

A.1 Afghanistan - 2009 - Conflict returnees

Update:

Country:
Afghanistan

Disaster:
Afghanistan returns to Sozma Qala camp

Returns date:
August 2009

Number of people displaced:
2002 - 2010 - over 5 million people returned to Afghanistan

Project target population:
379 families 2009
320 families 2011

Occupancy rate on handover:
94%

Shelter size:
Covered area 38.7m²



Project timeline



Project description

An emergency team rapidly winterised a temporary transit camp. The site was for 379 families of refugees returning after 23 years. Two years later 320 families remained at the site with dwindling funding for external support. To improve the existing tents, weather mitigating tent structures (WMTS) were built from bamboo and plastic sheeting. They lasted for more than two years - longer than expected.

Strengths and weaknesses

- ✓ The shelter design and fabrication proved to be more durable than expected.
- ✗ During this extended period of displacement, increases in family size further complicated the inevitable land disputes upon their return. This was

- hard to factor into planning for support packages.
- Although the camp was established as a short term fix, it may well become a permanent settlement. Initial land allocations and site layout will therefore have a long term impact upon the families at the site.



A Weather Mitigating Tent Structure. Left: in 2009. Right: two years later. Photos: Richard Hamilton and Shaun Scales



Sozma Qala transit camp after winterisation in 2009.
Photo: Shaun Scales

Background - 2009

(See Shelter Projects 2009 for the original case study.)

The Sozma Qala Transit Camp in the Sar i Pul district of Afghanistan was established in late 2009 to accommodate 379 families returning to their area of origin after the settlement in Iran that had been their home for the previous 23 years was closed by Iranian authorities.

Local authorities had initially approved the development of the temporary transit facility to house the families whilst long abandoned houses and infrastructure were rebuilt and issues over land ownership were resolved.

However during the 2 decades of displacement, family numbers had grown significantly, and their original land was no longer sufficient to accommodate all of the returnees.

Update: site issues - 2010

Of the 379 families who moved to the temporary site, 320 remained two years later.

Representatives of the returnee families then began a long process to try and be granted the area on which the site had been developed. This was opposed by local communities who had remained in the area during the previous decades of conflict. To increase the pressure on the local government many families with access to their original plots refused assistance to rebuild their original homes in a show of solidarity with their community members and extended families.

As time has passed and the land issue has remained unresolved many of those families with their

own land have returned to these plots and reconstructed their homes whilst the remaining families have remained on the Sozma Qala site.

As of 2011, it was planned that 150 families would return to their place of origin, a village a few kilometres away, and would be supported to build their own houses.

Of the families who have left the site:

- 34 families have received a winterised mitigating tent structure (known as WMTS) at their place of origin. They have then rebuilt their own homes.
- 25 families have moved to a plot of land (owned by one of them) at the bottom of the camp and have built permanent houses.

Two years later, the site has a mosque on the opposite side of the main road, and a school is being built in the camp. It also had three wells. Six camp residents were paid and armed as Afghan Local Police.

It is highly likely that a number of families will remain at the site and it will become a small village in the future.

Technical solutions 2009

The original transit camp facilities were built to provide temporary support and were not intended for winter occupancy. Tents were provided as family shelters and a basic water delivery system had been developed.

As winter approached the tented site was winterised through the provision of bamboo framed plastic sheet structures over the tents. Drainage, gravel roads and

insulated WASH facilities were also provided at the site.

Technical solutions 2011

The original weather mitigating tent structures have lasted well beyond their initially planned life span and will remain standing for a fair amount of time to come.

In some cases the shelters were upgraded with mud blocks and new sheeting by the remaining families. At this site, plastic sheeting lasted a maximum of 24 months. As a result, the plastic sheeting distributed was used to patch up the shelters.

The design of the weather mitigating tent structures has been adopted, and many were built two years later for conflict IDPs from Sayad district in and around Sar i Pul district centre. The design was also adapted for northern Pakistan in response to the 2009 IDP crisis.

The two remaining agencies who continue to work in the camp have provided limited support of heating fuel (350kg coal per family), blankets (3 per household) and other non-food items.

The latrines and washing areas fell apart early in 2011 as did the garbage collection process.

The design of the weather mitigating tent structures used in this project was informed by shelters built following the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan.



Views of Sozma Qula transit camp in 2011, two years after it was established. Although intended as a temporary transit site, the majority of the families remained on the site. Photos: Richard Hamilton, Jake Zarins