
USAID/OFDA/LAC Shelter and Settlements Workshop

February 25-26, 2009, San Jose, Costa Rica

Summary Report, March 12, 2009

Description: Nearly 30 representatives from the USAID/OFDA Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), non-governmental organizations (NGO implementing partners), and the Coordination Secretariat of the Office of the Presidency of Guatemala attended the two-day workshop on shelter and settlements, organized by the regional office and led by Costa Rica-based regional advisor Phil Gelman and Washington, D.C.-based USAID/OFDA Shelter, Settlements, and Mitigation Advisor Charles Setchell, who possesses 30 years of experience in shelter and settlements, primarily in Asia, and has worked with USAID/OFDA for the past 11 years. NGOs represented at the event include the American Red Cross, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), CARE, CHF International, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Habitat for Humanity Costa Rica, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Project Concern International (PCI), SHARE Guatemala, and World Vision.

Day 1, February 25, 2009

The workshop began with a group activity entitled “Creating Covered Living Space.” Participants were divided into four groups and instructed to mark out spaces on the floor each measuring 9, 5, 3.5 and 2.0 m². Setchell then led the entire workshop group to each marked space and informed them that:

- 9 m² is the average per-capita covered living space in developing countries in non-disaster conditions, based on research conducted by the World Bank;
- 5 m² per person is a U.N. Habitat indicator used, in combination with other indicators, to define “slum” living conditions;
- 3.5 m² is the “minimally acceptable” per-capita covered living space identified by Sphere Project guidelines, and current USAID/OFDA proposal guidelines; and
- 2 m² of space per person is an amount sometimes reflected in funding proposals submitted to USAID/OFDA; however, it provides an unacceptable level of humanitarian assistance to those in need. Once typical emergency relief supplies (e.g., blankets, water, food, hygiene items) are placed within this space, there’s barely space left to stand!

Conclusion: 3.5 m² per person of covered living space should be the minimum for any funding proposal submitted to USAID/OFDA (note that this is smaller than “slum” conditions, about 40% of what people enjoyed on average *before* the disaster, and acceptable only because it is temporary). 3.5 m² per person is considered a “minimally acceptable” level of humanitarian community output to promote basic health, privacy, and human dignity.

Session 1.1

Global Settlement Trends

Shelter and settlements are the “where” of USAID/OFDA’s mandate – the geographic platform for providing humanitarian assistance. Where settlements are located, how rapidly they grow, how strong their economies are, and how they are managed, especially in times of crisis, will largely determine whether they become the sites of future disasters.

Trends in settlements suggest we should pay attention. Almost one-sixth of the world’s population currently lives in urban slums, with limited water, sanitation, security, and other public services. This number is projected to increase to one in every four people by the year 2030. More than 1 billion people do not have access to potable water. These problems will likely become exacerbated by global warming and environmental degradation, conflict and instability, natural disasters, terrorism, and urbanization.

Global population is expected to increase from 6 billion to 8 billion people or more in the next 20 years. By 2030, roughly 60% of the global population will be urban. The doubling of urban populations in the coming years will lead to a three-fold increase in urban land area, and much of this expansion will be located in risk-prone areas (e.g., vulnerable coastlines where rising sea levels may have wide-scale impacts).

Are tomorrow's disasters being incorporated into today's development processes? Trends suggest that this is the case. Development processes affect humanitarian work. Should humanitarians be changing development policies? Yes! Humanitarian agencies must do more to promote interventions; their voices are not loud enough.

Session 1.2

A Focus on Framing: A Review of Materials and Practice

A good shelter begins with a good frame. In addition to creating covered living space, a well designed frame offers protection and disaster risk reduction (DRR). We want to focus on building back better, and framing is one of the ways to accomplish this. Frames can be made of any number of materials, e.g. metal, wood, bamboo, irrigation pipe, both salvaged and new (hopefully locally available). Frame considerations should be included in any proposal for USAID/OFDA funding. The implementing partner needn't provide it, but must account for it. This is particularly the case when plastic sheeting is provided as part of larger non-food item (NFI) distributions.

ADRA/Bolivia presentation: Günther Wallauer shared his organization's positive experience using prefabricated metal frames covered with plastic for temporary shelters in Bolivia since 2000. The metallic structure is reusable, and easier to transport and mount than the wooden frames formerly used. Metal frames are cost-effective because they are reused. (The recovery rate is 98%.)

SHARE Guatemala presentation: Tobin Nelson shared his organization's experience providing temporary shelters following Hurricane Stan in late 2005. A new shelter was designed using a PVC frame as wood was in short supply. PVC supplier AMANCO provided technical assistance to design the shelter and also matched employee donations to provide an additional 23 shelters on top of SHARE's 60. This experience demonstrates the potential for effective private sector support to emergency response efforts.

Session 1.3

Local Materials and Markets: Salvaging, DRR, and Livelihoods.

Shelters should be designed and built with local markets in mind: use local materials where possible and appropriate! People will be familiar with the material and know how to use it. Think about ways to create a shelter-livelihood link. USAID/OFDA is bombarded with offers for high-tech machines for brick production, but these are expensive, need costly maintenance and repairs, and break the link between shelter and labor-intensive brick-making. It is better to hire people who need work because their livelihoods were destroyed by the disaster.

Combining locally acquired and salvaged materials is also good. Salvaged/recycled materials help lower costs and reduce waste. Also, there is a psychological benefit for affected inhabitants to have familiar pieces, such as a window or door frame, incorporated into their temporary shelter. Debris fields are fields of opportunity to salvage and supplement what you may have to purchase on the local market, or even import, to build shelters. Rubble is also a major opportunity for livelihood generation. Clearing away the rubble creates space for shelter and other activities, and permits the materials to be salvaged.

Rubble can be an asset. But if not dealt with properly, rubble can become a hazard (e.g., used as unconsolidated fill for construction sites in earthquake-prone areas).

View shelter as both a survival (living/social) and production (economic) platform. The space is often used for income-generating activities, not just eating and sleeping. Also, look at shelter production and livelihood generation through a DRR lens. For example, why not promote the fabrication of wind and earthquake-resistant nails? It's a good livelihood idea which can also help avert loss.

CARE International presentation: Lizzie Babister shared her organization's experience with rubble removal in the context of a temporary shelter project in Peru. She presented a series of key issues to account for in planning rubble removal activities: Where will all of the trucks and earth-movers come from? Who will pay for them? How much fuel needs to be procured? How many drivers and rubble movers are needed? How many

people and tools are needed to place the rubble in the pick-up areas? How can we account for fuel management and machinery maintenance, and avoid corruption? Where will the rubble pick-up areas be located? Where is the best place to dispose of the rubble with minimal environmental impact? How can we ensure good communications and monitoring?

CHF International presentation: Eddie Argenal shared his organization's experience in Peru using local construction materials and cash-for-work programs to create transitional shelters. A bamboo structure was covered with USAID/OFDA plastic sheeting and then traditional woven wood mats were placed over the plastic; this helped insulate the shelter and extend the life of the plastic by protecting it from the sun.

World Vision Nicaragua presentation: Rod Imer shared his organization's experience using lumber from trees felled by a hurricane to build 500 transitional shelters and latrines in the remote north Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. The project is a wonderful example of using local materials; however, it was not without challenges. Government restrictions limited access to fallen trees to certain groups, local governments were ill prepared to deal with the bureaucracy involved, and transporting the timber was logistically challenging. World Vision ended up collaborating with local partners who had permits to use the fallen timber and also access to portable sawmills.

Session 1.4

Host Family and Community Support

Hosting can be referred to as "stealth shelter" – it is an often-overlooked option. Two basic forms exist: Socially defined (displaced families are hosted by family, friends, neighbors, etc.), and economically defined (displaced families are hosted for a fee, often in the form of rent, by strangers and others).

Arguments exist both in favor and against supporting hosting as a shelter strategy. USAID/OFDA's position is that a socially defined hosting arrangement can be very useful, has a positive cost-benefit relationship, and often transitions into a permanent shelter arrangement.

How is assistance provided? Based on field assessments, a notional package of assistance is identified and priced (e.g., minor physical upgrades, WASH improvements, NFI supplies, fuel, food, etc.).

If possible, repairs or upgrading existing unused spaces (e.g., old sheds, barns, garages, etc.) are identified and undertaken. Think of hosting as not just a family-based activity, but also a community-based activity, where improvements to water service, schools, or health posts can be made to reduce any impacts associated with the presence of large numbers of hosted families.

CHF/Georgia presentation: Eddie Argenal shared his organization's experience providing USAID/OFDA-funded support to host families during the 2008 complex emergency in Georgia. Project provided NFI packages to host families (included choice of firewood, crop seed/animal feed, bed and bedding, space heater, etc.) and cash grants to returnees to repair conflict-damaged homes.

Session 1.5

Benefits and Costs of Tents, Pre-fabs, and Camps

Camps should not be a default response, and should be considered only if no other shelter resources exist (which is rarely the case). Camps are labor intensive and very expensive to build and operate. Camps frequently have better facilities than neighboring towns, and thus draw people seeking these facilities and/or create resentment as those not affected by the disaster complain about the advantages being given the affected population. Tents and camps are often inseparable. Tents are expensive, hard to winterize, in general not large enough, and don't perform well as shelter (see attached document, "Thinking Outside the Tent on Tents: Some Points to Consider").

Pre-fabricated structures (pre-fabs) are not much better. Drawbacks include their high cost, inflexibility, transporting and importing/customs issues, and resultant flight of capital from the affected country. It represents a loss to the affected country as there are minimal economic (labor) opportunities for the local market. Provision of pre-fabs can also spark resentments among beneficiaries (those who get pre-fabs and those who don't) since typically there are not enough pre-fabs to go around. If deployed at all, pre-fabs might be used for shared public activities (e.g., community centers, schools, health clinics, etc.) but not for private use (see attached one-pager, "Pre-fab' Shelter: Some Points to Consider").

Session 1.6

Benefits and Costs of Plastic Sheeting

Upsides of plastic sheeting: it is flexible (can be used in a variety of ways), durable (can be used for up to two years), cost-effective (when used judiciously), and user-friendly (no special skills required).

Downsides: Needs framing (not very useful by itself), durable (perceived by some as long-lasting, so no further shelter assistance provided), viewed as free (no incentive for NGOs and others to use efficiently), not user-friendly (poor insulator, performs poorly in hot/cold weather), and not metric (difficult for logistics, handling, use in a metric world). On this latter point, USAID/OFDA hopes to go metric soon!

Local material options can be much less expensive than flying in plastic. For example, in Burma, plastic sheeting alone cost \$70 per shelter, but you could build an entire Sphere-compliant shelter with local materials for only \$50, and if you used salvaged materials the cost decreased to \$25.

USAID/OFDA plastic sheeting is best used as a *supplement* to other materials (see attached document: "Provisional Basic/Basic Guidance on Use of Plastic Sheeting as Part of NFI Distributions").

The Web site www.plastic_sheeting.org has plastic sheeting guidelines in English and Spanish.

Day 2, February 26, 2009

Elements of a good USAID/OFDA shelter proposal

Shelter provided must be adequate, habitable, safe, private, and secure. "Context" is probably the biggest word in shelter provision. Did you look at the local market; is it able to provide the materials and supplies needed? How can your project help revive the local economy? How can you incorporate disaster risk reduction? Build back better? Is it a short-term proposition, or is there an opportunity to transition into a more permanent solution? (See attached documents "Basic Elements of a Good Shelter Proposal" and "Guidelines for Unsolicited Proposals and Reporting".)

Coordination Secretariat of the Office of the Presidency of Guatemala presentation: Vanessa Ligorria shared her office's experience in taking charge of national efforts to design a temporary shelter strategy prior to a crisis. She explained the process of integrating the efforts of various government agencies, a university, and NGOs to develop a generally accepted, understood approach to post-disaster temporary shelter. The presentation demonstrated the efficacy of taking on such a task in "peacetime" to ensure an effective response.

Session 2.2

Incorporating DRR into S&S Activities

DRR is part of the USAID/OFDA mandate (save lives, reduce suffering, and *reduce the social and economic impact of disasters*). When do we do DRR? Before, during, and after disasters (all the time). How do we do DRR? By incorporating DRR thinking into relief projects; developing stand-alone DRR projects; and developing DRR programs (project packages). We need to be cognizant that DRR is a natural complement to shelter activities, and when included it really improves the quality of outcomes.

Participants reviewed five case studies exhibiting varying degrees of DRR incorporated into S&S projects, including:

- 1-) Java after the 2006 earthquake, which involved building low-cost earthquake-resistant transitional shelters with associated hands-on training in seismic-resistant construction and community DRR education;
- 2-) Afghanistan, which involved inserting DRR into new building methods using locally available materials to reduce seismic vulnerability;
- 3-) Goma following the volcanic eruption of 2002, which involved a 5,000 household transitional shelter project and associated two-year community-based seismic and volcanic hazard mitigation program that included new monitoring stations, an early warning system, school education programs, and evacuation plans;
- 4-) Bamako, Mali, which involved a flood mitigation project that incorporated livelihood generation through trash collection and disposal, environmental management, public health, improved drainage, community gardening projects fortified by composting projects, and other innovative solutions; and
- 5-) Darfur, where fuel-efficient stoves were designed to reduce the vulnerability of women and children as they collect firewood, and had the unintended DRR impact of reducing the risk of fire in camps because they enclose the flames.

Session 2.3

Beyond Shelter: Developing a Settlements Strategy

A good settlements program is integrated and multi-sectoral. The main features of a good settlements strategy include being shelter-led; multi-sectoral, reflecting the multi-faceted character of context; opportunistic with regard to livelihood promotion and DRR; cognizant of gender, environment, local organizations, and social relations; transitional, by linking relief and developmental concerns; and accountable to local governing structures (see attached document, “The USAID/OFDA Approach to Shelter and Settlement Activities”).

Participants reviewed three case studies: 1-) the Java earthquake response, which integrated transitional shelter, WASH, livelihoods, DRR and protection; 2-) the Kabul Area Shelter and Settlements (KASS) project, featuring the building of seismic-resistant transitional shelters, refurbishing unused living spaces, supporting social hosting, and related activities (e.g., WASH, training in seismic risk reduction) informed by the Kabul Municipality; and 3-) the Kabul KASS-2 project, building on lessons learned by placing greater emphasis on provision of services and livelihood generation, and providing more technical assistance to the local government for “urban recovery management” using resources from development institutions, universities and other heretofore untapped resources.

Session 2.4

Making S&S Strategies Work

Think broadly: Looking beyond the rubble will yield new resources, new options, and new opportunities. Think in terms of a “Shelter Options Survey” (SOS). This includes assessment of land, labor, and materials markets in affected settlements. Use mapping to dispel myths and show graphically what’s going on. How much of the land is developed/vacant/underutilized? How can we incorporate it? How many houses are not damaged and represent hosting possibilities?

Even though they are humanitarian, S&S strategies can have the effect of being developmental. Recognize that engagement with affected populations might be the first time they’ve participated in something that might be perceived as developmental activity, and this humanitarian activity may not be followed by actual development assistance. These perceptions and effects can present new opportunities and challenges.

Session 2.5

Linking S&S Strategies to Reconstruction and Development

Shelter is the core of humanitarian work. Given the developmental nature of S&S activities, focus should shift from relief and reconstruction “phases” to the “process” of transition that links relief and reconstruction, with donor and other institutional support shifting accordingly. Facilitating this will require new alliances within the humanitarian community, and between the humanitarian community and the development community, recognizing that concerns are shared, and not in competition. Humanitarians must influence development policy – the more we can do that, and the greater influence we can exert at higher levels, the better off vulnerable people will be. Humanitarian action is inherently developmental. Building on that and drawing in understanding and resources from the development side is something we can do better.

DRR is probably the best means for engaging the development agencies, as this is the most common ground we have. Find the common objectives of humanitarian actors and development actors: Jointly identifying “Harm’s Way” in at-risk, disaster- and crisis-prone settlements; creating mechanisms and incentives to reduce or prevent occupancy of these areas; reducing risk for those unable to move out of “Harm’s Way”; and responding to those affected by disasters in a creative, appropriate and cost-effective manner that reduces risk over time.

Final Session

Discussion, Q&A, and Wrap-Up

Settlements are growing fast, especially in the cities of developing countries. Humanitarians would be wise to pay attention to this trend. Settlements are the “where” of the USAID/OFDA mandate, and the geographic platform for humanitarian assistance. Some key workshop messages:

1. It’s NEVER too early to start focusing on shelter!
2. Provide shelter based on a context model of intervention, and not a deployment model.
3. Plastic sheeting is not free, and is most useful as a supplement to other materials.
4. Market analysis includes damage profiles (don’t forget the “no damage” category) and “SOS.”

5. Hosting (“stealth shelter”) can and does work in many settlements.
6. The “S&S” approach offers the humanitarian community with perhaps the best means of linking shelter, DRR, health, livelihoods, and protection issues.
7. Shelter provision can jump-start the incremental process of housing development, so facilitate the process and look for “linked” opportunities while doing so.
8. Planning the “where” of humanitarian activity – settlements – is critically important. The recovery of settlements is dependent, in large part, upon economic regeneration, which means concentrating activity in space, which is best done with the future in mind.