

## A.2 Eritrea - 1998 onwards - Conflict

### Camp upgrades

#### Project type:

- Non-food item distribution
- Camp support programme
- Fuel-efficient stove project

#### Disaster:

IDPs in camps in Eritrea following Eritrea/ Ethiopia conflict

#### No. of houses damaged/people displaced:

- Around 1 million people displaced in 2001
- An estimated 100,000 homes destroyed in the war

#### Project target population:

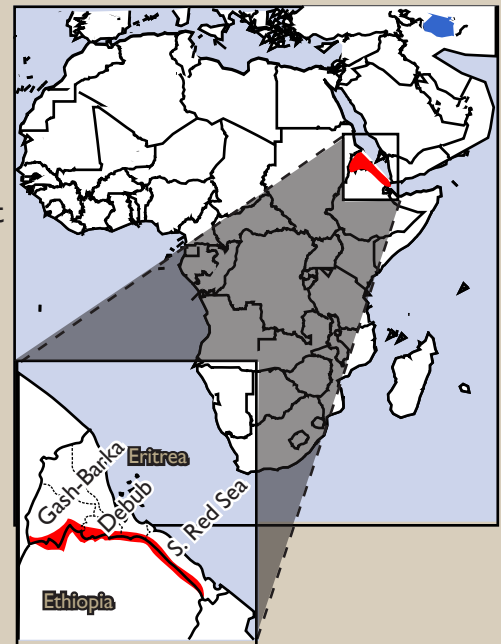
- Target population varied over time
- Camp population in the Gash-Barka, Debub and Red Sea states regions stabilised to 60,000 people by 2001

#### Occupancy rate on handover:

Occupancy of camps varied over time

#### Shelter size

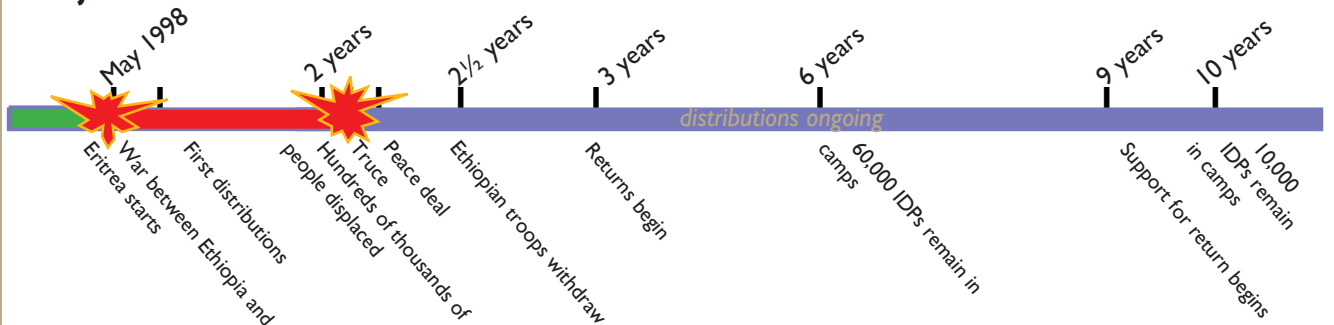
Tents provided 16m<sup>2</sup> of covered space. Some families had modified their shelters to provide up to 40m<sup>2</sup> for larger families.



### Summary

Support for a variable population of Eritrean IDPs following the conflict with Ethiopia. The agency in this case study was the main provider of shelter and non-food item (NFI) assistance. They provided IDPs with tents, tarpaulins and other non-food items (such as stoves) to those living in camps in the Gash-Barka, Debub and Red Sea states. The provision of durable shelter items was not possible due to political interests in ensuring that the camps were temporary. As a result, IDPs often adapted the emergency shelter items they received in order to improve their living conditions.

### Project timeline



### Strengths and weaknesses

- X Camp residents were ready to invest time and capital into the improvement of their 'temporary' shelters.
- X Distributions of tents and plastic sheeting were sufficient to ensure a basic minimum of covered space for IDPs.
- X Fuel-efficient stove distribution reduced deforestation problems.
- IDPs created shelters that looked more like the homes that they had been displaced from than the tents that they had been given.
- W Shelter options were limited by camps having to remain

'temporary', as authorities wished to avoid making the camps permanent.

W The inability to use more durable shelter materials that could have been reused by IDPs meant that emergency funds were used to replace worn-out shelters.

W Initial fuelwood consumption was so high that it caused deforestation in the local area and led to conflict over fuelwood with the local population.

W Although IDPs used their own initiative to upgrade their shelters, the designs required cutting down larger trees in an unmanaged way in order to obtain high quality timber.



Traditional hudno house with earthen roof



Over 60,000 people were living in tent camps six years after the outbreak of conflict.

### Situation before emergency

Eritrea is one of the poorest countries in the world, with more than 50% of its population living below the national poverty line of \$1/day. In the conflict-affected areas, people lived mainly in soil-block homes, in stone-constructed homes with heavy earthen roofs or in lighter-weight thatched round huts.

After Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia in 1993 the border between the two countries was disputed. In May 1998 the dispute escalated into war, displacing thousands from their homes in the disputed areas.

### After the emergency

As a result of the fighting, thousands of people left the disputed border area. Both countries also deported around 70,000 citizens. Settlements, including about 20 designated camps, were formed in the states of Gash-Barka, Debub and Red Sea. These were intended to be temporary and to house no more than 20,000 people on each site. Other people stayed with family members or rented accommodation. Many IDPs attempted to continue agricultural activities on their land while remaining displaced.

By June 2000 as many as 1 million people were displaced within Eritrea, though this figure fell sharply later that year to around 200,000 people in camps and 100,000 outside of camps.

Six years after the outbreak of the conflict, around 60,000 IDPs remained displaced. These people were either from disputed border areas, from the Ethiopian side of the border or had been prevented from returning to their land as a result of landmines.

Ten years after the outbreak of conflict 10,000 people remain displaced.

### Technical solutions

The official policy was that camps were temporary and that the displaced population would be returning home soon after the peace treaty. This meant that organisations were discouraged from providing more durable shelter solutions. However, the slow diplomatic resolution of the border demarcation and the need to properly demine return areas meant that ten years after their initial displacement some IDPs remained in camps and received only emergency shelter items.

Tents and plastic sheeting formed the core of the shelter response. Due to the short lifespan of such materials, many tents that had rotted, blown away or caught fire had to be replaced during the period of displacement.

There were trials with other materials. In 2001 the organisation distributed palm leaves for the repair of over 1,000 traditional homes in and around Barentu, in the Gash-Barka region. These were very bulky to transport. In 2004, woven mats were produced for one camp to provide a more traditional shelter material, but this was not extended to other camps.

With IDPs living in camps for much longer than expected, additional pressure was placed on natural resources in the area. IDPs and the host community were soon competing for scarce firewood and large areas of land near the camps were deforested.



Palm leaves were distributed to 1,000 families.

In 2002, the organisation began the distribution of fuel-efficient stoves and kerosene stoves, significantly decreasing the demand for fuel wood by IDPs.



Firewood collection led to serious conflict with the host community. Because traditional stoves were not very efficient, an improved stoves project was set up.

### Implementation

Distributions of shelter items were made in coordination with the governmental Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission.

After a mass distribution of 15,254 tents in 2000 when the total population in camps reached around 150,000 people, all camp residents were assessed as having their basic shelter needs met.

However, nearly 4,000 replacement tents were required between 2003 and 2007. This redistribution of basic emergency shelter items was enough to rehouse nearly half of the total camp population of around 63,000 people. Considerable quantities of plastic tarpaulins were also distributed, although as some of these were distributed to returnees an exact figure for camp residents is difficult to obtain.

The table shows the distribution of tents and tarpaulins. UN agencies and other NGOs were also supporting IDPs with emergency shelter items in the early period of displacement, but by 2002 the agency was responsible for shelter provision in the camps.

Year	Number of IDPs	Tents distributed	Plastic tarpaulins distributed
1999	30,000	4,207	2,000
2000	150,000	15,254	
2001	65,000		
2002	63,000		
2003	63,000	3,406	11,471
2004	63,000	6	20,547
2005	46,500		No figures (approx. 5,000 to returnees)
2006			
2007	10,000		No figures (approx 30,000 to returnees)
Total		Minimum of 22,873	Minimum of 34,018

\* Where there is no data, cells are left blank.



People adapted their tents in many ways.

### Adaptations by IDPs

An assessment made in 2002 revealed that many beneficiaries had made significant modifications to their shelters for two main reasons: emergency shelter items provided too little covered space and had too short a lifespan.

#### a) Space

The standard relief tent provides only 16m<sup>2</sup> of covered space (enough for a family of four people with 3.5m<sup>2</sup> per person) and many large families felt that they were living in overcrowded conditions. By modifying their shelters some IDPs managed to increase their covered floor space to around 40m<sup>2</sup> and to also ensure that they could stand up in them, something only possible in the middle of the tents.

While a standard ridge tent may have walls of 80cm in height when erected with long guy ropes, tents in the camp were pitched with shorter ropes in order to save rope for other

uses and to decrease the footprint of the tent. Shortening the guy ropes meant that the wall height shrunk to around 30cm, reducing the internal volume of the tent considerably.



People upgraded their tents using local materials to provide more head room.

#### b) Quality of materials

Weather conditions in this part of Eritrea included extreme heat during the day, cold at night, considerable dust and strong winds. Not all the shelter materials distributed were of the right specification to deal with these conditions. Tent canvas lifespan varied from four years to just six months. This variation can be explained by different shipments, with some tents provided from emergency stocks, some ordered new and some donated. Some canvas samples could be torn by hand after less than a year. Plastic sheeting often ripped in the wind, partly due to poor fixing techniques and a lack of suitable rope.

Many of the camp residents in the Gash-Barka region had previously lived in houses called hudnos. These houses had heavy roofs and thick walls, which kept interiors cool during the hot day and warm during the night.

The roof of a hudno uses a lot of wood - the roof frame is covered by more wood with a layer of mud on top. The walls are generally made of stone, often using mud as mortar.



A fly sheet separated from an inner tent and covered with plastic is used to form an extension. Sticks were used to raise the sides to increase the internal volume.

Though the high consumption of wood and the impossibility of transporting stone ruled out hudno construction in the camps, many people adapted their temporary shelters to look and act more like the homes from which they had been displaced. Camp residents in Gash-Barka made the following modifications:

**Structure:** IDPs extended the height and floor space of their shelters by building large wooden frames and hanging tents and other material over the top.

The wooden frame was constructed from logs up to three metres long. The logs were cut down locally or purchased by the IDPs themselves. The frames were not particularly efficient in the use of timber, consuming around 200kg of wood for a family shelter with considerable structural redundancy.

**Roofing:** Layers of tent canvas, plastic sheeting, grain sacks and straw mats were used as roofing materials. For those IDPs who did not possess a tent, plastic sheeting was used as an outer layer with other available materials placed over the top to prevent plastic sheeting from degrading in strong sunlight.

**Walls:** External walls were made of the same material as the roofing. Inside the shelters, a 'wall' around 20cm high was built up around the edge using donkey dung or mud. The walls were used as benches or beds and also provided some protection against rain.

**Partitions:** Partitioned interior space was created by hanging material over timber frames. Some families also created separate areas for storing straw for animal feed.