

B.2 Bangladesh - 2007 - Cyclone Sidr

Overview

Summary

Cyclone Sidr hit the south-western coast of Bangladesh during the evening of November 15th 2007. Cyclone Sidr destroyed over 450,000 houses across 30 districts, through wind damage, flooding and tidal surge. More than 50 percent of households in all of the six worst affected districts were either damaged or destroyed.

Most families built some form of shelter after four weeks with the notable exception of the most vulnerable members of the community. Families living outside the cyclone barriers had the greatest difficulties.

More than 160 local and international organisations were involved in the shelter response. Programmes included distribution of basic shelter items, shelter construction and training in safer construction.



Background

Bangladesh is one of the world's poorest and most densely populated countries. Poverty often compels families to settle in areas that are particularly disaster prone, such as coastal areas and lands newly emerged from riverbeds.

Most of the delta of South Bangladesh is cultivated wetlands. Many rivers cross the area, changing constantly and creating land insecurity. Some of the population lives in improvised or moveable shelters, mostly on land provided by the government on informally occupied land.

Since independence in 1971, the country had endured almost 200 disaster events – cyclones, storm surges, floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, droughts and other calamities – causing more than 500,000 deaths and leaving a serious impact on quality of life, livelihoods and the economy.

For simple structures, owners of the house are usually capable of doing the construction work themselves. Heavy manual labour or other assistance is required, they will solicit the help of a daily labourers, called 'krishan'. If woodwork is involved, they will hire professional carpenters.

Coping mechanisms

Four weeks after Cyclone Sidr passed, most affected people had found themselves some kind of temporary shelter.

People, whose houses were completely destroyed, built temporary shelter using scrap material that they could find. The living conditions were poor and did not provide enough shelter against rain or cold. Other people found refuge in relatives' houses.

For those, whose house was damaged, they repaired their house as much as possible, re-using the materials of their previous house. In some cases they used some new materials. The stability and general living quality of these houses was generally lower than it had been before the cyclone.

In all cases people were more vulnerable for future winds, floods or tidal surges than they had been before the cyclone. Many houses needed to be replaced urgently, or upgraded before the start of the next cyclone season.

Many affected families had expressed a clear will to continue on the land where they were previously living, even if the land was at a risk of disappearing.

The response

In the response, several approaches were made to support families to find shelter:

- general distribution of blankets and household items
- distribution of emergency shelter covering items such as tarpaulins, and tents
- shelter assistance packages including corrugated iron and tool kits
- transitional shelter programs. to construct shelters or core houses.
- Shelter training programs to improve construction quality and awareness of hazards to housing.

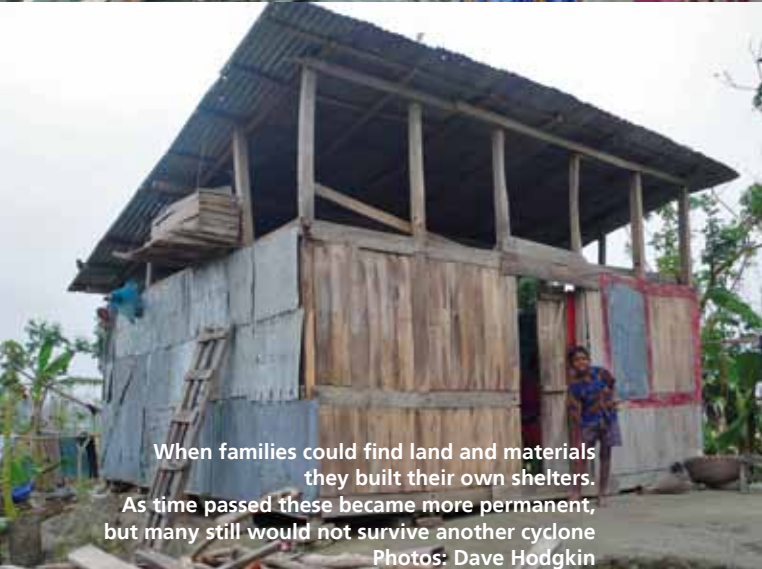
There were also multiple programmes distributing cash and some organisations advocating for improved access to safe land for the most vulnerable families.



Emergency shelter built by a cyclone affected family
Photo: Dave Hodgkin



Families rapidly built emergency shelters, using materials that they could recover, that they could buy or that they received. With time many were able to improve their shelters, but the underlying vulnerability to flooding and cyclones remained
Photos: Dave Hodgkin



When families could find land and materials they built their own shelters. As time passed these became more permanent, but many still would not survive another cyclone
Photos: Dave Hodgkin