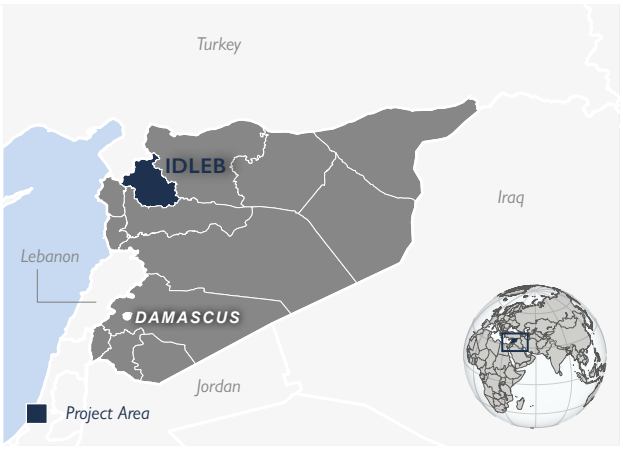
CASE STUDY

SYRIAN ARAB REP. 2019–2020 / SYRIAN CRISIS

KEYWORDS: Disaster Risk Reduction, Infrastructure upgrading, Site improvements

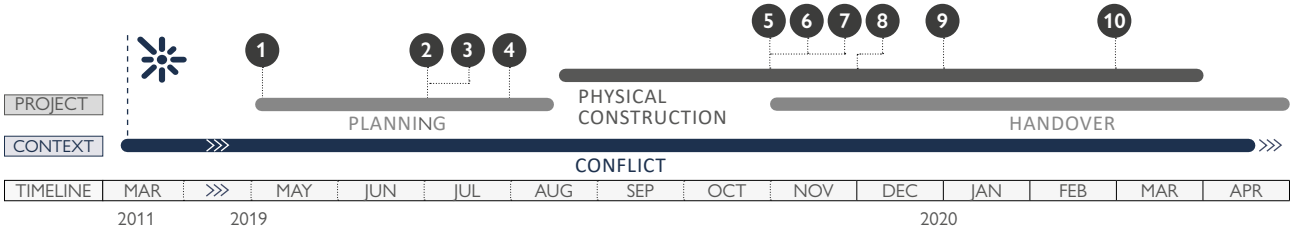
CRISIS	**Syrian crisis, 2011 onwards**
PEOPLE AFFECTED	**4.3 million** people affected by conflict in Northwest Syria of whom 2.8 million are IDPs*
PEOPLE DISPLACED	**2.7 million** IDPs living in Northwest Syria*
PROJECT LOCATION	Idleb Governorate, Northwest Syria
PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT	**24,026 HHs** (119,740 individuals, comprised of: 24,226 men, 26,109 women, 35,541 boys, and 34,833 girls)
PROJECT OUTPUTS	**58km** of road gravelled **37.4km** of drainage works **19 culverts** installed Ground insulation for **6,377 tents**
DIRECT COST	**USD 81** per HH
PROJECT COST	**USD 99** per HH

* Source: North-West Syria: Shelter & NFI Emergency Overview (Dec 2020)



PROJECT SUMMARY

Approximately 1.2 million IDPs in the Northwest of the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) live in informal and unplanned IDP camps which are prone to flooding in the winter, which has serious implications for humanitarian access, as well as to the health and living conditions of IDPs. Working fully remotely from Gaziantep (Turkey), with no direct access to the camps, the organization implemented a large-scale site improvements and flood mitigation project through two local NGO Implementing Partners (IPs) in 42 IDP sites across Idleb Governorate, using innovative monitoring approaches to ensure quality of the works.



Mar 2011: Syrian Crisis began.

1. **May-Jul 2019:** Site Identification.
2. **Jul-Aug 2019:** Technical assessment and BoQ Development.
3. **Jul-Aug 2019:** HLP Due Diligence.
4. **Aug-Sep 2019:** Contractor Identification and start of works.
5. **Nov-Dec 2019:** Project Monitoring (TPM) – First phase.
6. **Nov 2019:** Handover of first completed projects.
7. **Nov-Dec 2019**: Fuel crisis.
8. **Dec 2019-Mar 2020:** Large scale offensive, resulting in increased displacement.
9. **Jan-Mar 2020:** Additional assessments due to increased population in camps.
10. **Mar-Apr 2020**: Final monitoring and handover.

There are over 1,000 IDP sites in Northwest Syria, with most of them clustered close to the Turkish border.

CONTEXT

For more background information on the crisis and response in Northwest Syria (NWS) see A.22.

PROJECT APPROACH

In Northwest Syria (NWS) there are over 1,000 IDP sites, with most of them clustered close to the Turkish border. Many of these sites have been established in low-lying areas which were previously used for agriculture, thus posing significant seasonal flooding risks. Following continuous reports from both the CCCM and S/NFI Clusters on the high number of camps which were being flooded between 2018 and 2019, the CCCM Cluster provided a comprehensive needs assessment of flooded sites. In February 2019, the CCCM Cluster reported that at least 28 IDP sites in Aleppo Governorate and 171 sites in Idleb Governorate experienced flooding in the winter of 2018-2019. The main goal of the project was therefore to target a number of these camps with infrastructure upgrades or rehabilitation of roads, drainage channels and culverts, to mitigate flooding for the following winters.

As part of this larger goal, the intended outcomes of the project were to improve access for residents within the camps (particularly for the elderly and those who face physical mobility challenges), and also to improve access within the camps more generally (for humanitarian actors, livelihood opportunities, medical emergencies, etc.). Another aim of the project was also to improve overall health conditions for residents of these camps, as following on from flooding, stagnant water may remain present and can pose a hazard as it may become a breeding ground for mosquitoes, bacteria, and parasites. Another intended goal of the project was to improve the efficiency of the humanitarian response. With each flood, tents and NFI kits are flooded and must be replaced prior to the fulfillment of their lifespan. With such large-scale needs in NWS, this is an inefficient use of resources.

Due to access constraints, the project was managed remotely by the organization from Gazientep, Turkey.

SITE IDENTIFICATION

Following the needs assessment conducted by the CCCM Cluster, the organization proceeded with site identification. Once the project was already underway, as a result of almost one million newly displaced people arriving in NWS, the needs for camp infrastructure upgrades increased further. The project was therefore adapted from its original scope to expand and target a larger number of camps. A total of 42 camps were targeted.

INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Working with Implementing Partners (IPs), who had staff both in Gaziantep (Turkey) and in the field locations in NWS, technical assessments and topography studies were carried out to develop BoQs specific to each site. The IPs selected eight contractors to carry out the infrastructure works. The tender process for these contractors was observed by the organization's programs and compliance teams.

The project was in essence a Shelter, WASH and DRR project. A variety of interventions were carried out based on the needs and technical assessments of each camp. These included constructing open and closed drainage systems, sewage systems, culverts, roads, and raising tents 20cm off the ground through graveling. In camps where there was existing infrastructure, the project focused on infrastructure rehabilitation and providing supportive structures. Additionally, to complement the camp infrastructure upgrades, the organization also installed emergency latrines in several of the camps where needed. Coordination also took place with the Early Recovery and Livelihoods (ER/L) Cluster to construct roads leading to several of the camps from the nearest towns and cities.

In the design phase there was some consideration of how infrastructure could be removed once the IDPs leave the sites. Plastic sheeting was placed under the drainage canals for example, to ensure that they are removable and to not harm agricultural land and soil.

Many self-settled IDP sites have been built in low-lying areas that are at risk from seasonal flooding.

Nearly 200 IDP sites in Aleppo and Idleb Governorates reported having experienced flooding In the winter of 2018-19.

HLP DUE DILIGENCE

Through community verification, triangulation of documentation, and coordination with local authorities, HLP Due Diligence took place in all 42 camps. In cases where land rights could not be comprehensively verified, technical designs were amended to ensure land was not altered where verification could not be secured.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There were multiple rounds of discussions with residents and local leaders within the camp to identify the priority infrastructure issues within each camp. Prior to and throughout the project, both IPs mobilized community engagement teams (composed of an equal number of male and female mobilizers) to sensitize the communities living in the camps. This included distributing flyers which explained the scope, duration, and purpose of the project. Additionally, both IPs provided multiple feedback and complaints mechanisms – including in-person interviews, feedback boxes, and a dedicated phone number and e-mail address for feedback. Feedback received directed IPs to more specific needs of IDPs in the camps, such as tents requiring ground insulation. In other cases where the IPs received requests for assistance such as NFI items, they were able to coordinate with other partners distributing these items. Throughout the project, the IPs coordinated with residents of the camps to ensure they were not disturbed by the infrastructure works taking place. Moreover, all infrastructure works took place around the existing tents/makeshift shelters, to ensure the residents did not need to move.

REMOTE MONITORING

As the project was implemented remotely, a variety of monitoring modalities were used. Firstly, the IPs monitored the contractors directly in the field, while the organization also arranged for weekly visits by engineers through Third-Party Monitoring (TPM). Additionally, the organization's M&E team used TPM to conduct visits to ensure quality of works. Lastly, the organization's donor used TPM to conduct an additional layer of verification. As a result, the project was monitored by four separate actors, and at different stages of implementation. Additionally, throughout the project, the organization relied on photographs and videos sent by the Implementing Partners, to monitor progress in the sites.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

In its design, the project is a Disaster Risk Reduction project. Due to the topography and slopes of the informal camps targeted, as well as experience of previous winters, the threat of flooding was almost certain. IDPs living in these sites living either in tents or self-built concrete units, are highly exposed to the impacts of flooding. Floods result in the destruction of tent, NFIs, and severe damage to concrete units. Therefore, rather than continue the cycle of disaster > response > dependency > repeat, the project mitigated the threat of flooding and the subsequent disaster response required.

LINKS WITH SITE MANAGEMENT

Following the camp infrastructure upgrades, through coordination with the CCCM Cluster, Site Management Support (SMS) teams worked to build up the capacity of local camp management and provided support through developing committees in the sites. The SMS teams also supported through the installation of fire extinguishers and filling other CCCM gaps where identified.

Following the interventions, the organization handed over to the local camp management structures, providing information on the required care and maintenance. Additionally, other humanitarian actors who have since been providing other services in the camps, have also been supporting the local camp management structures in the cleaning, care and maintenance of the infrastructure, considering the costs are very low.

Implementing Partners coordinated with site residents to try to minimize disturbance during site works.

As the project was managed remotely from Gaziantep (Turkey) a range of approaches were used for remote monitoring of site works.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Remote management and remote monitoring. Due to access constraints, the organization managed and monitored activities from Gazientep, Turkey, working with IPs and Third Party Monitoring.

Large-scale displacement during the project. During the project, nearly 1 million people were newly displaced in NWS. This resulted in safety concerns for the staff of the IPs, as well as a high pressure to provide a timely response to newly displaced IDPs. The organization was able to utilize savings from various budget lines and other projects to cover the additional needs and target a higher number of sites than originally intended, expanding the scope of the project to adapt to the increased needs. Additionally, the organization conducted daily security analyses for the accessibility and safety of all IP staff in the field.

Risk of overlaps in target locations. As a result of new displacements, self-settled informal IDP sites were established which did not yet have unique coding. This created a risk of overlap between the interventions of humanitarian actors. The organization worked in close coordination with the Shelter/NFI and CCCM Clusters to ensure that there were no overlaps in targeted locations.

Rising fuel prices. In November 2019, fuel prices in NWS had almost doubled since the previous month. Consequently, contractors identified by the IPs requested higher prices than originally agreed and stopped the provisions of several services.

In response, the organization and the IPs monitored the market fuel prices weekly to adapt to the changes. New tenders were announced, and IPs identified new contractors with agreed prices. As a result, there were several delays in the project, however the organization was able to complete all the works in the targeted sites.

Large-scale loss of HLP documentation. One result of the conflict in Syria has been a large-scale loss or destruction of HLP documentation. A study by another organization found that two thirds of respondents with previous housing documentation reported that it had been left behind or had been destroyed or lost. This posed a challenge to carrying out HLP Due Diligence.

The organization triangulated documentation through community assessment checks and coordination with local authorities. In cases where HLP could not be established, technical designs were also adapted to ensure that no infrastructure was constructed on land where HLP could not be verified.

Storm drainage channels were a key site improvement intervention to mitigate the risk of flooding.

A variety of interventions were carried out based on the needs and technical assessments of each camp. These included constructing open and closed drainage systems, sewage systems, culverts, roads, and raising tents 20cm off the ground through graveling.

OUTCOMES AND WIDER IMPACTS

Mitigation of flood risk in 42 camps. This prevented over 20,000 tents and self-built concrete units from being flooded and improved the living conditions in these camps. This was observed in the 2020-2021 winter season, where the IPs visited the sites which had received upgrades and observed that the infrastructure was still working, and roads and tents had not been flooded. Without flooding and an improved drainage and sewage systems, the health and sanitation conditions of residents in the camps was significantly improved.

Improved mobility for camp residents. In the event of flooding many residents would face access issues to nearby markets, towns, health centers, and livelihood opportunities. Moreover, elderly camp residents and people with physical disabilities would face additional challenges in being able to leave their tent or makeshift shelter. The impact of mitigating flooding and improving access therefore had a wide impact.

Improved access for humanitarian actors to and inside the camps. Prior to the intervention, flooding had resulted in humanitarian actors not being able to reach or move around the sites, often leading to the suspension of activities and distribution of aid. Following the interventions, actors providing protection services for example (psychosocial support, GBV awareness raising etc.) were able to continue with outreach services, rather than having to suspend activities due to flooding and blocked access.

Impacts on local markets and livelihoods. All materials were procured locally inside Syria as they were all available. This had a positive impact on the local economy of NWS as it provided a boost to local markets and created employment opportunities for daily workers.

Interventions improved access and mobility for site residents within sites and also improved humanitarian actors' ability to access sites, many of which had not been able to reach during previous floods.

Supporting IDPs where they are. Experience has shown that despite camps being flooded on an annual basis, many residents continue to live there and do not want to be relocated due to numerous reasons (disrupting livelihood opportunities, losing access to services, being separated from family/friends etc.). This intervention was able to therefore directly positively impact people's lives without relocating IDPs out of their existing locations.

Setting a precedent. As the project was successful and resulted in a high level of resident satisfaction, it has provided a model for the S/NFI Cluster, who made site infrastructure upgrades a key priority for mid-term interventions in NWS.

The project provided a model for how large scale infrastructure upgrades could take place across other sites in the future.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

√ **Large-scale impact of project.** By addressing flood risk and undertaking site improvements, the project was strategic in selecting interventions that would have large-scale impacts in improving the living environments of IDPs across 42 camps.

√ **Strong remote monitoring mechanisms.** Despite the challenges posed by access constraints and remote management, strong remote monitoring mechanisms were put in place through IPs and through Third Party Monitoring.

√ **Strong technical capacity.** Both the organization and the IPs have strong in-house technical expertise which includes site planners, architects, and engineers, enabling the project to be designed and implemented on a large scale.

√ **Flexibility in adjusting the project in a changing context.** The project successfully adapted to address challenges created by the changing context – for example through expanding the reach of the project following new mass-displacements, and adjusting to the step rise in fuel costs.

WEAKNESSES

× **Uncertainty about care and maintenance of infrastructure upgrades.** As the camps are self-settled, there is an absence of 'formal' camp management. Without 'formal' camp management, the risk of leaving the infrastructure without formal/funded facility management remains high. Consequently, care and maintenance of the infrastructure remains somewhat reliant on other humanitarian actors that are providing services in the camps.

× **Drawbacks of remote management.** Despite having multiple layers of monitoring and verification, the project was still implemented through a remote management modality. As a result, it was difficult for the organization to know what was happening on the ground all the time, as well as ensuring the works were being conducted to a high quality.

× **Wider site planning needs remain.** The project was able to support in supplementary infrastructure works to reduce the chance of flooding in sites, however the project was not able to carry out more holistic site planning improvements to the extent desired.

Before: An informal camp pre-flood mitigation intervention.

After: An informal camp, post-flood mitigation intervention.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Consider also using resources for planning and establishing new sites.** Existing sites in NWS are heavily overcrowded due to lack of available land, often face flood risk and face HLP issues. In addition to supporting upgrading of existing sites and site extensions (where feasible), consideration could be given to establishing new sites for newly displaced populations and for IDPs wanting to relocate from existing sites.
- **Inclusion of sewage networks.** It was noticed that residents connected their sewage to the drainage channels due to a lack of sanitation infrastructure. The organization has therefore integrated the construction of sewage networks into a subsequent project.
- **Piloting of rainwater catchment.** Future site improvement projects could benefit from piloting rainwater catchment approaches to reduce reliance on unsustainable water trucking and link to nearby agricultural projects.
- **Seasonal challenges.** As possible it is best to ensure that project implementation does not take place during winter, as it is challenging to implement the project with heavy rains, mud, and poor weather conditions.