for S&S activities. The successful candidate, a dual-degree Masters student in architecture and city planning at the University of California, Berkeley, focused thesis work on self-recovery of shelter in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

USAID/OFDA is developing guidance on how to facilitate the transition to permanence of S&S activities, particularly in urban areas. In addition, USAID/OFDA plans to generate guidance notes on wind-, seismic-, and flood-resistant construction and settlements measures to inform the creation of safer structures and communities.

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