

A.5 Liberia- 2007- IDPs, refugees

Self-build shelters

Project type:

Community mobilisation
Self-build shelters
Materials distribution
Cash payment for materials and labour
Technical support for improved design

Emergency:

Liberian returnees, 2007

No. of houses damaged/people displaced:

A 2005 needs assessment estimated 80% of the housing stock was damaged. In total, around 500,000 of Liberia's population of 3 million had been displaced by civil war.

Project target population:

500 individual shelters in Cape Mount, Bomi and Gbarpolu counties, benefitting 1,328 beneficiaries. Post-completion, a total of 1,782 people were living in the houses as family members and lodgers moved in.

Occupancy rate on handover:

100%

Shelter size

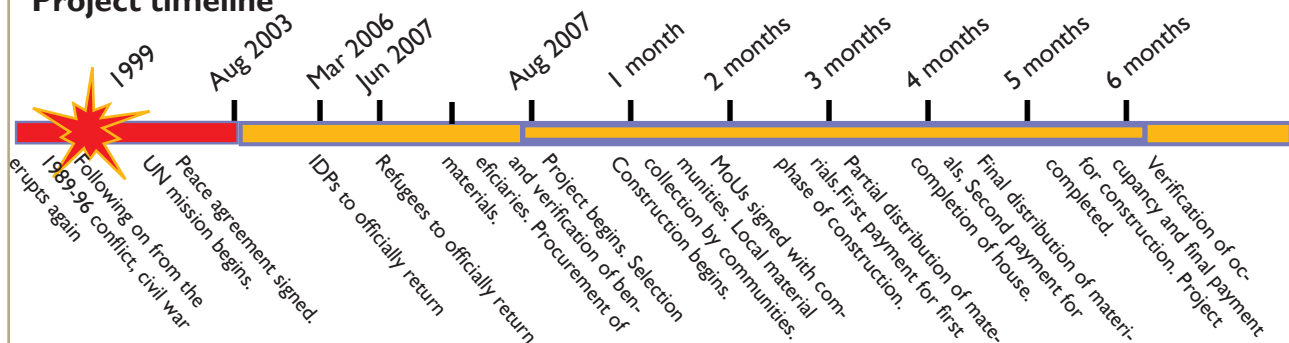
25m² (5m x 5m)



Summary

Shelter assistance to vulnerable returnees (IDPs and refugees). Building materials were provided and cash incentives were given to communities for construction. The agency provided technical support and close project monitoring in collaboration with the community.

Project timeline



Strengths and weaknesses

X Selecting beneficiaries in collaboration with the community ensured community cooperation.
X Close partnership with local authorities through several initial open meetings meant that what was and was not covered by the project was clearly understood.
X A good balance between community decision-making and quality control was achieved through close monitoring of the project by the agency. This helped to minimise corruption.

X Learning from previous projects, enough supervisors were employed to ensure that they had a face-to-face meeting with each beneficiary once a week.
X Paying for materials and labour only after the materials had been used in construction and the beneficiary had moved in ensured work was completed on time and that the right people benefited.
X Using a local design meant that local people knew what they wanted to build and how to build it.

Strengths and weaknesses (continued)

- The project ran alongside water and sanitation and education programs, which was necessary to ensure that people had access to the services they needed in order to resettle.
- The construction of shelters for vulnerable beneficiaries appeared to inspire other returnees to begin rebuilding spontaneously, as it created a positive atmosphere of recovery.
- The project was better suited to a rural context than an urban one, as community mobilisation was much easier in smaller villages where the benefits to the whole community

could be more clearly seen.

W Maintenance issues could have been considered further, with many beneficiaries asking for cement for flooring and walls.

W Technical supervision could have been more intensive from the beginning, as some construction work had to be rectified.

W Donor-driven partnerships with community-based organisations from previous projects had to be dropped due to corruption and a lack of community involvement.



Completed houses for returnees

Situation before emergency

After years of civil war, many of Liberia's 3 million inhabitants had been displaced within or outside of the country. Between 2004 and 2007, 327,000 IDPs were assisted in a returns process, leaving an estimated 23,000 in camps. Over 110,000 refugees returned at the same time. Around 90,000 Liberian refugees remain outside of Liberia, making the total figure of those displaced over half a million.

It is estimated that the number of people living on less than one dollar per day rose from 55% in 1997 to 80% in 2007. As well, the sanitation and nutrition conditions of the early 1990s had seriously deteriorated by 2004.

After the emergency

The vast majority of returnees did not have appropriate shelter when they returned, due to their houses being destroyed or simply deteriorating during the two civil wars.

In rural forested areas, building traditional shelters required families to collect materials and provide the labour to rebuild. While some support was provided for rebuilding (such as this project), most returnees' shelter

assistance did not extend beyond the standard repatriation package (sleeping mat, blanket, cooking kit, food and transportation) issued in the return-transit camp.

Selection of beneficiaries

Using the opportunity of a routine check of returnee names, the agency made notes of those living in overcrowded shelters and poor conditions before communities were aware of a proposed shelter programme. This eliminated the temptation for people to temporarily overcrowd their shelters on assessment day. By correlating this information with a joint UN/NGO monitoring project to establish vulnerability categories (including female-headed households, unaccompanied minors, the chronically ill and physically disabled) the agency was able to draw up a shortlist of potential beneficiaries.

The final selection of 500 beneficiaries was carried out by the agency, in collaboration with local authorities and community representatives, after several visits and open meetings. Three-way Memorandums of Understanding, describing the assistance

given and the criteria for beneficiary selection, were prepared and signed by beneficiaries, community leaders, and agency representatives.

Technical solutions

The traditional house design is a bush pole-framed, mud-walled construction with a thatched roof of grass or palm leaves. The project improved the design to include a corrugated iron roof, which reduced the need to maintain a thatch roof, and a stronger central pole to improve structural stability.

Many local houses do not have closable doors and windows, and walls and floors have to be frequently repaired after damage from the elements. As vulnerable beneficiaries were unlikely to be able to undertake much maintenance themselves, doors and windows were included in the build.

'I now have a good place to stay, and my family will come to stay with me in my new home'.

– Beneficiary



**'The project was a success because we were accountable, delivered what we said we would deliver and had constant discussion with the communities themselves. The communities understood that supporting vulnerable people was of benefit to everyone'.
- Project coordinator**

Photo: John Flomo

Traditional shelters under construction

The doors and windows originally produced by each local construction gang were found to be of inconsistent size and quality, so it was decided to prefabricate these components in the NGO's compound using skilled workers.

Implementation

Once beneficiaries had been selected and cooperation of the community was agreed upon through a series of open meetings, a skilled local carpenter was chosen to lead the construction of between one and three houses. The carpenter would also act as a community mobiliser to organise people to collect materials and provide labour for construction.

Progress was monitored by one of five shelter supervisors, all of whom had construction knowledge and skills. The supervisors were managed by a shelter coordinator and a project director.

Supervisors were expected to visit each beneficiary at least once a week. The coordinator usually visited sites four days a week. Such close and direct monitoring was a key reason for the project's success, as problems were identified and resolved quickly and the quality of building could be examined throughout the project. This enabled ongoing improvements to be made.

The NGO paid US\$ 40 for the materials collected to build the house

and US\$ 40 for the labour. This was not a salary, but an incentive. The community decided who would benefit from the money; normally it was used to pay for the food of those who provided labour.

The sum was large enough to be an incentive to get people involved, but small enough to prevent conflict over who benefited. The US\$ 40 for the materials was only paid once construction up to the roof was completed.

Payment of the final US\$ 40 was made upon occupancy rather than when the structure was completed. This was a lesson learned from previous projects, where payment had been made upon structural completion. The NGO was then unable to prevent occupancy of the structures by non-beneficiaries afterwards.

Shelter supervisors marked out the agreed 25m². A standard design was proposed for a two-room construction with a veranda. However, beneficiaries were free to alter this design according to their needs. The NGO felt it necessary to make further stipulations about central support poles, to ensure that the building was safe once the project was underway.

The project was completed on time with a 100% occupancy rate.

Land issues

The community allocated the land themselves. This was easy in rural

areas and small communities, where there was no pressure on land. In more densely populated communities (though not urban) land had a price. In these areas the NGO had to check the site selection as there was a temptation to allocate land to vulnerable beneficiaries that was inappropriate for building. This was solved through joint meetings with the local authorities and community representatives.

Logistics and materials

Materials were collected locally, apart from doors and windows. It was not thought that environmental damage would be caused by local collection. The total cost of materials for each shelter was US\$ 320 (US\$ 240 for imported materials, US\$ 40 for local materials bought from communities, and US\$ 40 for labour provided by the community).



Photo: Jake Zarins

Completed house

Materials	Quantity
3" nails	65 (0.3kg)
4" nails	28 (0.3kg)
Hammer	1
Zinc roofing sheets (0.66m x 2.4m)	2 bundles
Zinc nails	1.5 packets
Door and frame	2
Window and frame	2
Hinges	4 pairs
Nails	115 (0.3kg)
Hasp/staples	4 pairs
Window and door bolts	4 pieces
Roofing felt	1 piece
Materials collected locally:	
Central pole	1
Poles for frame	Around 160
Rafters (poles)	50
Bamboo/rope for ceiling mats	As required