

Africa Shelter Forum 2020 – 16th July 2020 - Summary Report

Building on the previous annual East Africa Shelter Forums that were held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2018 and 2019, this year, the Africa Shelter Forum was broadened geographically across the continent and included presentations and active engagement from the wider region. The Forum was also held virtually in both English and French, to create opportunities for access, learning and sharing across the continent and improve shelter and settlement responses through the facilitation of discussions and networking opportunities.

The forum was primarily organized by partners that are active in working in Shelter and Settlements work in the region and included Danish Refugee Council (DRC), International Federation of the Red Cross, (IFRC), InterAction, International Organization for Migration (IOM), and UN-Habitat, and was supported by the Global Shelter Cluster. The Forum was a tremendous success, with over 250 participants joining from more than 140 cities globally. This event was one of the largest ever shelter events held globally, and a great opportunity for learning and exchange between different parts of Africa, and to link national partners with shelter and settlements colleagues across the globe.

The half-day Forum was divided into three focus areas: 1- Sharing learning from shelter and settlements programming in Africa, 2- Updates on regional and global shelter and settlements initiatives, and 3- Discussions on the role of shelter and settlements in public health emergencies. Presentations were followed by participants entering four parallel breakout groups for further discussion focusing on various themes under the topics: Shelter and Settlements Responses to Covid-19; HLP and Covid-19; Integrated Programming (Shelter-WASH-Health); and broader discussions on the previous three themes.

Presentations

The presentations within the first session covered a wide scope, picking up on many specific themes and focuses within shelter and settlement projects from across a range of different contexts. Presentations included the Uganda Red Cross sharing insights on shelter programming with a focus on disability inclusion in Uganda, Medair presenting on Covid-19 specific shelter support in South Sudan, IOM presenting on evolving camp and settlement patterns in NE Nigeria, CRS presenting on localization of shelter programming in Mozambique, and CARE sharing insights on self-recovery support in Malawi.

The second session saw a series of regional and global updates. These included:

- A presentation from CRAterre on supporting self-recovery – further information here: <https://self-recovery.org/>
- A presentation from InterAction introducing research on the wider impacts of shelter and settlements programming (<https://www.interaction.org/blog/more-than-four-walls-and-a-roof/>) and inviting collaboration on further research
- An introduction from IOM on the Information Education Communication (IEC) Material Compendium project, with a request for everyone to share their IEC materials so they can be added to the database: email IEC@sheltercluster.org
- A presentation from CRS linked to their collection of project case studies: <https://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/research-publications/shelter-settlement-and-infrastructure-case-studies>
- An update on Shelter Projects, launching a new Central and West Africa thematic booklet and inviting abstracts for the upcoming Shelter Projects 2019-20: <http://www.shelterprojects.org/>

The slides from all presentations are available on the Shelter Forum website in English and French, so please refer to these for further information: <http://www.shelterforum.info/africa/>

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Breakout sessions

The first breakout session on “Shelter and Settlements Response to Covid-19” was led by UN-Habitat, with a presentation sharing examples of COVID-19 preparedness, recovery and long-term response in areas such as Kakuma-Kalobeyei, in Turkana, Kenya. The importance of sustainable approaches was emphasized throughout the process, which include using a data and evidence-based approach, policy tools such as spatial coordination plans, and spatial guides to address tailored and specific measures. In the breakout session, participants from various backgrounds shared examples of on-site approaches used in settlements and approaches to inform better preparedness for future public health crises (e.g. changing system structures; importance of site planning).

The second breakout session, on “HLP and Covid-19” was led by the Shelter Cluster and Uganda Red Cross. Participants shared experiences from Nigeria, Somalia and Uganda. Points raised included that renters are losing the capacity to pay rent (loss of income due to diminished economic activity) and facing eviction, and in some cases, stigma associated with health workers and outsiders is also a driver of evictions. It was discussed that a spike in evictions is anecdotal and assumed but lacking hard data on global trends, and that the risk of Covid-related evictions is higher in big cities, where landlords can more easily replace evicted tenants with new ones. There was discussion on temporary measures to mitigate impacts of Covid on evictions: moratorium on evictions, rental support, moratorium on mortgage repayments, but the question was asked: what happens when these measures expire?

The third breakout session on “Integrated Programming - Shelter-WASH-Health” was led by DRC, where the participants discussed number of aspects that could make a program integrated in all its aspects. This led the conversation to focus around coordination, WASH elements, and emergency response (health and the current pandemic).

The fourth breakout session was a broader discussion led by IOM and IFRC. Participants noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a strong impact on shelter programs - interrupting or slowing them down - and shelter actors reported having to find new ways of working to deliver assistance due to access constraints and confinement, notably remotely or engaging the community. There was discussion on programs adjusting (e.g. introducing prevention measures at distribution points), on strongly engaging with health actors on adapting shelter activities and using activities to promote prevention messages (e.g. during distributions), and it was noted that for countries with experience of Ebola outbreaks, lessons learnt from the Ebola response were drawn upon. Shelter actors have also been involved in new construction activities besides shelters, notably quarantine centers. Participants also noted that in some cases, there have been funding consequences for shelter programming, with funding being cut or re-directed in some cases.

The roles of different partners and strength of collaboration and partnerships were also emphasized throughout all breakout groups and presentations through-out the day with the importance of coordination between sectors, collaborative approaches towards ensuring multi-partner responses, and the importance to move from short-term responses to focusing on the long term. The Forum concluded with several participants expressing gratitude to the organizers for the rich discussions, and their looking forward to the next iteration of the Africa Shelter Forum.

What's next?

The event has demonstrated the appetite and interest for shelter and settlements activities in the region and the close links within the Shelter and Settlements sector in particular with health and other sector outcomes. There will be a survey sent out to explore the demand for this type of fora in the region, with the opportunity to possibly increase the frequency of these events, as well as invite all interested agencies to get involved if interested to support the planning of the next event.

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