

A.1 Afghanistan – 2012 – Conflict Returns

Case Study: **Keywords:** Returns, Urban neighbourhoods, Construction materials, Core housing construction, Cash / vouchers, Infrastructure, Training.

Country:

Afghanistan

Project location:

Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad

Disaster:

Conflict returns

Date:

2002 onwards

Number of houses damaged:

More than 130,000 houses in project areas (within Kabul)

Number of people returned:

Over 5 million people since 2002
150,000 families in Kabul

Project target population:

Pilot 295 households
(Expanded to 2,075 households)

Project outputs:

295 shelters with hygiene activities

Shelter size:

One-room shelter: average 18m²
Two-room shelter: average 30m²

Materials cost per household:

Two-room shelter US\$ 1,700
(household contributes US\$ 500)
One room shelter US\$ 800
(household contributes US\$ 200)

Project cost per household:

Two-room shelter, including indirect cost US\$ 2,286



Project timeline



Project description

This project addressed the poor living conditions of recent refugee-returnees, IDPs and host families through the construction of 295 semi-permanent shelters with household latrines and hygiene promotion. Cash grants gave beneficiaries an active role in the project and allowed the organisation's staff to spend more time with the community rather than managing contractors. The pilot phase of the project was successful and was scaled up to target a further 2,075 households.

Strengths and weaknesses

- ✓ The beneficiaries took control of the construction process, and adapted the design of the shelters according to their own needs.
- ✓ Groups of five beneficiary households worked together to manage the construction process, promoting community cohesion.
- ✓ Freed from construction management tasks, field teams focused on discussing specific DRR measures with each household.
- ✓ The cash-grant project resulted in three times the number of shelters being built compared to the previous year's direct-procurement method.
- ✗ A gender balance amongst beneficiaries was not achieved, despite using a vulnerability list.

- ✗ It was challenging to identify the most vulnerable families. The urban context made this more difficult.
- ✗ The project did not address wider community planning issues of community sanitation and drainage, or community-level disaster risk reduction (DRR).
- ✗ It was not anticipated that some construction techniques, which returnees had brought back, were not earthquake-resistant, leading to weaker buildings.
 - There is ongoing discussion about whether smaller, single-room core shelters provide enough space.
 - Allowing households control over design required greater technical support from the organisation.
 - Separating chronic needs from returnees needs in urban Kabul was challenging.



Groups of five households were provided phased cash payments to allow them to build a one- or two-room shelters with sanitation facilities. People were given flexibility to build what they needed
Photo: Left: Jim Kennedy, Right: Jake Zarins

Before the conflict

In the 1970s the population of Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, was 500,000. Despite the fact that a range of different ethnic groups lived together in relative peace, some groups were discriminated against, with differing access to resources, property and services. As a result, the Hazara minority were living on the outskirts of the city whilst Pushtoon and Tajik groups occupied more central areas.

The 1978 revolution was followed by civil war and Soviet invasion. This led to a significant growth in Kabul's population as many people were displaced from rural to urban areas. The city's Hazara population increased tenfold, establishing new settlements in the western part of the city.

The collapse of Afghanistan's communist regime in 1992 led to an intensification of conflict, killing tens of thousands of people in just four years. During this period many city residents (mainly Hazaras) had fled to Pakistan, Iran and other parts of Afghanistan.

During this period all the houses in western Kabul were destroyed.

Conflict returnees

Since 2002 and the fall of the Taliban regime, over five million people have returned to Afghanistan.

Most of the returnees found that their own houses had been totally destroyed and rented shelter or stayed with host families. Many had land that they could use to

build shelter, but many households lacked the labour and materials.

By the end of 2011, more than 200,000 shelters had been provided for returning refugees and Internally displaced people (IDPs) by various different organisations under one national programme. However, there remained a national gap of 50,000 shelters.

The government set a target of the end of 2010 for the complete rehabilitation and integration of all displaced people. Two years later housing and landlessness remained significant obstacles.

The lack of available shelter or land in Afghanistan is the primary reason for many refugees remaining in Pakistan and Iran. The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) launched a land allocation scheme at the end of 2005 to deal with this issue. The scheme has so far provided 42,000 families with temporary land ownership deeds.

Selection of beneficiaries

In 2011, districts 13 and 16 in the western part of Kabul were identified as the neediest areas of urban Kabul for shelter assistance.

The organisation worked with beneficiary selection committees established in each community. Each committee consisted of two staff from the organisation (one male and one female), a representative from the government, and the 'Gozar's Malik' (religious leader).

Beneficiary selection forms and the guidelines and criteria for filling them in were explained during workshops with benefi-

ciary selection committees. Land ownership documents were checked by the Malik, who were able to resolve local and non-written issues surrounding tenure.

The pilot phase targeted 295 households, prioritising recent returnees from Pakistan and Iran. These were followed by IDPs, and finally, host communities. In addition to these main target groups, the organisation prioritized according to primarily landless, and then land-owning returnees who had been displaced or returned since 2008.

The final section was based on the following criteria:

- female headed households
- disabled headed households
- child headed households
- elderly headed of households
- victims of Gender Based Violence (GBV)
- large families
- very low income families with no regular income.

The most vulnerable families were given additional financial and technical assistance.

"The Community Driven Method (CDP) allowed me to purchase the material for my shelter according to my own choice. The design of my shelter unit was finalised in consultation with my family members."

Abdullah - Shelter beneficiary

Implementation

The organisation had been building shelters in Afghanistan for a number of years, but had previously directly provided construction materials. This was the first time that a cash-based, owner-driven approach had been attempted by the organisation in Afghanistan. The pilot project was implemented in 2011.

After signing a memorandum of understanding with the provincial authorities, the selection of beneficiaries began.

The project established beneficiary groups of 4 to 5 members to create community networks that would support vulnerable beneficiaries (especially women and disabled people). The whole group would not receive their grant instalments if one of the group members had not reached the agreed stage of construction. This condition forced the group members to help each other and work together.

Grants were paid out in hard currency (cash in envelopes) in four instalments. The cash was to be used for purchasing shelter materials. Mobile phone banking options were investigated but rejected as being too complicated.

In the original pilot project in Kabul, 102 out of 295 families opted to construct a single room shelter. This was mainly because the shelter plots were not large enough for the two-room shelters. As the shelters were constructed by the affected households, the dimensions of each shelter varied.

Technical assistance

During the shelter construction, households received support from the project technical staff. This included advice on the plot layout, ground clearing and foundation digging, stone masonry, brick masonry, seismic risk reduction measures and roofing design.

Handover

The houses were handed over to the households when they were completed and well dried. However some of the neediest people, who

had urgent sheltering needs and who could not afford rent, did not wait until the handover to move into their new shelters.

Technical issues

Key to the success of the project, the returnee population had the skills to build their own houses. Some people had learnt these in the construction industry in Iran.

Instead of providing fixed designs, the project provided a generic bill of quantity and technical advice to individual households to address disaster risks. This included advice on proper jointing for stone and brick masonry, the proper placement of lintels and roofing beams, and proper roof drainage.

The training provided by the field teams was accompanied by illustrated construction drawings.

The decision to give homeowners flexibility in what they could build was based on learnings from previous projects where a single, standard shelter design was issued. Plot sizes in Kabul vary greatly and flexible design allowed households to adapt constructions to the space available.

Some families piled sandbags around the foundations as a preventative measure to prevent erosion in case of flooding.

DRR components

Since Kabul has earthquake risks, timber braces were provided to all households to be used at each corner of each shelter. Families were also provided with technical training on disaster risk reduction.

As the cash-based approach allowed team members to spend more time with households, they were able to better explain seismic mitigation measures compared to previous projects.

Many people were interested in more modern materials and construction methods but were



Households were expected to make contributions of money and labour to the construction of their shelter.

Photo: Jim Kennedy

unaware of the greater seismic risks that such materials carry. Encouraging families to use more traditional materials and methods was challenging.

Logistics

In previous projects the counter programme had directly managed procurement and logistics, and this had led to many challenges. In contrast, in the community-driven approach, only timber for bracing, tool kits and hygiene kits were procured by the project and delivered to the beneficiaries.

The rest of the materials such as lintels, roofing materials, doors, windows and latrine slabs were procured by the households themselves. Households made a personal contribution of around one third of the costs of construction and materials.

Project follow up

The pilot project team was made up of six people with mixed skills, including engineers, community mobilisers and people with data-collection experience. In previous years this team had built 100 shelters per year using the direct procurement method. The cash-based approach nearly tripled this figure.

The success of the pilot project led to the implementation of the cash-based approach in other parts of Afghanistan and by the end of 2012, 60 per cent of the planned 2,075 shelters had been built in Kabul, Jalalabad and Herat.