B.1   Afghanistan - 2002 - Returns

Case study: Shelter construction

Project type:
Package of shelter construction materials
Self-build shelters
Cash grants
Technical support

Disaster:
Afghanistan repatriation, 2002-2008

No. of people displaced:
5 million or more returnees since 2002

Project target population:
1.2 million beneficiaries to date
Average family size of six people
Shelter provided for an estimated 25% of returning population

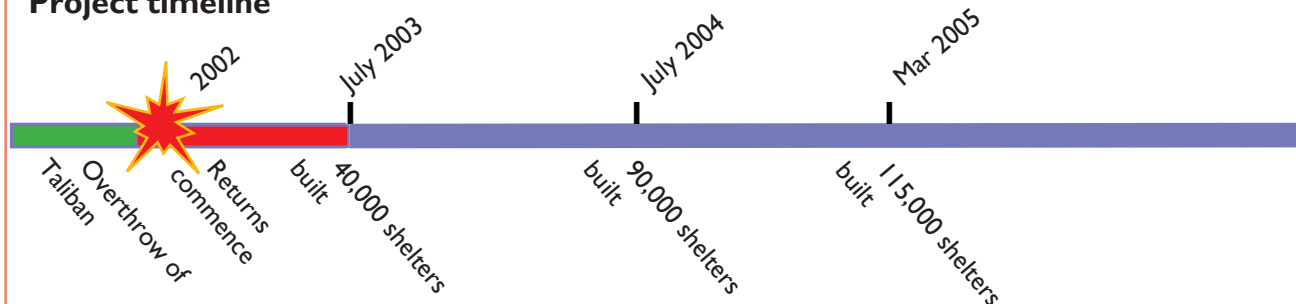**Occupancy rate on handover:**
Unknown

Shelter size
Maintaining a 21m^2 minimum net floor area was strongly recommended. The shelter consisted of two rooms, one corridor and an external latrine. The shelter plan could modified if it was within the allocated budget and if structural integrity was not compromised.
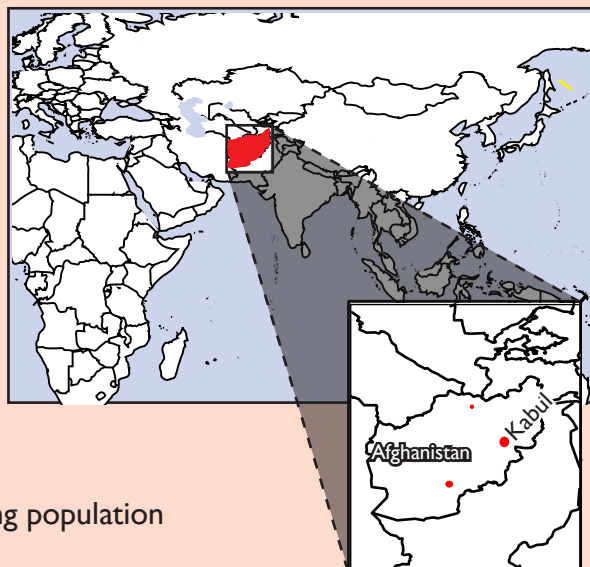
Summary

A large-scale, self-build shelter programme implemented through partner organisations to help meet the needs of the 5 million people returning to Afghanistan since 2002, following conflict since 1979. Different shelter models were adopted around the country depending on local construction technology. This programme provided materials, basic technical guidance and cash for the most vulnerable people. It was integrated with monitoring and support for return. Escalating steel prices severely affected the programme, leaving it US$ 5 million under budget for 2008.

Project timeline

2002 — Overthrow of Taliban / Returns commence
July 2003 — 40,000 shelters built
July 2004 — 90,000 shelters built
Mar 2005 — 115,000 shelters built

Strengths and weaknesses

X Very large-scale programmes are possible using partner organisations as implementers.

X Efforts were made to encourage equitable and gender-sensitive participation in beneficiary selection.

W Building sites must be serviced. On some new build sites, site selection and provision of water and infrastructure were poor.

W The non-anticipated rise in international materials prices severely effected the programmes.

W Inequality between the responses of different organisations has led to some of the cheaper shelters being demolished by their owners.

W There were delays in shelter provision for the landless.

Urban housing in Kabul

Project background

Since 2002, there have been over 5 million returnees to Afghanistan, displaced over 20 years of conflict. The largest returns are from Pakistan and Iran. Three million refugees remain in host countries and it is estimated that 1 million more will return by 2013.

Those returning through official schemes receive a 'one-off' grant of US$ 100.

Selection of beneficiaries

Traditionally, there is serious under-representation of women in public decision-making in Afghanistan and significant control is in the hands of a few non-elected individuals. To remedy this, beneficiary committees were formed in each project area. Each committee consisted of the lead and implementing organisation, a local government representative and members of the population for whom the project was targeted.

Land issues

The project could only provide shelter materials to those who had land to build on. Returnees with no land had apply to the Government of Afghanistan's managed land allocation scheme. However, this scheme has proven slow to operate in the past. As of mid-2008, approximately 500,000 returnees have registered for land and very few of them are now living on registered land.

It was originally anticipated that 55 land allocation sites would be provided through the support of the Ministry of Refugees and Returnees. This number was reduced to thirteen, partly due to the unsuitability of selected sites.

One of the challenges with building on new sites has been to coordinate with other organisations to provide services on previously uninhabited sites. In some cases this has not happened and has led to shelters being unusable.

Technical solutions

Shelter programmes in Afghanistan started as a distribution of tents and household items. The main focus gradually turned to shelters.

This programme began building mud-block shelters with wooden roofs, windows and doors. Due to supply and sustainability issues, steel was used to replace the timber.

'There are strong indications that more women are now participating in programme decision-making'.

As the programme worked across the entire country of Afghanistan, there were significant variations in climate, cultural values, construction materials, capacity of implementing partners and community support mechanisms. This led to the development of standard formats for technical specifications, data collection, reporting, feedback and analysis.

The following key regional variations of shelter design were adopted:

• Dome-type ceiling without beams in west and north Afghanistan;

• Flat roof with beams in central, east, south-east and south Afghanistan;

• Smaller windows in the Central Highlands area than in other areas. Relatively wider windows can also be found in the central region.

Implementation

The shelter programme is based on a four-stage process:

Stage I: Planning - Allocation of shelter per region/province/district, budgeting, identification of implementing partners, establishment of materials supply contracts.

Stage II: Contracting – Establishing contracts with implementing partners.

Stage III: Assessment – Local needs assessment and beneficiary selection.

Stage IV: Implementation.

• Work started on site and foundation completed (eight weeks).

• Walls erected, lintels installed (four weeks).

• Shelter completed (four weeks).

• Handover (liquidation period, four weeks).

Logistics and materials

In the first years of this programme, the timber was sourced from South Africa and Pakistan. Supply challenges and major sustainability issues with the sourcing of timber have led to revised designs for 2007 onwards that will use steel in place of timber.

Completed shelters

Steel trusses

During 2007 and 2008, rising costs of steel led to cost escalations from US$ 900 per shelter to in excess of US$ 1500 per shelter. This caused serious budget shortages and the materials used consequently needed to be reassessed.

Completed shelter

Internal view