



Meeting Notes

UK Shelter Forum

05 September 2008 / Oxford

hosted by:  **Oxfam**



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Forum Aim

The UK Shelter Forum is a community of practice for individuals, agencies, academics and built environment professionals involved in international shelter and settlement reconstruction work. In semi-annual meetings and special events, new initiatives and practical approaches to shelter needs of disaster or conflict affected people are discussed. UK Shelter Forum events are hosted by non-governmental organisations, including Oxfam GB, Care International, and Habitat for Humanity.

For further information on the UK Shelter Forum, contact:

- Rick Bauer at Oxfam GB rbauer@oxfam.org.uk
- Lizzie Babister at Care International babister@careinternational.org

Meeting notes from previous UK Shelter Forum events can be found at:

<http://www.shelterforum.org.uk/>

Welcome

Jeremy Loveless, Oxfam GB Deputy Humanitarian Director spoke about the wide range of professions represented in the audience, including humanitarian specialists, architects, engineers, and surveyors. Each of these professions have slightly different definitions of what constitutes “shelter”, and different standards to guide their work. Jeremy encouraged the group to use the day’s proceedings to develop synergy in approaches to shelter in humanitarian contexts.

Recent Initiatives

□ **Dr. Tom Corsellis**, co-director of the Geneva-based Shelter Centre, gave a presentation on the recently printed guidelines: *Transitional Settlement and Reconstruction After Natural Disasters*. Supported with funding from DFID and UN/OCHA, the field version of the guidelines is now being tested in a number of locations, including Myanmar.

In his presentations, Tom emphasised that while the components of a good response must be specific to the disaster itself, basic principles should apply to all those involved in the delivery of shelter programmes. These principles include:

- support for the affected community;
- coordinate with others, and promote a strategy for response;
- maintain continuous assessment of risk, damage, needs and resources;
- avoid relocation or resettlement;
- when displacement is essential, minimise the duration and distance;
- support reconstruction for all those affected by the disaster;
- ensure rights and secure tenure for all those affected;
- support the affected population in making informed choices;
- ensure that vulnerability to disasters is not rebuilt;
- undertake contingency planning.

The guidelines offer detailed information on twelve common types of assistance methods that support a “sheltering” approach to settlement and reconstruction. Targeted at government, non-governmental, and private sector stakeholders, feedback from field testing of the guidelines is currently sought. This feedback will be used to inform a revised edition to be published by the Shelter Centre and UN/OCHA in 2009.

For more information, contact:
shelterafterdisaster@sheltercentre.org



□ **Seki Hirano**, architect, gave an update on behalf of the editors of the soon-to-be published *Case Studies of Emergency and Transitional Shelter Projects*. Intended to fill the gap in documentation of what worked and what didn’t work in post-disaster and post-conflict shelter, thirty different projects from Africa, Asia, and the Americas are presented in a catalogue format. Included in the case studies are historically significant projects collected by the Cuny Center, some dating back to the early 1970s. More recent examples include the Pisco earthquake in Peru in 2007, and the 2007 displacement caused by the conflict in Sri Lanka.

Seki showed some sample pages from the catalogue, and a comparison table of different combinations of shelter assistance methods used in the case studies. Also illustrated was a graph of the different sizes in square meters of the transitional shelters.

The project is managed by UN Habitat on behalf of the IASC Emergency Shelter and Early Recovery Clusters. The case studies can be downloaded in early 2009 at www.disasterassessment.org or contact Esteban Leon shelterprojects2008@gmail.com



□ A second publication that looks at case studies in post disaster shelter was the topic of a presentation by **Jo Da Silva**, Associate Director of Arup.

Post Disaster Reconstruction: Lessons From Aceh is intended as a reference for senior NGO managers to help them understand the complexity of engaging in housing construction. Using field experiences from one location – Aceh, Indonesia –, the research conducted by Arup looks at the technical, social, and managerial processes involved in the construction of permanent dwellings (reinforced masonry houses). The housing work of eleven different agencies who received financial support from the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) is examined in this reference guide. Lessons drawn from their

experiences are highlighted in this work, with a publication date of early 2009. For more information, contact:

Jo da Silva jo.da-silva@arup.com

□ **Mark Goodwin** of the Royal Institute for Chartered Surveyors (RICS) gave an overview of what his organisation can offer NGOs involved in housing construction work. As a professional trade association of over 100,000 surveyors and other property professionals located in over 100 countries, RICS helps set, maintain, and regulate building standards. RICS also offers advice on land, property, construction and environmental issues to policy makers in governments and NGOs alike.

Currently RICS is creating a guide to the built environment professions. Its target audience is NGOs, to contribute to a better understanding of the roles of surveyors and other built environment professionals. For more information, contact:

Mark Goodwin mgoodwin@rics.org

□ **Emily Darko** works for the RICS supported project, *BuildAction*. This initiative is intended to link NGOs to the professional expertise on offer by RICS members. Emily gave examples of a recent BuildAction project in Montserrat, where RICS helped guide the construction of a low cost community centre and a retirement home. Currently BuildAction is seeking project proposals from other NGOs interested in their services. For information, contact Emily Darko:

edarko@rics.org

Learning and Training for the Shelter Sector

Liz Lambert, Learning and Development Manager with Oxfam GB, led the attendees in a mapping exercise of learning and training in shelter and settlement issues. Based on previous discussions from previous UK Shelter Forum meetings, this session was intended to take a step back from the ongoing development of new training initiatives, and reflect on the skills and learning needs of shelter practitioners.

Liz led the group in a four-stage exercise:

1. identifying the skills required to effectively deliver shelter and settlement programmes;
2. discuss from a personal perspective how learning occurs;
3. discuss how people are helped to learn; and
4. identify the shelter learning and training priorities, and the personal commitments to realise these opportunities.

Given the complexity of issues that shelter and settlement programmes attempt to address, the list of important skills identified by participants was lengthy. Three main categories of skills were identified:

- *interpersonal skills*, related to the importance of communication; listening; cultural sensitivity; and influencing others;
- *knowledge based skills* involving NGO standards and codes of conduct; damages and needs assessment techniques; community participation principles; people and project management; and land rights;
- *technical skills*, including basics of structural engineering and hazard-resistant construction techniques; logistics and supply chain management; and analytical skills.

Although many of the participants had attended or delivered shelter training programmes before, the majority stated that their most valuable lessons came from field based observations and practical experiences, and through discussions with disaster affected communities themselves. Direct observation of the impact of disasters on local building styles was also highlighted. Only a handful of attendees stated they had gained invaluable learning from attending workshops.

The importance of being well managed and coached was widely identified as a major contribution to learning. Other effective learning methods include working alongside with, and learning from local people; discussions with experts in workshops, or informal situations; self-paced learning, including reading and reflecting; and informal shelter and settlement networks.

The broad range of learning needs and methods identified by the attendees made it difficult to arrive at decisive conclusions on what the learning and training priorities for shelter sector should be. Two areas of interest discussed in the concluding session of the mapping exercise were:

1. to develop more mentoring opportunities;
2. to lobby donors and/or agencies to fund shelter preparedness and capacity building activities.



Lessons from Recent Disasters – Cyclone Nargis

□ **Remote Programming in Shelter Projects** One of the operational challenges faced during the humanitarian response to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar was gaining access to the disaster-affected areas. Although the political restrictions on visas and travel permits were later relaxed, during the first few months the ability of relief agencies to do their work was impeded.

Simon Springett, Oxfam GB's Humanitarian Programme Coordinator for the Middle East, and **Seki Hirano**, Technical Lead for the Emergency Shelter Cluster in Myanmar, lead a session on remote programming for shelter projects in limited access environments. Small group discussions focused on four issues:

1. ensuring quality
2. accountability and monitoring
3. hazard - resistant construction
4. community engagement

Suggestions on how to address these issues included: making better use of contingency planning to pre-identify disaster prone areas; strengthening networks and capacity building with local partners; using digital and other communication methods; and maintaining transparency with affected communities as the core of the humanitarian response.

□ **Plastic Sheeting as a Default Shelter Response** Field research conducted in Myanmar by **Lizzie Babister**, Shelter and Reconstruction Adviser for Care International, showed a ubiquitous use of plastic sheeting in Cyclone affected areas. The range of quality, sizes, uses and fastening techniques observed by Lizzie caused her to reflect on whether the humanitarian community is using plastic sheeting as a default response to shelter needs after disasters.

In breakout groups, three questions were discussed:

1. Is plastic sheeting becoming the default shelter response at the expense of other assistance methods?
2. When is it too late to distribute plastic sheeting as a shelter response?
3. Imagine you are a disaster-affected family... how big of a piece of plastic sheeting do you need?

Group 1 concluded that while plastic sheeting is a practical material that has multiple uses, the 6 month time frame in which many relief agencies operate makes it difficult to consider other shelter options. In the tropical climate of Myanmar, plastic sheeting seems to have been an appropriate shelter choice. While recognizing that plastic sheeting is a low cost, readily available, and easy to handle material, the group made an appeal to give more thought to *what* plastic sheeting is intended to do, and *how* it will be used.

Group two suggested that there is a myth that plastic sheeting is only appropriate as an emergency shelter material, and gave two examples where follow-up distribution of plastic sheeting occurred (Bangladesh and Sri Lanka). Monitoring how plastic sheeting is used, and whether it is being sold or bartered by beneficiaries is important. The group recommended that case studies on the uses of plastic sheeting be collated from different responses.

The third group identified the importance of knowing what building materials can be salvaged, and what are the sizes and availability of the structural support members (e.g., timber or bamboo). The group also recommended that more choices should be given to families, including the possibility of cash instead of plastic sheeting.

□ **Market Survey Tool for Shelter Materials** To help better understand how local markets can be more effectively utilized in humanitarian responses, an inter-agency initiative to develop a market assessment tool is underway. Key questions that the assessment tool (called EMMA - Emergency Market Mapping and Assessment) is meant to answer include: Are the local markets functioning, and can they support post disaster needs? Would cash, or in-kind assistance, be the most appropriate humanitarian intervention? And where in the supply chain are the best opportunities to help restore market functions?

In July 2008, EMMA was field tested in the cyclone-affected districts of Myanmar. **Rick Bauer**, engineering adviser for Oxfam GB, gave a presentation on the results of this field trial, and its implications for better informing shelter assistance options.

In the Delta, a single species of thatch (locally known as *dhanni*) is used as roofing material. *Dhanni* grows in the coastal mangrove areas of the Delta, where it is shipped to local and national markets throughout Myanmar. As Cyclone Nargis destroyed over 70% of the *dhanni* crop, and almost 40% of the housing in the Delta, many agencies expressed concerns about how the limited supply would meet the huge demand. In collaboration with local NGOs, Save the Children undertook a market analysis exercise that looked at the *dhanni* supply chain in the Delta.

The results of the survey confirmed some findings from research into other post-disaster markets, notably the reliance on informal credit systems for purchasing. In the Delta, the availability of credit - especially for poor families - was severely restricted after Nargis. Also highlighted in this study was the negative impact on local earning potential, especially for women involved in weaving the *dhanni* fronds into roof thatch as an income source.

More information on the EMMA tool, and the full report from the Myanmar field trial, can be obtained by contacting Mike Albu Mike.Albu@zen.co.uk



Future Directions for the UK Shelter Forum

As a community of practice of UK based shelter practitioners and researchers, the UK Shelter Forum (UKSF) meets twice a year. Now in its second year, questions related to the future directions for the UK Shelter Forum 2009-2010 were raised by Rick Bauer and Lizzie Babister (the ad hoc "steering committee" for the UKSF). These questions included: frequency and location of meetings; hosting and facilitating; meeting format; and overall objectives.

A survey to solicit the views of the UKSF participants will be presented at the next meeting.

UK Shelter Forum Meetings 2009	
date	host
06 Feb 2009	British Red Cross
Sept 2009	Save the Children