

SCALE, COVERAGE, QUALITY AND IMPACT

in Shelter and Settlements projects

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In most crises, those people receiving support in shelter and settlements (S&S) are a minority of the total with need. Questions of scale, coverage, quality, and impact in implementing S&S programmes thus become key in defining appropriate and responsive (“good”) programming, and how best to use limited resources for timely support to populations in need.

Humanitarians working in any sector face the question of how to best use available funds, skills, and materials. For S&S programming, this can be a particularly challenging question, as needs are often great, and funds, skills, and materials in short supply. In agreeing an appropriate level of support, humanitarians need to be mindful of what the impacts will be on those who will be directly assisted, those who are able to support themselves, and what will happen to those whom they are not able to assist.

The different case studies in *Shelter Projects* can highlight these challenges, by showing the diversity of programming for the same crisis response. For example, there are seven case studies¹ after typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, where organizations faced similar contexts and worked within government and Shelter Cluster guidance, but programme designs and responses differed, due to differing funding, capacities, agency mandates and available materials.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SCALE AND COVERAGE?

“Scale” refers to the number of people assisted by an intervention. In the case studies in this edition of *Shelter Projects*, assistance ranges from 484 households, to over half a million households. Whilst looking at absolute numbers provides an idea of scale, looking at the percentage of crisis-affected people supported (including host communities) provides an idea of “coverage”. However, the definition of coverage depends upon whether we are referencing the proportion of people (or households) affected, in need, or to be targeted, as well as the timing of assessments, whilst assuming no duplication of effort.

¹ See A.24 and A.25 in *Shelter Projects 2013-2014*, and A.9 to A.13 in this edition.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY QUALITY AND IMPACT?

By “quality”, we mean the timely, efficient, effective, and appropriate provision of assistance, i.e., how well project inputs are designed and implemented. By “impact”, we mean how well project outputs result in positive outcomes and influence beneficial, longer-term, processes following assistance. For example, a project to distribute NFIs can be a simple “dump and run” operation, or can be based on detailed assessments, careful targeting, and viewed as a basis for future community engagement. Poorly designed and implemented projects (of even limited scope) can do harm, while well-planned and implemented projects, however modest, can have significant beneficial impacts on the lives of affected populations.

In addition, reduced funding availability may limit assistance to choices between NFI kits for each of thousands of households, or the construction of houses for a handful of households. There is a tradeoff between the level of support provided to individual households and the number of households which can be assisted. In this context, humanitarians make decisions on how to balance quality and household-level impacts of intervention, anticipated impact, and scale. The S&S sector does not yet have the metrics which exist in, say, the Health sector, to objectively measure interventions. While there has been a lot of work on evaluating the impacts of shelter projects, many decisions on project selection and methodology will continue to be based upon personal experience and resources, i.e., “best practice”.

DIFFERING ROLES IN RESPONSE

Organizations have their own varied capacities, and project design should take into account how to maximize those capacities. For example, one agency may have experience in managing common NFI pipelines, whilst another may specialize in training. There may also be an institutional interest in certain types of projects. For some organizations, there may be an interest in designing the “perfect” response project, while for those working in national coordination or mak-



Humanitarian shelter actors are constantly challenged to maximize the available funds, materials and skills. When deciding the appropriate level of support, there needs to be a balance between the impacts on those who will be directly assisted, those who have the capacity to help themselves, and those who will not be reached at all.

ing funding decisions, the focus might be ensuring equitability and coverage, or looking at how to leverage funding to create shifts in government policy².

One role of sector coordination is harnessing different agency capacities and avoiding situations whereby one agency provides a USD 20,000 house, next to another providing a USD 500 transitional shelter to households with similar needs; or, ensuring that entire regions are not overlooked. The common goal should be that all agencies maximize their available resources to support the most vulnerable individuals.

WHAT IS A REALISTIC MINIMUM?

S&S project managers need to decide a realistic minimum of implementable support per household, recalling Sphere Project guidance on support of “minimally adequate” covered living space³. Beyond the type of intervention, operational decisions need to balance whether to go for larger numbers of people in easier to reach locations, or focus on those in less accessible locations (or some other focus). People in hard-to-reach areas are often the most vulnerable, yet also among the most resilient, leaving agencies to determine who to target and where the largest cover and impact can be achieved. Decisions on targeting should be made on how vulnerability is defined, where people most in need of assistance are, and how S&S resources and capacities can best support them.

BROADER UNDERSTANDING OF ACCOUNTABILITY

When organizations decide to work in selected locations, they also decide not to work in other locations, cognisant that they cannot be held accountable to entire affected populations, and that most agency accountability frameworks relate only to the populations within project areas. Indeed in many cases, accountabilities of implementing agencies are taken to apply only to project beneficiaries. Practically, it is often impossible to fully understand the breadth of the needs, given limited time, scope and reach of assessments; the result being that decisions are often made with partial/imperfect information.

Coordinating agencies have a differing set of accountabilities. In the Cluster system, most lead agencies take on the responsibility of calling on partners to address critical gaps in humanitarian response. As a result, Cluster leads may need to push for lower levels of per capita assistance, to ensure that life-saving shelter needs are met, before shelter programmes can start to address a broader resilience agenda. They may also look at the broader national recovery agenda, where, for example in Nepal, large-scale government assistance has been planned⁴. In this sense, the coordination role needs to understand accountability as being to the entire affected population.

SETTLEMENTS AND COMMUNITY

To provide a strong framework for all shelter interventions, a settlements focus provides an excellent starting point of shelter strategy and operations. The choice of a specific location of intervention has significant short- and long-term implications for the quality and impacts of a project. Further, adopting a settlements-based approach increases the likelihood of local/national authority participation in key project decisions.

² See, for instance, two projects in the Philippines: A.13 compared to A.11.

³ See, for instance, case study A.20 (Malawi), where tents were distributed as emergency shelter assistance to decongest overcrowded collective centres.

⁴ See overview A.3 of the response to the Nepal earthquakes and case study A.4 on the set up and operation of the Shelter Cluster Nepal.

However, one of the recurring S&S sector challenges is that of scaling up community-based approaches in a timely fashion. How can S&S actors engage rapidly at the neighbourhood level, and encourage multisectoral response at scale? Operationally, the assessment and response at neighbourhood level is like a scaled-up household response – working at community, rather than household, level. However, this takes resources to achieve effectively. To date, successful multisectoral projects exist as examples for single neighbourhoods⁵.

To help promote neighbourhood responses at scale, Shelter Clusters should create a settlements-based framework as part of the sector strategy that prioritizes neighbourhoods for intervention, based on assessment of neighbourhood needs, boundaries, and local and regional plans. Governments have a critical role in scaling up community-based S&S projects. Well-implemented projects can become models, but at the same time they must be designed to be financially and politically realistic enough to be replicable at scale – something which may only be demonstrable after work in the first “model” neighbourhood is substantially completed.

S&S PROGRAMMING AS A PROCESS

Accounting for the critical programmatic parameters of scale, coverage, quality, and impact, serves as the basis for promoting “good” S&S programming. However, there is no fixed rule on how to balance these parameters. Coordination forums can, for example, establish standards of intervention and strive for consistency in their implementation, while also promoting quality programming. No matter what intervention types an agency chooses, it is the actual implementation of the project and the levels of social engagement, wherein the quality and the impacts of a project lie. At whatever scale, and with whichever intervention, a shelter team decides to intervene, S&S programming is a process, and the success of interventions will depend on whether it meets the needs of those it seeks to support in a timely way, and whether it facilitates engagement of affected populations in longer-term processes, towards durable solutions, recovery and development.

⁵ See, for example, case studies A.31 (Lebanon) and A.13 (Philippines).



Shelter programme managers have to define a realistic minimum of support, and find a balance between larger numbers of people assisted, in easily accessible locations, or a higher-impact support to a smaller number of people. Top: NFI distribution for IDPs; Bottom: urban neighbourhood, Maiduguri, Nigeria.

DURATION, SCALE AND COST OF CASE STUDIES IN SHELTER PROJECTS 2015-2016

| Project | Crisis | Modalities | Project duration | Scale (households) | Cost per HH (USD) |
|---------------------|--------|------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| A.2 MMR | IH | | | 4.7k | \$\$\$ 1,000 |
| A.5 NEPAL | ES | | | 20k | \$ 200 |
| A.6 NEPAL | TS | | | 5k | \$ 250 |
| A.7 NEPAL | HR | | | 15.6k | \$ 160 |
| A.9 PHILIPPINES | HR HF | | | 4.3k | \$\$\$ 1,076 |
| A.10 PHILIPPINES | CH | | | 4.6k | \$\$\$\$\$ 2,424 |
| A.11 PHILIPPINES | ES TS | | | 62k | \$ 385 |
| A.12 PHILIPPINES | ES TS | | | 36.1k | \$\$\$ 1,086 |
| A.13 PHILIPPINES | HR TS | | | 3.2k | \$\$\$\$\$ 2,475 |
| A.16 BENIN | ES | | | 5k | \$ 83 |
| A.18 NIGERIA | TS | | | 3.5k | \$\$\$ 564 |
| A.20 MALAWI | ES | | | 1.8k | \$\$\$ 550 |
| A.21 MALAWI | CH | | | 1.1k | \$\$\$ 552 |
| A.22 SOMALIA | CH | | | 1.2k | \$\$\$\$\$ 3,493 |
| A.24 S. SUDAN | ES | | | 580k | \$ 135 |
| A.25 S. SUDAN | ES | | | 11.7k | \$\$\$ 895 |
| A.26 ETHIOPIA | TS | | | 0.8k | \$\$\$ 800 |
| A.27 TANZANIA | TS | | | 7.7k | \$ 500 |
| A.28 GAZA PALESTINE | TS | | | 0.5k | \$\$\$\$\$ 6,600 |
| A.30 SYRIA | HR | | | 0.8k | \$ 323 |
| A.31 LEBANON | HR | | | 0.7k | \$\$\$\$\$ 1,731 |
| A.32 LEBANON | ES | | | 2.3k | \$ 295 |
| A.34 IRAQ | HR | | | 2.2k | \$\$\$\$\$ 1,376 |
| A.35 IRAQ | HR | | | 0.9k | \$\$\$ 770 |
| A.35 IRAQ | TS | | | 1.4k | \$\$\$\$\$ 9,621 |
| A.40 ECUADOR | ES | | | 2.7k | \$ 115 |

ES = Emergency Sh. = Cash-based assistance
 TS = Transitional Sh. = Site planning / infrastructure
 HF = Host Families = Distribution of NFI / tools / kits
 RS = Rental Support = Guidelines / Communications
 CH = Core Housing = Training / Capacity-building
 HR = Housing Repair
 IH = Individual House

Project duration in months
 = 12 months

Total households supported by the project
 = 1,000 HH

Average project cost per household served / per unit (in USD, converted with exchange rate at the time of the project). In case different modalities of assistance were used, this is an average for the whole project.