

OVERVIEW

MALAWI 2015 / FLOODS

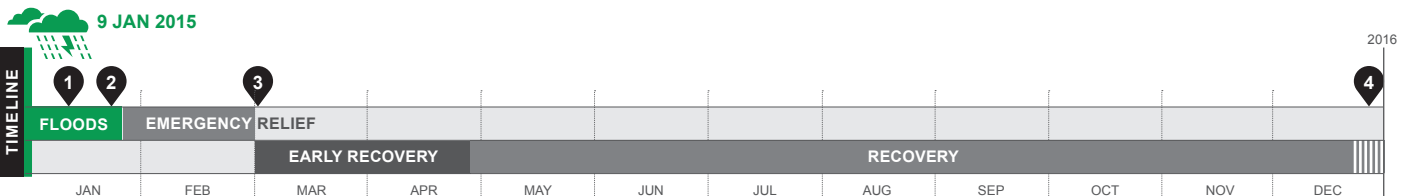
CRISIS	Malawi floods, January 2015.
TOTAL HOUSES DAMAGED	523,347 houses affected. 356,643 completely destroyed ¹ .
TOTAL PEOPLE AFFECTED	1,101,364 individuals affected ¹ . 336,000 individuals displaced (230,000 in displacement sites; 106,000 in host sites) ² .
RESPONSE LOCATIONS	15 districts affected (the most affected were Chikwawa, Nsanje and Phalombe).
RESPONSE OUTPUTS (as of August 2015) ³	Approx. 50,000 households served with NFIs (70,000+ planned). Over 19,000 households assisted with emergency shelter (32,000+ planned). Over 2,000 households assisted with repairs and retrofits (5,000+ planned).



¹ Malawi 2015 Floods Post Disaster Needs Assessment Report, Gov. of Malawi, March 2015, <http://bit.ly/2ogiYqQ>.
² UNDAC Assessment Report, 6 February 2015.
³ Data reported to the Shelter Cluster 4W by humanitarian organizations. Note that this data may not be 100% accurate nor complete (it does not include the figures of the overall response).

SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSE

The floods in Malawi in 2015 led to displacement and widespread damage to housing in the affected areas. Displacement sites were set up in public buildings (such as schools) during the emergency phase, and assistance was provided primarily in these sites. After the first few months, the focus shifted towards relocation and supporting return to IDPs' places of origin, in order to enable collective centres to go back to their functions, and facilitate early recovery. According to data reported to the Shelter Cluster, emergency shelter support consisted mainly of distribution of tents and tarpaulins, while repairs assistance was primarily in the form of tool kits and/or materials, coupled with trainings.



- 1 13 Jan 2015: Declaration of Sate of Disaster by the Government of Malawi.
- 2 22 Jan 2015: Shelter Cluster released Preliminary Response Plan.
- 3 2 Mar 2015: Rapid joint assessment released by Shelter Cluster.
- 4 End of 2015: Deactivation of Malawi Shelter Cluster.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

80% of the population of Malawi live in rural areas. The economy is primarily agricultural, which accounts for 90% of export revenues. National GDP per capita is one of the lowest globally and the economy has experienced low growth. Malawi is also heavily reliant on investments from global finance institutions. A lack of trust in the Malawian Government by these institutions (since 2013) has led to a reduction in investments, further stagnating economic growth.

Malawi experienced above-average rainfall throughout December 2014 and January 2015. The Southern Region of Malawi received 400% more rainfall than the Long Term Mean for the region. 15 of the country's 28 districts experienced significant flooding, with a **state of emergency de-**

clared on 13 January 2015. As a result of the prolonged, heavy, rainfall, the Shire River reached its highest level in 30 years, bursting it banks in multiple areas.

SITUATION AFTER THE FLOODS

The extreme rainfall event and resulting flooding led to displacement, with many affected households evacuated to collective centres (schools, churches and mosques). As these naturally (and in some cases enforcedly) disbanded after the first two months, affected households with no long-term shelter solution constructed simple emergency shelters, or stayed with host families.

Properties sustained damage through a combination of rain and high winds. The most affected communities were more



After several weeks of heavy rains, the Shire River reached the highest level in the past 30 years, burst its banks in several locations and caused widespread flooding.

vulnerable to the disaster, as a result of their shelter and settlement typologies. Many of the inhabitants of the flooded rural areas resided in one-storey houses, constructed using traditional techniques and materials, such as sun-baked mud-bricks and thatched roofs. The flooding, rainfall and wind caused homes to disintegrate and roofs to blow off. There appeared to be a correlation between the degree of damage sustained and the construction techniques used. As shown by the Rapid Joint Assessment (March 2015), 47% of houses built with fired bricks and CGI roofs reported damage, compared to 71% of those built with sun-baked bricks, and 78% of wood and mud houses.

EMERGENCY SHELTER PHASE

The Shelter Cluster, led by the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Development, was activated shortly after the emergency, and a Rapid Joint Damage Assessment was undertaken by various clusters⁴.

The international organization co-leading the Cluster quickly established a large shelter pipeline, and the first significant shelter distributions took place in early February, with tents and shelter kits being airlifted to areas on the east bank of the Shire River that had been completely cut off by the floods.

During the emergency phase, the government promptly erected tents in the most critical displacement sites, in order to clear the public facilities, particularly schools. The sites were selected without sufficient planning and the tents set up hurriedly, leading to challenges such as overcrowding and gaps in WASH and Protection. Additionally, the distribution of humanitarian aid was reported to create a draw to these sites, partially driven by the underlying poverty and also by the food insecurity, created by flood damage to crops and livelihoods. A further challenge in the response was that initial assessments and distributions tended to neglect IDPs in host communities, which increased the draw to displacement sites and complicated coordination efforts.

⁴ The Assessment is available at <http://bit.ly/2jbPHqw>



Displacement site at Bitilinyu. These collective centres were the initial option for those who had to leave their homes and caused a significant draw, due to the distributions of aid (and relative neglect of IDPs in host settings). These sites were also particularly overcrowded and had gaps in protection and hygiene.

The Shelter Cluster's **initial strategic objective was to relocate all people from collective centres** into planned camps or resettlement areas⁵. Expected outputs and impacts of the emergency response were:

- 31,636 households provided with tents and NFIs.
- Assessments conducted in all the 15 districts for strategic positioning of camp sites.
- Displaced people in the camp sites to be trained in construction, for dignity and Disaster Risk Reduction.
- Resettlement areas properly laid out.

EARLY RECOVERY PHASE

By early March, the government prioritized the closure of camps and the return of IDPs. This change in approach led to a swift re-focusing from emergency operations to early recovery planning within the humanitarian community. As part of these efforts, the Shelter Cluster led the process of preparing a "Durable Solutions Framework" and, where feasible, orientated its own efforts towards providing shelter support in areas of return. **Supporting the ability to return was essential to encourage livelihood recovery and to allow collective centres to return to their proper use.** The Cluster aimed to provide adequate shelter in the camps, whilst also strengthening the capacity of the displaced population for early recovery, through training on good construction methods and through the provision of construction materials.

The Cluster and the government promoted the use of fired bricks (as opposed to sun-dried bricks) for reconstruction, so that buildings would be more resistant to disintegration⁶. However, a lack of availability of wood to fire the bricks (or financial resources to purchase fired bricks) led to many households resorting to unsafe traditional building approaches. Some households received shelter **assistance from government and NGOs in the form of shelter kits** (tools and tarpaulins), **tents, or materials to construct temporary timber and plastic-sheet shelters.** In assessments conducted by humanitarian organizations, communities expressed a preference for basic materials and tools, to repair or construct core dwellings supplemented by local materials, including earth blocks and grass thatching. This was considered an appropriate and durable solution to their immediate and longer-term shelter needs, which would also allow them to focus on their priorities, i.e. food security and livelihood recovery.

The case studies that follow show two approaches taken by humanitarian organizations. While the first (A.20) was a short-term project focused on the emergency relief and early recovery phase, the second (A.21) was a longer-term recovery programme looking at housing reconstruction, with significant training and Disaster Risk Reduction components.

⁵ Preliminary Response Plan, released on 22 January 2015 (<http://bit.ly/2i0oiK1>).

⁶ Key Shelter Safety Messages - 2015 Malawi Floods and Storms.