

CASE STUDY

# HONDURAS 2020-2021 / HURRICANES ETA AND IOTA

KEYWORDS: Emergency shelter, Training, Transitional shelter, Wider impacts

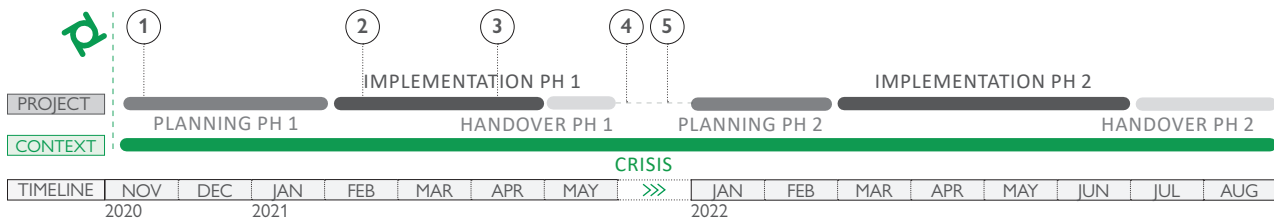
<b>CRISIS</b>	<b>Hurricanes Eta and Iota</b>
<b>PEOPLE AFFECTED</b>	<b>4 million+ people*</b>
<b>HOMES DAMAGED/ DESTROYED</b>	<b>82,307 homes</b> damaged** <b>9,315 homes</b> completely destroyed**
<b>PEOPLE WITH SHELTER NEEDS</b>	<b>88,000 people</b> in need of temporary shelter** <b>35,000 people</b> in need of house repairs**
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>	Departments of Atlántida, Colón, Copán Cortés, Gracias a Dios, Santa Barbara, y Yoro. (24 municipalities in total)
<b>PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT</b>	<b>3,208 HHs</b> (14,264 individuals)
<b>PROJECT OUTPUTS</b>	<p><b>Emergency Phase and Early Recovery:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>3,208 HHs</b> recived <b>Emergency Shelter Kits</b></li> <li>- Provision of <b>Shelter Kit training</b> at household and community levels to support repairing local housing and building transitional shelters with local materials through a self-recovery approach</li> <li>- <b>Build Back Safer training</b> and support to target households</li> </ul> <p><b>Reconstruction phase:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Resettlement of <b>26 HHs</b>, to evolve from a temporary shelter to permanent housing</li> </ul>
<b>SHELTER SIZE</b>	<b>Temporary shelters</b> were <b>18m<sup>2</sup></b> (3 x 6m) or <b>12 m<sup>2</sup></b> (3 x 4m) depending on resources available.
<b>SHELTER DENSITY</b>	<b>3.6 m<sup>2</sup></b> per person (average of 5 persons per HH)
<b>DIRECT COST</b>	<b>USD 130.50</b> per HH
<b>PROJECT COST</b>	<b>USD 218.20</b> per HH



**PROJECT SUMMARY**

This project is part of a coordinated regional intervention in Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, led by three national entities of a global housing network, which worked in each country in partnership with the governments, and other local and international organizations. In Honduras, the housing agency partnered with an international NGO specializing in emergency shelter, a local branch of a civil society entity, and some local government agencies (municipalities). With this support, the project participants with damaged homes carried out housing repairs and extensions. Others whose houses were destroyed received support for their reconstruction processes through emergency and transitional shelter; and some of the most vulnerable with core housing.

\*Weekly Situation Update, LAC, OCHA, Nov 2020.  
\*\*Factsheet, Honduras Hurricanes Eta and Iota, Global Shelter Cluster, Dec 2021.



- Nov 2020:** Hurricane Eta (Cat 4) and Iota (Cat 5) caused severe damage in Central America and the Caribbean.
- ① **Nov 2020:** Agreement signed between the three partners.
- ② **Feb 2021:** Arrival of the kits to San Pedro Sula from Panama.
- ③ **Apr 2021:** Distribution of emergency shelter materials completed.
- ④ **Jun 2021:** Relocation project completed.
- ⑤ **Jul 2021:** Envisioning a resettlement project.



Hurricane victims take refuge under a bridge in San Pedro Sula, Honduras.

## CONTEXT

Honduras is the second largest country in Central America, with a population of more than 9.4 million as of 2021. According to the National Institute of Statistics (INE) as of 2020, 48 percent of its population is male, and 52 percent is female. The urban population is comprised of 5,157,115 (55 percent) inhabitants. The economically active population represents 43.8 percent of the working-age population, of which 23.4 percent is employed in agriculture, 18.7 percent in commerce, and 16.2 percent in industry. Financially, Honduras remains one of the poorest and most unequal countries in the Western Hemisphere.

Honduras is also a country vulnerable to various hazards, which generated 82 hazards between 1970 and 2019 – of which, 67 had hydrometeorological or climatic causes. The disasters generated by hurricanes Fifi in 1974 and Mitch in 1998, which caused 8,000 and 14,000 deaths respectively, stand out. Storms have become increasingly frequent in the country. Between the two hurricanes, there were six storms, and between Hurricane Mitch (1998) and Tropical Storm Eta and Hurricane Iota (both occurring in November 2020), there were 11 tropical storms. Before the two 2020 impacts, 25.2 percent of the Honduran population lived in extreme poverty and almost half (4.4 million people) lived in poverty, according to official poverty lines.

### SITUATION BEFORE THE CRISIS

The housing deficit in Honduras reached a total value of 1,366,691 housing units, of which 522,076 are new homes and 844,615 are improvements. About 11.5 percent of households do not have access to potable water, and 23 percent of homes have earthen floors.

Approximately 11.5 percent of the population in the Sula Valley Region resides in irregular settlements. Most of these irregular or informal settlements are in areas of the city without infrastructure (peripheries), on riverbanks, on the sides of old railroad tracks where train companies have not operated for decades, or in other areas at risk of flooding and landslides. These communities lack access to basic services such as water, energy, and sanitation. Poor socioeconomic conditions compound the disaster risk in the area.

### SITUATION DURING/AFTER THE CRISIS

Tropical Storm Eta and Hurricane Iota affected at least 5 percent of the country's 1.8 million housing units. The most affected departments were those in the Sula Valley: Copán, Cortés, Olancho, and Yoro. These departments represent 37 percent of all occupied housing units nationwide but experienced 82 percent of the damage and destruction of homes with a total of 27,856 homes affected.

Over 71,000 individuals (among which 11,700 children) were displaced and accommodated in collective emergency shelters. A total of 93 schools, churches, and other buildings were used for this purpose.

Despite the efforts of communities, governments and NGOs, there was not enough space in evacuation centers for all displaced people following minimum standards of habitability. The lack of alternative temporary solutions (rental or hosting families), or available safe spaces for vulnerable population groups (pregnant women, nursing mothers, infants, children, etc.) exacerbated the overcrowding of the emergency shelters available, increasing the risk of gender-based violence and the spread of COVID-19 and seasonal diseases, such as dengue, chikungunya, and zika.



Survey reports suggested that shelters faced challenges in implementing COVID-19 prevention measures and lacked access to water and sanitation, waste storage, power, non-food items (NFI), food kits, etc.

### NATIONAL SHELTER STRATEGY

The damage and needs assessments were conducted by the Office of Risk Management and National Contingencies of the Government (COPECO) with support from the Honduran Red Cross and other agencies of the Humanitarian Network (led by OCHA). In coordination with local and national institutions and authorities, and within the framework of national and municipal strategic plans, the shelter and settlements technical working group proposed the following response strategic lines:

- Support for the safe and dignified return of affected communities, with housing solutions designed for the short, medium, and long term.
- Support for interventions with a territorial approach, rehabilitation of infrastructure and community facilities in settlements, paying particular attention to the conditions of people with special needs and in circumstances of vulnerability due to gender, age, disability, etc.
- Identification of housing solutions to meet the population's needs in uninhabitable (unfit and high-risk) areas, considering context situations and special needs of groups with high levels of vulnerability and special needs.



## PROJECT DESIGN/STRATEGY

The intervention's objective was to assist vulnerable households impacted by the Eta/Iota storms in the north and west of the country. During the emergency phase, they were provided with tarpaulins and tools to repair damaged houses or set up temporary shelters for displaced people. They also welcomed technical guidance. Families living in high-risk areas who requested relocation to safer places received support in the recovery phase through transitional shelters that later became permanent.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The project focused on:

- The distribution of 3,208 emergency shelter kits (comprised of tarpaulins and basic tools) and household items such as solar lamps, mosquito nets, kitchen sets, water filters, and rugs.
- Shelter kit training was provided at the household and community levels. The training was carried out by the technical staff of the national housing entity (who were previously trained virtually by its partner international emergency shelter NGO), which included information on the proper use of shelter kits and Build Back Better and Safer messaging.
- Building materials (timber and roof sheeting) were distributed to 130 households in the areas of greatest vulnerability and impact of the storms.
- Training and technical advice to support self-recovery was conducted for families and masons (the Municipal Emergency Committee, or CODEM) who accompanied families to help repair homes or build temporary shelters.
- The relocation of 26 households to safer areas with

basic services was conducted. Two municipalities offered land for families who were living in damaged homes in high flood-risk areas. From the planning of these new settlements, coordinated with the government housing institution (Comisión Nacional de Vivienda y Asentamientos Humanos de Honduras "CONVIVIENDA") and local municipalities, permanent homes were considered. First, transitional shelters were set up which had concrete foundations and the footprint of a future permanent home, tarps for walling, and Aluzinc sheets for roofing (plus a timber frame). The families lived in their temporary shelters for approximately one year, the time needed to get all the preparations for permanent homes, including financing. Then, families moved their temporary shelters to the back of their plots and participated in constructing permanent dwellings, with an area of 36 m<sup>2</sup> covered space.

## TARGETING

Target communities were selected with the support of local governments, following the criteria of greatest need for temporary housing. A technical team visited all selected communities to collect data that informed the assignment of the type of shelter kits. In target communities, leaders were contacted to identify households in the most precarious and affected conditions, considering the following vulnerability criteria: social-economic vulnerability, age, marital status, and gender.

Additionally, the selection of households was based on need and shelter kit potential and adequate use, so that participants could either properly repair, adapt and rebuild their homes or build a temporary shelter in a safe and secure manner and location. Selected communities were clustered in villages or settlements. However, due to individual choice, level of damage, and family social-economic



(Left) Old man carrying a distributed shelter tool kit, March 2020.



(Right) A woman and her son carrying distributed shelter and household non-food items, March 2020.



A view of transitional housing built in a resettlement site. Trainings at household and community levels enabled self-recovery of the targeted population. June 2020.

their homes or build a temporary shelter in a safe and secure manner and location. Selected communities were clustered in villages or settlements. However, due to individual choice, level of damage, and family social-economic conditions, some internally displaced households moved from collective centers back to their damaged homes.

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Community leaders coordinated and participated in the selection of participants, the mobilization of the targeted population, and in the distribution of kits. The approach applied was mainly community visits, which were adjusted for each of the municipalities, in which measures to prevent the spread of COVID 19 were considered.
- Prior to shelter kit distribution, selected community members were trained and replicated the training further in their communities.
- Direct communication with the affected community took place during training sessions and when kits were delivered. Indirect communication was also carried out through community leaders who socialized in more detail with each of the participant families.

### COORDINATION

Project partners actively participated in the activities of the Emergency Shelter Coordination Board, which was key to reaching those in need and avoiding duplication of attention to communities. In each municipality, work was coordinated with the relevant Municipal Emergency Committee (CODEM), who previously received support

from the government and other NGOs and supported the mitigation of activity duplication. In some municipalities, coordination with other NGOs took place, also led by CODEM which enhanced the response further through integrating WASH Solutions, hygiene kits, shelter kits, food, water, and other NFIs.

### MAIN CHALLENGES

- No significant disasters occurred in the country in recent years, and the housing national organization had no longer staff with experience in humanitarian response efforts.
- Project planning took longer than anticipated, and implementation began months after the impact of the storms. The shipment of goods could not proceed until all parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding.
- The project faced challenges in transferring disaster response knowledge to local municipalities (i.e., in some cases, local authorities built 12m<sup>2</sup> shelters that did not meet Sphere minimal standards).
- Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, local and national authorities had insufficient funds to respond to the storm disaster, and there were restrictions on staff movement and the implementation of community activities during the response period.
- Lack of sufficient funding for sustainable reconstruction phase due to the institutional context of the country.



## LINKS WITH RECOVERY

The intervention followed the global housing network-designed approach, which aims to place affected families on a path that enables incremental progress toward achieving permanent and durable housing and settlements solutions. This focuses as much on the process of sheltering and risk reduction as it does on the factors that may support it. Thus, the activities implemented responded to priority short, medium, and long-term shelter needs to enable households to recover.

## MATERIAL AND SUPPLY

- The shelter kits were brought by truck from Panama, where the international NGO specialized in shelter-prepositioned material in a regional warehouse.
- Roofing metal sheets and timber were purchased locally.

## OUTCOMES AND WIDER IMPACTS

- The response to this disaster was a learning process for the national housing organization, which prepared the organization better to respond to future humanitarian crises.
- The project was also fundamental in advocacy on land tenure, response capacity, risk reduction, affordable and proper housing conditions for the most vulnerable people, as well as with the national government institution CONVIVIENDA, to make possible the two resettlement projects that began with temporary shelters and transitioned to permanent homes.
- This response project involved several municipal governments and NGOs, collaborating with distributions and transportation in a coordinated and effective manner which set up a positive basis for any future response needed.



A view of the permanent dwellings built in a resettlement area. Following the global housing network-designed approach, progressively allowed to relocate affected families from flood-prone areas to safer plots.

## STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

### STRENGTHS

- √ **Effective collaboration among partners increased programme synergies.** The national housing organization led the response at both the programmatic and implementation levels, with technical and financial support from the network. The international emergency shelter NGO provided shelter kits and expertise in this activity. The civil society local branch provided the availability of facilities, volunteers, and relevant contacts within target municipalities.
- √ **The international NGO specialized in emergency shelter** focused on the initial response, while the **housing national entity developed strategies** and built relations to facilitate the process to long-term housing and settlement solutions.

### WEAKNESSES

- × **This was the first humanitarian response by the housing network national entity in many years.** Thus, its current staff lacked humanitarian expertise. After this experience, the organization has been positioned in the national humanitarian network as an actor with knowledge and experience in housing solutions, which also permitted the organization to be part of the Honduran WASH Cluster and work on other responses after Eta and Iota.
- × **The delivery of the goods was delayed** due to inefficiencies in the logistics management processes, resulting in slower-than-expected shipments.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- Partnerships at various levels during implementation reduced costs and intervention times. Building alliances with social organizations working in the affected reduced logistics costs, as they may provide information on pre-existing needs and the relief distribution system.
- A prior socialized and signed MOU could help earlier project implementation.
- Local volunteer support was beneficial for the response (a group of approximately 40 people collaborated in the storage center to receive, unpack, assemble, or group and load the kits that were being dispatched to the communities).
- Prepositioning the shelter kits in Panamá anticipated the supply shortage that occurred a few months later for some items, such as tools and water filters.
- The involvement of participant families is crucial as it generates long term sustainability.

### RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD

- Where project teams consist of multiple organizations and individual volunteers, a process of induction should be considered for ensuring the commitment of all the partners in meeting humanitarian minimum standards.
- For further replication of the activities, additional training for implementing teams to conduct distributions would be recommended, as well as training for partners and participants on how the shelters should be better located.
- Provide letters of guidance to local government that include clauses relating to the prohibition of politicization of aid. Further to this, the project team found that the more communities and civil society partnerships involved, the less likely distributions will be used as political tools.
- Logistics issues:
  - i. It would be worth tracking the full shipment of emergency shelter kits at the same time since this is a much cheaper option – if warehouse capacity is available to receive.
  - ii. Logistics scoping should incorporate diminished capacities of warehousing facilities due to COVID 19 mitigation.
  - iii. Deploying international teams (particularly logistics specialists) would have added additional capacity and should be considered where COVID 19 mitigation restrictions allow.



### FURTHER READING ON SHELTER PROJECTS

**On Honduras:** C.1 / HONDURAS 1998; C.8 / HONDURAS 1974

**On transitional shelter:** A.7 / FIJI 2012; A.27 / TANZANIA 2016–2017; A.28 / GAZA (PALESTINE) 2014–2016