

As part of our humanitarian mandate, Oxfam initiates and supports emergency shelter interventions for people affected by disasters and conflicts. Our experience shows that the rapid distribution of shelter NFIs and shelter support for host families can help people meet their immediate needs for dignity, privacy and protection from adverse weather. This Technical Briefing Note outlines the different approaches and key principles to be considered when considering emergency shelter programmes in humanitarian responses.

Oxfam & Emergency Shelter

In the aftermath of a natural disaster, or when armed conflict causes displacement from homes and communities, Oxfam's humanitarian activities focus on:

- saving lives through ensuring safe water, sanitation and public health interventions (WASH support);
- supporting the reactivation of livelihoods and local markets (EFSL support); and
- advocacy and campaigning on humanitarian relief issues (such as access, accountability; protection).

In order for Oxfam to deliver these relief activities, affected populations must first be temporarily sheltered in locations where they feel safe (or safer). While most people prefer to stay in or near their original dwellings, a conflict or disaster may force people to relocate a number of times before achieving durable shelter solutions. Providing rapid and appropriate emergency shelter support in acceptable settlements can:

- help meet immediate critical survival needs;
- provide a physical and social space for WASH and EFSL activities to take place; and
- aid in post-emergency shelter construction (through the provision of useful materials and tools).

Oxfam's Shelter Policy

Oxfam GB's Shelter Policy of 2006 recognizes the role of supporting emergency shelter in helping us deliver our humanitarian mandate. This policy confirms our organizational commitment "to maintain our expertise and play an active role" in emergency shelter.

Permanent housing and/or the construction of transitional shelters requires extensive resources in time and funding. It also requires specialist technical and dedicated management support. For these reasons, projects of this type are not considered as part of Oxfam's humanitarian expertise.

Who's Responsible?

Although emergency shelter assistance is not strictly a technical concern, Oxfam's WASH engineers are typically tasked with ensuring that emergency shelter needs are included during initial assessments. If assessments indicate that there are unmet needs for emergency shelter, it is expected that Oxfam engineers will take the lead on identifying appropriate interventions.

For interventions that call for direct shelter NFI distributions as complimentary assistance to our WASH programmes, Oxfam engineers are expected to provide technical specifications and initiate requisition proceedings with logistics personnel. Beneficiary identification and distribution of shelter NFIs is typically led by PHP or ESFL teams, or specialized distribution teams. Like all other Oxfam programmes, monitoring of the use of these materials and the impact of our interventions remains the responsibility of all Oxfam staff.

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For partner led distributions, Oxfam's engineers will be involved in encouraging quality standards for procurement of shelter NFI materials. In some cases, Oxfam's engineers will be tasked with providing technical oversight for the appropriate use of these materials by beneficiaries. As with all of Oxfam's humanitarian programmes where partners are involved, capacity building approaches (vs. direct project supervision) should be used.

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Large scale emergencies will likely require specialized NFI distribution staff and Emergency Shelter Project Coordinators. To avoid programme delays due to recruitment difficulties, early identification of the need for Shelter NFI distribution teams should be highlighted.

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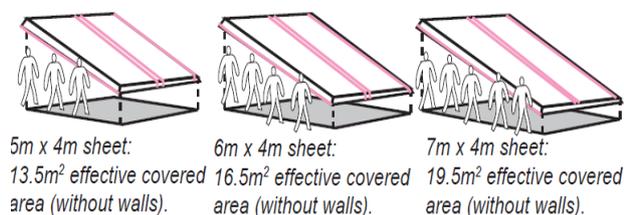
As an active partner in the IASC Emergency Shelter Cluster, Oxfam is committed to the goal of a rapid and coordinated humanitarian response to meet 100% of the emergency shelter needs of affected communities. While Oxfam's attendance at the Emergency Shelter Cluster meeting is not mandatory, Oxfam must report our emergency shelter distribution plans to the Information Management sub-group of local Shelter Cluster.

Seven Key Principles of Emergency Shelter

1. The first several weeks after a disaster or conflict are the most critical in addressing emergency shelter needs. After this, beneficiary priorities tend to shift towards more durable shelter solutions. To help ensure maximum impact of relief operations, **emergency shelter distributions should take place within the first 45 days of the response.**

2. **Sphere shelter and settlement standards must be used** as a guide for all emergency shelter distributions. Whenever possible, the minimum guidance of 3.5 m³ of covered space per person should be adhered to. To achieve this, two pieces of 6m by 4m sheets should be distributed to each family of 4 or more persons (see illustration below)

Effective covered areas are smaller than plastic sheets themselves.



(examples based on 30° pitched roof allowing 25cm each side for fixings.)

3. **All reinforced plastic sheeting** used for emergency shelter **must adhere to Oxfam specifications**, which have been widely promoted and accepted by the international humanitarian community.

4. The two non negotiable items to be included in emergency shelter kits should be **two (2) pieces of reinforced plastic sheeting or tarpaulins, and sufficient rope or other fasteners**. In arid lands or where deforestation might take place, distributions should also consider the addition of bamboo or timber poles.

5. Attempting to reach higher numbers of beneficiaries by distributing one sheet of plastic per family rather than two should be avoided. **Follow-up distributions often occur too late to have the desired impact** on effectively addressing emergency shelter needs.

6. People displaced by disasters and conflicts are resourceful and competent, and are often capable of erecting an adequate emergency shelter without technical support. **Avoid efforts to design new or improved emergency shelters** using plastic sheeting or tarpaulins and bamboo, plastic or timber poles. If assessments indicate that there is need for self supporting emergency shelters, provide tents.

7. Shelter needs and use change over time. While plastic sheeting or tents may not be the most desirable option, **Oxfam's advocacy and coordination with others** is often the most effective means of supporting more durable shelter solutions.

Shelter NFIs

Emergency shelter materials were included in the first Oxfam humanitarian programme in 1942, when blankets were included in the food assistance packages shipped to Greece during a naval blockade. Since then, Oxfam's emergency response experiences have shown us that the rapid distribution of **shelter NFIs** can help people meet their immediate need for dignity, privacy and protection from the elements.

Typical **shelter NFIs** include:

- ✓ plastic sheeting or tarpaulins (minimum 2 per family);
- ✓ twisted or braided rope from natural or synthetic fibres;
- ✓ timber, bamboo, aluminium or brush poles for emergency dwelling superstructure;
- ✓ single family tents made of cotton or synthetic materials;
- ✓ blankets, ground mats and/or mattresses;
- ✓ locally procured, sustainably harvested materials such as bamboo or palm frond mats;
- ✓ shading materials made of cotton, synthetic or natural fibres woven into mesh or sheets;
- ✓ manufactured roofing sheets made from corrugated galvanized iron (CGI), PVC, or bitumen coated fibres;
- ✓ fastening materials such as nails, roofing bolts or screws, or cable ties;
- ✓ hand tools such as hammers, saws, pliers, metal cutters, measuring tapes; shovels, etc.;
- ✓ solar lamps; stoves (for cooking/heating); cooking pots and house wares.

As their primary use is for vector control measures, Oxfam does NOT consider the following items as shelter NFIs:

- × insecticide treated plastic sheeting;
- × bed nets.

If assessments indicate high risks and unmet needs for the need for these items, Oxfam's Public Health Promotion team will take the lead on addressing these concerns.

Emergency Shelter Upgrades

In situations of prolonged displacements, it may be necessary to provide additional materials or technical assistance to help people upgrade or improve their emergency shelters. Before initiating upgrading activities, follow-up assessments should be done with the views of beneficiaries, landowners, local authorities, camp management, and the shelter cluster taken into consideration.

While targeting vulnerable people for shelter upgrading activities makes sense from a humanitarian programming perspective, this can create conflict in communities and lead to resentments towards those who receive assistance. Local partners may be best placed to advise on how these risks can be mitigated.

Emergency Shelter Practices for Different Contexts

Camps In many planned or government-authorized displacement camps, other agencies are likely to be better positioned than Oxfam to ensure that residents are adequately sheltered. The most appropriate emergency shelter intervention that Oxfam can provide in these situations is often that of *complimentary support*, where Oxfam supplements the distribution of tents or plastic sheeting of other agencies. High levels of coordination are essential to ensure that minimum standards are adhered to and that there is sufficient surplus stock to support any influx of new refugees/IDPs.

As *self-settled camps* are often considered illegal, any plans for providing emergency shelter assistance must first be approved by the relevant authorities. Distribution of emergency shelter materials should take into account the overcrowded conditions and the transient nature of these camps. In most cases, plastic sheeting and rope is more preferable than tents as these materials are they are generally considered more a temporary solution.

Floods In general, people displaced by heavy rains and floods are keen to return to their homes as soon as possible. Any plans for emergency shelter assistance must therefore recognize that people might have moved away during the time it takes for Oxfam's material procurement processes to take place. To avoid this, logistics teams should be involved as soon as possible in the assessment phase to advise on realistic lead times for procurement.

Distribution of emergency shelter materials to families who are returning to their places of origins can help decongest crowded camps or collective centres and support the early recovery efforts of affected populations.

Whether distributed to recently displaced or returning peoples, it is of critical importance that each family receive two (2) plastic sheets or tarpaulins as rains may continue.

Cyclones / Hurricanes The hazards of high winds and heavy rains that characterize cyclones and hurricanes pose distinct challenges to emergency shelter assistance. Contingency plans should focus on ensuring that early warning systems are robust, and that the most vulnerable families have access to cyclone shelters.

As the most common cyclone / hurricane damages to buildings is damaged roofs, consideration should be given to stockpiling CGI roofing sheets and fasteners to facilitate a quick distribution. All CGI distributions should be accompanied by information, education and communication (IEC) materials that illustrate recommended construction practices for areas affected by high winds.

Earthquakes Experience shows that people affected by earthquakes prefer to stay at or near their damaged homes, rather than go into camps or collective centres. The versatility of plastic sheeting or tarpaulins makes it the standard material of choice for emergency shelter support. As earthquake affected people are often able to salvage building materials from their houses, there is not generally a need to include timber or bamboo poles in distribution.

Corrugated galvanized iron (CGI) sheets are also of great utility for assisting beneficiaries in their rebuilding of their earthquake damaged homes. If budgets are robust enough to consider CGI sheets as part of emergency shelter assistance, fastening devices such as cup headed nails or screws should be included. It may also be necessary to consider providing some timber for roofing superstructures.

In urban areas where there are a large number of renters or informal settlements, earthquake affected people may not have many opportunities or incentives to rebuild (e.g., Haiti earthquake 2010). While the most effective forms of emergency shelter assistance in these situations is likely to be plastic sheeting, advocacy efforts should focus on addressing the challenges that must be overcome before more durable shelter solutions can be considered.

Hot / Arid Climates As plastic sheeting can make interior spaces very hot in hot or arid climates, emergency shelters must be well ventilated and shaded whenever possible. The use of shading materials over roofs or walls should be considered. In many tropical climates, grass or palm thatch may be available for use as a shading material for roofs, walls or fences.

Rolls of woven plastic shade netting made of polypropylene or polyethylene is another cost effective and highly suitable form of shading. Advantages include ease of use and reduced risk of deforestation or environmental damages. There may be difficulties in finding sufficient local suppliers for woven plastic shade netting to meet the humanitarian demand, however.

Cold Climates While plastic sheeting or tents can provide a basic level of protection against wind/rain/snow, displaced people in cold climates need additional forms of emergency shelter support. Warm clothing, blankets, and elevated bedding (including cots and mattresses) are essential items that Oxfam or other agencies must ensure are available in sufficient quantities for all family members.

Stoves and fuel for heating and cooking may also be required. To avoid fire risks, stove should be placed on a sand or stone platform away from walls and bedding.

Cash as an Emergency Shelter Activity

The use of cash transfers in humanitarian contexts has increased in recent years. In emergency shelter responses, cash transfers are usually used in one or more of the following ways:

- *cash for work*: project beneficiaries receive financial compensation for participating in activities such as: rubble clearance; site preparation; producing building materials; and/or shelter construction.
- *conditional* cash transfers: recipients receive cash or material vouchers for materials upon completion of tasks related to sheltering activities such as: hosting other displaced families; rental support; digging foundations or building plinths; etc.

As with all cash transfer programmes, the essential elements for success are: *clarity on the programme objectives*, *proper targeting* and a good *market analysis*. The following SWOT analysis highlights some of the issues to consider when thinking of using cash as a complimentary component for emergency shelter programmes:

	<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides a temporary income to affected people, especially vulnerable groups who may not have other sources of income; • motivates people to participate in relief & recovery operations; • generally high level of acceptance by authorities. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • physical labour projects might exclude women and less able-bodied persons; • may create expectations that NGOs will pay people for participation in all relief work; • could compete with private sector labour; • selected CFW activities selected may not have strong coherence with shelter activities.
<p style="text-align: center;">Cash for Work</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can help address disaster waste management concerns; • can link with training programmes to improve building skills and livelihoods. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • potential health and safety issues; • quality of work might be poor; • if too high, the wages set for CFW activities might discourage normal livelihood activities; if too low, participation may be reduced.
	<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contributes to economic recovery of local markets; • cash grants can support access to rental accommodations; • generally high level of acceptance by authorities. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need for frequent monitoring and skilled monitors is often underestimated; • less able bodied and more vulnerable groups may not be able to meet conditions and will require additional support; • time commitment by beneficiaries to meet conditions may conflict with seasonal livelihood activities.
<p style="text-align: center;">Conditional Cash Grants (incl. vouchers)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • voucher based programmes require close contact with local suppliers, which can help ensure quality in shelter materials; • setting targets and transferring cash in tranches based on progress can support safe construction and building back better. • cash grants to host families can reduce their financial burden and facilitate camp decongestion. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased demand for shelter materials may outstrip local supplies; • possible inflationary impact on prices by creating high demands for shelter materials.

A third method of cash transfers involves *unconditional* cash transfers, where beneficiaries are free to decide how they wish to use the monies received. While there is some evidence to suggest that beneficiaries spend a proportion of these funds on shelter related activities or purchases, in most humanitarian situations other priorities (e.g., food, medicine or debt repayment) take precedence.

Gender and Shelter in Emergencies

Women, girls, boys and men have different needs, roles and responsibilities in relationship to shelter / housing. To ensure that all people affected by crisis benefit equally from Oxfam's emergency shelter interventions, gender considerations must be integrated into assessments, planning and programming. The following actions to help achieve gender equality in emergency shelter activities are recommended:



Equal Participation

- ✓ Use participatory assessment techniques that include women and men to determine shelter needs and programme options.
- ✓ Hold meetings to discuss shelter-related issues (e.g shelter NFI distributions) with women and men together and separately at times of their convenience.
- ✓ Ensure that women and men, adolescent girls and boys have equal opportunities for involvement in all aspects of shelter construction and receive equally pay for equal work.
- ✓ Monitor women's *effective* participation in decision-making on shelter and be sure that their views are heard and are influential.

Recognizing & Addressing Differences

- ✓ Make efforts to ensure that the particular preferences of women and men are considered in the selection of shelter NFI materials.
- ✓ Push for community support to female headed households in shelter construction projects are offered; if this is not possible, look to provide additional labour.
- ✓ Ensure that the shelter options offer privacy to women and girls and minimize protection risks.

Allocation of Shelter Goods & Services

- ✓ Ensure that male and female heads of households and single women and men have the same access to shelter and shelter materials.
- ✓ Establish monitoring and accountability mechanisms that can rapidly alert and address obstacles to equal access.
- ✓ Identify those at risk of exploitation during shelter allocation and construction, and develop mechanisms through consultation with them to reduce these risks.



Monitoring & Reporting

- ✓ Sex disaggregated data on needs, beneficiary selection and programme activities should be collected, analyzed and reported upon.
- ✓ Monitor communal shelters or camp settings for instances of gender-based violence, and report any incidents to the appropriate authorities.
- ✓ Case studies of the impact of Oxfam's emergency shelter programmes on women, girls, boys and men should be collected and shared. Challenges and problems are as important as successes.

When Does Oxfam Get Involved with Post-Emergency Shelter?

Oxfam's 2006 Shelter Policy sets out the limits of our preferred shelter activities, focusing our humanitarian efforts in the first phase of emergencies when basic shelter needs are most acute. In recent years, however, there have been situations where post emergency shelter work has occurred, notably in Asia (e.g., Indonesia 2006; Pakistan 2010; Bangladesh 2012).

Before senior regional managers can permit exemptions to this policy, the following essential components must be in place:

- there are **clearly substantiated, longer term shelter needs not met by others**;
- there are **partners with the experience, capacity and skills** to deliver more durable shelter projects;
- there are **sufficient longer term funding** sources available to finance such projects;

Additional Resources

➤ **Emergency and Transitional Shelter Guidelines**

- *Transitional Settlements for Displaced Populations* (ShelterCentre, 2005)
- *Transitional Settlement and Reconstruction after Natural Disasters* (ShelterCentre, 2010)
- *Transitional Shelter Guidelines* (ShelterCentre, 2011)
- *Transitional Shelters – Eight Designs Guidelines* (IFRC, 2011)
 - available on the Shelter Centre Library www.sheltercentre.org
- *The Sphere Handbook : Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*
 - available on the Sphere Project website www.sphereproject.org/handbook

➤ **Emergency Shelter and Camp Settings**

- *Camp Management Toolkit* (NRC, 2008) available at www.nrc.no
- *UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies* (UNHCR 2000) available at www.unhcr.org

➤ **Emergency Shelter and the Environment**

- *Checklist for Identifying Critical Environmental Considerations in Emergency Shelter* (Kelly, 2005)
 - available at postconflict.unep.ch/humanitarianaction/documents/02_05-01.pdf

➤ **Emergency Shelter and Gender**

- *Women, Girls, Boys and Men : Different Needs – Equal Opportunities* (IASC, 2006) -
 - available on the IASC website www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/gender

➤ **Emergency Shelter and Hazards**

- *Transitional Shelter : Understanding Shelter From the Emergency Through Reconstruction and Beyond* (Corsellis, 2010)
- *Responding to Earthquakes : Learning from Earthquake Relief and Recovery Operations* (Cosgrave, 2008)
- *Responding to Urban Disasters : Learning from Previous Relief and Recovery Operations* (O'Donnell, 2009)
- *Flood Disasters : Learning from Previous Relief and Recovery Operations* (Alam, 2008)
- *Tsunami Emergency - Learning from Previous Natural Disasters* (Houghton, 2005)
 - available on the ALNAP website www.alnap.org

➤ **Shelter and Cash**

- *Community Recovery Cash Grants in Sumatra* (Palmaera, 2010)
- *Rebuilding Lives with Shelter Grants* (IFRC, 2011)
- *Cash for Shelter Programme - Hurricane Richard 2010* (IFRC, 2010)
- *CRS Transitional Shelter Programme in Sumatra* (CRS, 2010)
 - available on the CALP website www.cashlearning.org/resources

➤ **Shelter Case Studies**

- *Shelter Projects 2008 / Shelter Projects 2009 / Shelter Projects 2010* (UNHCR)
 - available on the UNHCR website www.unhabitat.org/pmss/

➤ **Technical Guides**

- *Plastic Sheeting - A Guide to the Specification and use of Plastic Sheeting in Humanitarian Relief* (Oxfam-IFRC, 2007) -available in 4 languages at plastic-sheeting.org
- *Tents – A Guide to the Use and Logistics of Family Tents in Humanitarian Relief* (OCHA, 2006)
- *Timber as a Construction Material in Humanitarian Responses* (OCHA, 2009)
- *Fire Safety & Tent Winterization – An Illustrated Guide* (Ashmore, 2005)
- *Winterization Technical Guidance for Pakistan* (Ashmore, 2005)
 - all docs available at josephashmore.org
- *Humanitarian Bamboo – A Manual on the Humanitarian Use of Bamboo in Indonesia* (Hodgkin, 2009)
 - research funded by Oxfam GB, available at humanitarian.bamboo.org