

A.2 Burkina Faso – 2012 – Conflict

Case Study: **Keywords:** Planned and managed camps, Construction materials, Emergency shelter, Transitional shelter / T-shelter, vouchers, Site planning.

Country:

Burkina Faso

Project location:

Férério Refugee Camp, Oudalan Province

Conflict:

Malian Refugee Crisis

Conflict date:

March 2012

Number of people displaced:

July 2012 (increased later in 2012):

IDPs in Mali: 150,000

Refugees - Burkina Faso: 100,000

Project target population:

Férério Refugee Camp:

3,000 households May 2012

4,000 households August 2012

Project outputs:

1,000 shelters

Occupancy rate on handover:

100 per cent

Shelter size:

21 m²

Materials cost per shelter:

US\$ 240

Project cost per shelter:

Unknown



Project timeline



Project description

This project provided temporary shelters for nomadic Tuareg refugees displaced from northern Mali to the Oudalan Province in Burkina Faso. Shelters were built through a self-help construction approach using traditional construction materials. Participation in the selection of the type of shelter to be provided was crucial since the refugees had already rejected other proposed solutions by other agencies. The project worked within the cultural norms of a Tuareg population where women were the main constructors of tents, and families moved their shelters according to nomadic traditions to increase spacing between shelters and tribal groups.

Strengths and weaknesses

- ✓ Beneficiaries felt involved in the process right from the first discussion around shelter design.
- ✓ The project was implemented through existing community structures which facilitated beneficiary selection as well as shelter materials distribution.
- ✓ Close involvement of the beneficiary communities guaranteed the security of both project staff and stored materials.
- ✓ The host government representatives on site were part of the coordination process.
- ✓ Staging the distribution of materials worked as an incentive to complete the shelters.
- ✗ Coordination with some other agencies could have been strengthened. Despite the change in site layout in terms of spacing between the shelters the providers of

sanitation services did not change their layout, leading to many latrines being either too far away or too close to other groups.

- ✗ Coordination was hampered by the lack of a camp management focal point.
- ✗ Site selection, though beyond the influence of this project, made accessing populations difficult as communication connections were poor.
- Site planning at Férério camp had to adapt to the cultural norms and social structures of the camp population. A traditional grid layout was inappropriate and was rejected by the refugees who preferred to group their shelters according to tribal affiliations and space them in a way that reflected their usual, nomadic way of living.



Shelter structure under construction.
Photo: Christian Jepsen



Completed shelter structure.
Photo: Ghada Ajami



Traditional tanned skin roof cover.
Photo: Christian Jepsen

Before the conflict

The Tuareg population in northern Mali is made up of nomadic and semi-nomadic groups moving across sparsely populated desert areas. Traditional Tuareg tent shelters are made from wooden supports covered with tanned animal-skin roofs, and are designed to be easily dismantled.

The semi-nomadic population construct mud brick houses with traditional tents erected close by. Although land is mainly owned by men, the Tuareg tent is built by women and is the property of the family matriarch.

Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world, with a life expectancy of just over 50 years and a Human Development Index ranked 175 (out of 187).

After the conflict

A large number of the Tuareg population of northern Mali sought safety in neighbouring countries. The Tuareg population targeted by this project moved mainly to the Sahel region of Burkina Faso but were asked by the Burkinabe government to move to managed camp sites.

By March 2012, Férério camp contained over 2,000 households. Four months later, in July, the figure had risen to 3,500.

Initially other organisations provided all-weather tents, but people refused to occupy them. Emergency tents were seen as too flimsy to protect people from strong winds and high temperatures.

This project was established to involve beneficiaries in the development of a shelter solution.

Beneficiary selection

The organisation received an assessment report from another shelter actor that concluded that 1,000 shelters were needed. These shelters were to fill gaps in support as some shelter solutions had already been provided.

Initially an agency proposed a shelter design based on a standard box-style shelter with a gable roof to be arranged in a grid format, fairly close together. Some shelters were built by an external contractor.

Both the design and the site plan were rejected by the refugees and this agency was invited to provide an alternative solution, securing extra funds to meet any additional needs.

Three criteria for selection were shared with the beneficiary groups, the United Nations and the government representative in the camp:

- households with a lack of adequate shelter
- households with elderly occupants
- vulnerable female-headed households who have no access to adequate shelter.

The community groups were organised by the refugees themselves and were based on traditional tribal structures. Leaders of these groups drew up a draft list of potential beneficiaries. This was used as the basis for an assessment by the agency in coordination with camp community leaders and the host government representative.

The final beneficiary list was presented to the group leaders, who communicated the outcome to the other families.

Implementation

Participation in all stages of the project was crucial so a sample shelter was built following discussions with community groups about the design. The sample shelter was then a focal point for suggested modifications before the final materials list was established.

The organisation procured the materials. Triple-weave plastic sheeting was procured (though not produced) in Burkina Faso and the quality was seen as better than plastic sheeting that had previously been distributed in the camp.

To prevent damage to the local environment by cutting down trees, wooden poles were procured from sustainable Eucalyptus plantations in the Southern regions of Burkina Faso.

All materials were first transported by truck to a hub three-and-a-half hours' drive from the camp and then to the camp itself.

The beneficiary communities were given responsibility for guarding the wood stored in an open-air, fenced-off area, while desirable items like plastic sheeting and mats were distributed immediately to reduce the risk of theft.

Each household was given a materials coupon. Structural materials were distributed first and, when the structure was completed, materials for covering the roof and walls were distributed.

Distribution was coordinated with the tribe leader who organised the order in which families would fetch their materials. The whole community of each tribe assisted in moving the materials to the construction site.



An overall view of one section of the camp.
Photo: Christian Jepsen

Field monitors checked the structures during and after construction.

As Tuareg women had a traditional leading role in tent construction, it was they who led the construction groups. Each group would complete one shelter at a time.

The community specifically said that they did not require the agency's support in construction and, in the case of vulnerable families, men helped to dig the pole-holes while the women groups erected the shelter. Due to the communal organisation of childcare and of many other often female-dominated activities it is not thought that the women were over-burdened by their construction responsibilities.

As a side-project, the agency contributed to the reduction of work carried out by children through the provision of donkey carts for the collection of water.

Site planning and WASH

Families did not like living in close proximity to each other and traditionally lived spread out.

The camp held more than 25 tribal groups. The camp population re-organised itself according to these groups. A standard camp grid plan could not be applied to this more "organic" spread of families and if the refugees did not like where they were sited they simply dismantled their shelter and moved it somewhere else.

Agencies working on water and sanitation continued place latrine blocks according to the site plan instead of adapting it to the settlement patterns of the refugees. As a result, a high percentage of the refugee population did not use the latrines either because of the long distance (sometimes up to 500m) or because some tribes refused to share latrines with other tribes.

Technical solutions

The shelter model chosen was similar to a traditional Tuareg tent. It had a wooden-pole structure but instead of the traditional tanned skins for the roof and walls plastic sheeting was used. In some cases families used the emergency tents that had been provided earlier as roofing material.

Tuareg tents are suited to the environmental conditions: high wind loads, high temperatures and sand storms. The shelter contained no concrete so did not worsen water scarcity. The sides of the shelter were made from mats which could be re-positioned in order to change the location of the doors depending on the direction of the wind.

The shelter could be disassembled and relocated to another location without any material wastage, and women knew how to maintain them. Materials could be taken with families when the camp closed.

"I am very, very happy. Look around, here is much more space", says Fatima the proud new homeowner surrounded by her children. "There is even enough space for the little ones to play inside, and I have room for visitors."

Tanned animal skins took too long to produce, and were not an option as a roofing material. To replicate the thermal insulation qualities of the skins, a set of nine woven straw mats were placed under the two plastic sheets.

The refugees paid a lot of attention to detail in construction. The two plastic sheets provided were hand sewn together while the 8mm rope connecting the plastic sheets to the roof was skilfully secured in place by tying it to the corner poles of the shelters.

Materials	Quantity
Stage 1 - structure	
Eucalyptus Poles Green wood. Length = 4m 6cm diameter at mid length	16
Eucalyptus Poles Green wood. Length = 4m 4cm diameter at mid length	18
String 0.3cm diameter	2x20m
Machete	1
Stage 2 - coverings	
Rope 0.8cm diameter	30m
Plastic mats (1.2m x 2.5m)	8
Plastic sheeting (4mx5m)	2
Straw mat (1m x 1.8m)	9