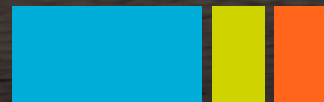




Habitat
for Humanity®

Disaster Resilience and Recovery Shelter Catalogue

Adopting New Approaches



Thank you

We are thankful to those within the Habitat for Humanity network and community who contributed content and submissions for this publication: Javier Cidón, Sujit Maharjan, Lubna Al Attiah, Jaime Mok, Chrispin Chavula, Lucy Mwase and Katharina Jazbec.

We are grateful to the following donors whose financial support made the work described within this publication possible: AARP, Aktion Deutschland Hilft, CERF/OCHA, ECHO, Financial Times Seasonal Appeal, Global Giving, government of Japan, government of China, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Hope and Healing, individual donors, KOICA, Migrantes Guatemaltecos, ShelterBox, Somfy Foundation, and Habitat-affiliated organizations working in countries and communities around the world.

A grateful recognition to Habitat's national organizations, affiliates and partners, particularly their field staff, who have always shown extreme dedication and commitment to working in challenging post-disaster environments, making all the work described here possible. Our gratitude also goes to the donors who facilitated these interventions. Finally, our thoughts go out to those families and communities who participated in these projects.

OVERALL SUPERVISION BY

Mario Flores

COMPILATION COORDINATED BY

Javier Cidón

EDITORIAL COORDINATION BY

Laura E. Peluso

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Kai A. Porter

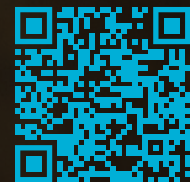
EDITOR

Adam Smith

ART DIRECTOR

Matt Stepp

Shelter
Catalogue
Collection



♥ In memory of **Ana Olaru**.

Foreword

In August 1992, hundreds of homes were obliterated by Hurricane Andrew in south Florida, USA. Significantly, 27 homes built by Habitat for Humanity in Dade County weathered the storm with window damage and water intrusion but no structural damage. This was the first encounter between Habitat for Humanity and a major disaster event. In 1998, Habitat started responding to disasters, beginning with hurricanes Mitch and Georges in Central America and the Caribbean. Since then, Habitat has responded to more than a hundred disaster events and has implemented dozens of resilience-building projects in varied contexts around the world.

Habitat focuses its responses along the shelter continuum, providing a path for disaster-affected people and communities to envision an incremental process of reconstructing both homes and lives. We call this holistic approach “Pathways to Permanence.”

Over the past several decades, Habitat has helped thousands of disaster-impacted families transform feelings of grief, despair and loss into active participation and agency of their own recovery through the distribution of shelter materials and tools; training; facilitation of transitional accommodations; home repairs; the construction of new, resilient homes; and the provision of technical assistance.

Habitat has continued to adapt to the changing needs of survivors. Recognizing that responding to disasters is not enough, Habitat also has implemented initiatives to build the resilience and preparedness of communities before disasters strike. Every home built by Habitat strives to follow best practices and code compliance to mitigate the impact of natural hazards and includes adaptations to the changing climate and environmental conditions. The same applies to home improvement projects in existing communities and settlements. Issues around land tenure and property are also addressed, as these constitute key components of a resilient housing solution.

Introduction

Published in 2013, the first edition of the Habitat for Humanity Disaster Response Shelter Catalogue collected more than 60 case studies describing a breadth of Habitat disaster response projects around the world. To account for disaster risk reduction and response projects implemented since 2013, we have designed a series of five thematic editions. This catalogue, the fourth in the series, is dedicated to Habitat's engagement with new approaches developed by the shelter and settlements sector across the years.

The shelter and settlements sector has long promoted new approaches in support of effective and contextual disaster response and recovery. Humanitarian and development agencies foster innovation in the sector by creating incubators, accelerators and other instruments that support scaled pilot-to-deployment models. Habitat has adopted some of these initiatives in our disaster

recovery programs, and the case studies presented in this volume describe how Habitat national organizations implemented these interventions and learned valuable insights and lessons from them.

Many of the new perspectives on interventions have been integrated into "Pathways to Permanence," Habitat's holistic and integrated approach to building housing resilience and responding to disasters with a vision of permanent and durable solutions. Through its participation in the Global Shelter Cluster (now the Global Shelter, Land and Site Coordination Cluster), Habitat is involved in several working groups dedicated to research and evidence in support of innovations and new approaches to enhance our collective work. This involvement is strategic, and Habitat aims to keep an active role in developing practices that enhance our resilience and disaster recovery programs.

Lessons learned

Habitat recognizes the opportunity to further our impact by adopting emerging approaches within our disaster recovery work. We engage partners and colleagues in professional organizations to identify materials and processes newly implemented within the shelter and settlements sector. The case studies presented in this edition yielded the following lessons from over a decade of recovery projects:

- **Prioritizing local knowledge during responses promotes the capabilities of disaster-affected communities and advances sustainable recovery practices.** The use of local materials and construction technologies is a powerful driver



of sustainability. Using construction sites as “laboratories for learning” creates opportunities to instill marketable, regionally valued construction skills within affected communities. Two case studies in this catalogue illustrate the benefits of promoting local building cultures: the use of bamboo in Nepal and the construction of recovery homes in Haiti using traditional materials.

- **Transitional rental-in-kind models benefit both landlords and renters.** The rental-in-kind model has a dual benefit that allows dilapidated properties to be significantly improved and then contracted to host refugees and internally displaced households for an agreed-upon period. The tangible improvement of properties benefits landlords in the long run while renters seek to stabilize their situation through employment opportunities. This type of intervention strengthens the local housing market and prevents the proliferation of informal settlements, as demonstrated by Habitat's work with Syrian refugees settling in Lebanon. These arrangements also facilitate the integration of the refugee population within the host community.
- **Cash and voucher assistance can be a safe and targeted method of shelter support.** In a context with functional markets, cash and voucher assistance can be the optimal method to deliver support to affected households. Cash transfer can be used to cover transitional rental solutions, and vouchers can be negotiated with local hardware and construction materials suppliers to be exchanged for shelter-related goods and services. In limited cases, cash can also be distributed without any stipulations — what is often referred to as unconditional cash transfers — to support emergency expenses of disaster-affected households. For example, after the Fuego volcano eruption in Guatemala, families used cash to pay for transportation of their salvaged goods from affected homes to host families' locations, which prevented further loss of their assets.

- **The provision of support to host households and communities — in addition to disaster-affected populations — creates an equitable approach to shelter assistance.** Work with affected households being hosted by relatives or friends has been called “the stealth approach” in the humanitarian shelter and settlement sector. Although this work has received less attention than the support of households displaced in collective centers or camps, support for households staying with host families provide shelter support to both groups through the targeted provision of non-food items or repairs as well as extensions of existing facilities in the hosting household or community.
- **Augmenting and customizing the provision of non-food items expedites recovery efforts.** Habitat Germany expanded on the traditional method of distributing non-food items to encompass a process that provided access to tools and construction services to affected households. This initiative accommodated equipment donations, the engagement of community volunteers and the inclusion of market-based approaches. By increasing the availability of commonly employed tools and trained volunteers, it greatly benefited disaster-affected communities engaged in cleaning up storm debris, removing rubble, and dismantling or repairing damaged homes.

MARIO C. FLORES

Director, International Field Operations

Housing Disaster Resilience and Recovery
Habitat for Humanity International

Reflection



Germany: Habitat Germany set up a temporary distribution center in Dernau so that the community could borrow tools.



Germany: Habitat Germany installed water cisterns in Dernau to address interruptions in water supply caused by the flooding.



Haiti: Habitat Haiti built hurricane- and earthquake-resistant homes using improved local building techniques and materials.



Haiti: Habitat Haiti distributed shelter kits to those with homes in need of repair.



Nepal: An example of a large transitional structure created after the earthquake in Nepal.



Nepal: A completed bamboo structure house with plastered finish.

Guatemala: Habitat Guatemala staff members interviewed community members impacted by the Fuego Volcano to ascertain their most pressing needs.



Malawi: A completed flood-resistant Habitat home in Malawi with accessibility features.



Malawi: Habitat Malawi constructed homes with an elevated foundation.

Countries where Habitat currently works

Argentina	North Macedonia
Armenia	Paraguay
Australia	Philippines
Bangladesh	Poland
Bolivia	Romania
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Samoa
Brazil	Singapore
Bulgaria	Slovakia
Cambodia	South Africa
Canada	South Korea
Chile	Sri Lanka
Colombia	Tanzania
Costa Rica	Trinidad and Tobago
Côte d'Ivoire	Türkiye
Dominican Republic	Uganda
Egypt	Ukraine
El Salvador	United Kingdom
Ethiopia	United States of America
Fiji	Vanuatu
Germany	Vietnam
Ghana	Zambia
Guatemala	
Haiti	
Honduras	
Hong Kong, SAR China	
Hungary	
India	
Indonesia	
Ireland	
Japan	
Jordan	
Kenya	
Lebanon	
Lesotho	
Malawi	
Malaysia	
Mexico	
Myanmar	
Nepal	
Netherlands	
New Zealand	
Nicaragua	





Intervention types

Each case study in this report details intervention types that fall into the following broad categories, denoted by the icons in the table below.

Icon	Intervention category
	Non-Food Items (NFIs) Distribution
	Temporary Shelter Support
	Technical Assistance
	Construction
	Basic Services and Community Infrastructure
	Capacity Building
	Market-Based Interventions
	Influence
	Livelihoods

Heavy Floods, Western Germany • 2022

 Derna, North Rhine-Westphalia • Germany

Types of intervention



Non-food items distribution



Technical assistance

Project targets

- **540 households** (as of Dec. 31, 2023).

Stakeholders

- **Implementing organization:** Habitat for Humanity Germany.
- **Partners:** Aktion Deutschland Hilft and local partners.



Timeline

July 2021–September 2021:

Immediate relief through distribution of essential items such as wheelbarrows, tools, pumps, cisterns and generators.

July 2021–October 2023:

Setting up a free tool lending service in Derna and deploying a mobile team to different affected locations.

July 2021-present:

Establishing and maintaining the tool lending service, including acquiring specialized tools for ongoing support.

July 2021-present:

Collaborating with communities, NGOs and volunteers for damage assessments and providing support.



Summary

After devastating floods struck in western Germany, Habitat for Humanity Germany, which traditionally focused on fundraising, launched a groundbreaking disaster response project. This initiative, a first for the entity, evolved continuously to meet the needs of those affected by the floods. Initially, Habitat Germany's staff volunteered on the ground, helping with cleanup and recruiting more volunteers. As the project progressed, a lack of tools for homeowners became apparent. This critical need led to the creation of a free tool lending service that kept its inventory updated to address the evolving needs of the communities.



Background

In July 2021, severe floods in western Germany (primarily North Rhine-Westphalia and Rhineland-Pfalz) killed 184 people and caused over €30 billion (about US\$35 billion) in damage. The Ahr valley was hit hardest, with homes, roads and bridges destroyed, leaving families stranded without power for days. While the government quickly repaired public infrastructure, households had to manage home repairs independently. Volunteers flooded in to help clear mud and flooring, but both residents and volunteers desperately lacked the proper tools. Although uninsured households received an 80% government subsidy, low-income families still struggled with cash flow, forcing them to rely heavily on DIY repairs.

Project programming

The aim of the intervention was to support flood-affected households in and around Dernau to achieve a faster, sustainable and cost-effective recovery through durable repairs that enhance home habitability and long-term resilience. This was achieved through the following phased outputs:

- **Initial actions:** Distributed tools, brooms and generators and installed water cisterns, hoses and pumps for quick water access.
- **Cleanup and gutting:** Assisted families with debris removal, initial restoration and cleaning.
- **Community collaboration:** Partnered on land provision; worked with crisis management, NGOs and volunteers; and supported damage assessments with civil engineers.
- **Free tool lending:** Opened a center in Dernau and deployed a mobile team to affected areas, acquiring specialized tools based on demand.

Implementation

After providing initial emergency support such as generators and mud-removal tools to communities in the Ahr Valley, Habitat Germany shifted focus to a critical, specific gap: the lack of tools needed for debris removal and structural gutting. To address this, they launched a free tool-lending service in Dernau. This resource-sharing model proved highly efficient. Because most families only needed specialized tools for a few days and dehumidifiers for a few weeks, equipment could be quickly cleaned and passed to the next household.

Through continuous consultation with the community, Habitat adapted its inventory to match changing needs over three distinct moments, starting with an initial focus on power tools for stripping away damaged structures, progressing to an intermediate phase centered on construction dryers and dehumidifiers, and culminating in an advanced phase providing specialized tools required for final repairs and reconstruction. This highly specialized focus was made possible because a robust network of partner agencies simultaneously handled other vital relief efforts, such as psychosocial support, free meals, alternative housing, and assistance with navigating insurance and government subsidies.

Despite its success, the project's main hurdle was hiring and retaining qualified staff members for long-term management.

Lessons learned and promising practices

- **Early engagement:** Quickly collaborate with local authorities and residents from the start.
- **On-site leadership:** Ensure a project manager is on site daily, starting from Day 1.
- **Volunteer coordination:** Efficiently manage volunteers, as they are critical to emergency aid.
- **Team building:** Assemble a qualified project team as quickly as possible.
- **Internal communication:** Maintain vital, clear communication within the NGO team.

Volcanic Eruption • 2018

Escuintla and Sacatepéquez departments • Guatemala

Types of intervention



Temporary shelter support



Non-food items distribution



Market-based interventions

Project targets

- **90 households** (approximately 360 individuals).
- **Shelter/housing solution size:** 53.55 square meters.

Stakeholders

- **Implementing organization:** Habitat for Humanity Guatemala
- **Partners:** Mercy Corps

Timeline

June 2018:

Fuego volcano erupts.

June 2018:

Cleaning kits are distributed for the removal of ashes and mud.

June 2018:

A disaster response plan is designed.

November 2018:

Host family program is completed.

November 2018:

Started the construction of the first homes.

December 2018:

Dedication ceremony of the new homes.



Summary

Habitat implemented a host families support program that included home improvements for 90 families (including hosting and hosted families) in Escuintla and Sacatepéquez. Cash was also provided for basic expenses to every hosted family, and cash for rent was provided to 20 families. A second phase of the project involved the construction of 41 core houses.



Background

On June 3, 2018, the Fuego volcano, which spans the departments of Sacatepéquez, Escuintla and Chimaltenango in Guatemala, erupted. The event destroyed roads, power grids, plantations, forests, wildlife and communities, including San Miguel de Los Lotes in the municipality and department of Escuintla, and El Rodeo in the municipality of Alotenango, department of Sacatepéquez.

The eruption killed more than 200 people, displaced 12,823, and affected 1,714,387, with an additional 229 missing. It destroyed 186 homes and seriously damaged 750 others. Of the 12,823 evacuees, 3,510 were in registered collective shelters, leaving around 9,000 individuals in other living arrangements.

Since 1979, Habitat Guatemala has helped over 600,000 individuals through more than 100,000 housing solutions. But despite operating from 25 offices across Guatemala and boasting a substantial team of technical experts, Habitat Guatemala had limited experience in disaster response.

Project programming

Based on the needs assessment and in coordination with government and humanitarian coordination mechanisms, Habitat's response prioritized supporting people from the communities of El Rodeo and Los Lotes who lost everything; were sheltering with family, friends or acquaintances; and had not received assistance from the government.

These individuals often lived with host families, straining space and conditions. While registered collective centers received support, sheltered families with hosts did not. Habitat Guatemala tackled this by prioritizing the improvement of habitability conditions in host family arrangements, supporting both sheltered and host families through five key components under a "Pathways to Permanence" approach:

- **Provision of non-food items** such as water storage tanks, high-efficiency Chispa stoves and basins for washing clothes.
- **Home improvements** such as constructing or remodeling washrooms and repairing or extending spaces doubling as bedrooms.
- **Cash transfers via checks for discretionary use**, with payments via checks equal to 50% of rental expenses to a small number of families, along with food vouchers.
- **A training program.**
- **New houses** for a small number of families.

The 90 beneficiary families (approximately 360 people) included in this plan are divided into three types:

- **Hosting:** Those who received displaced families into their homes after the volcano erupted.
- **Hosted:** Those who were displaced and had to seek safe shelter (whether with family, friends, acquaintances or strangers) after losing homes, belongings and, in some cases, family members.
- **Renting:** Those affected families who, immediately after the eruption, lived with host families for less than three months and then were able to rent a house in the area.

Implementation

The **emergency response** prioritized the following activities:

- **House cleaning:** An emergency toolkit was designed and distributed for cleaning homes affected by mud and ash, helping families return safely home and recover when feasible.
- **Potable water:** Lack of drinking water was identified upon return home and within host family arrangements. Water filters (with replacement filters) and water storage solutions were provided.
- **Host family arrangements:** Various levels of assistance based on assessed needs, including:
 - **Home improvements/additions:** Construction materials and labor were provided to expand or improve host homes, such as replacing doors, installing washroom doors and fixing broken zinc sheeting.
 - **Economic support:** Food vouchers, discretionary use checks, and assistance covering 50% of rental expenses. The vouchers, redeemable in specific supermarkets, ensured the money was used appropriately.
 - **Efficient stoves:** Chispa stoves were installed with a combustion technology that reduced firewood consumption.
 - **Educational training:** Guidance on using and maintaining non-food items, promoting harmonious family life, and preparing for disasters.
 - **Technical assistance:** Ongoing technical support was offered during home improvements, with all construction supervised and determined by Habitat Guatemala's staff.

During the **reconstruction phase**, Habitat Guatemala constructed 41 homes, each measuring 53.55 square meters, with three rooms and a bathroom. Families partnering on the homes met specific criteria, including owning a home in

San Miguel Los Lotes that was deemed uninhabitable, experiencing the loss of a family member, sustaining serious injuries or disabilities, being over 65 years old or a sole survivor, being a single mother or widow with underage children, being part of the Habitat emergency response phase, expressing willingness to relocate and participate in education and training programs, demonstrating the ability to cover administrative costs, and not receiving benefits from other NGOs or government agencies.



Lessons learned and promising practices

- **The assistance model successfully improved living conditions** for families affected by the Fuego volcano eruption during their stay with host families.
- **Four components — non-food items, home improvements, cash transfers and trainings — alleviated economic burdens on host families**, reducing stress and improving shared living conditions.
- **Habitat Guatemala's expertise** in working with beneficiary families and its commitment and quality of work were crucial for the success of the assistance model.
- **To enhance effectiveness, Habitat Guatemala needed to adjust internal administrative procedures** for faster implementation of each component.
- **A full-time team with disaster response project capabilities was necessary** for successful model implementation.
- **The delivery of non-food items** improved water quality and storage, enhancing families' living conditions.
- **Chispa stoves effectively reduced smoke inhalation, firewood consumption and expenses**, but cultural preferences still influenced stove choice.
- **For the installation of non-food items that require some kind of structure**, such as water tanks or Chispa stoves, Habitat Guatemala must first talk to families about installation options and the technical pros and cons of placing them in a specific place, then let the family decide. When a plot is shared by relatives, the recommendation is to wait until the families can agree on where to place the structures.
- **Improvements such as replacing or installing front doors** offered more security to the members of both families. Installing additional doors on washrooms and building walls to separate toilets from showers allowed for greater privacy. Replacing broken zinc sheeting resolved leaking roofs in the kitchen and/or improved hallways that doubled as bedrooms. These improvements were not meant to reduce overcrowding conditions, but to make shared spaces livable for both host and hosted families.
- **Cash transfers should be implemented**, in coordination with Habitat Guatemala, by an organization with experience in the logistics needed to implement this type of benefit. Habitat Guatemala must ensure that its components are articulated within the integrity of the model, and avoid implementing them in isolation.
- **Training courses offered relevant lessons** on non-food items, harmonious living and emergency preparedness, but low attendance, non-dynamic sessions and accessibility issues hindered effectiveness. Improvement suggestions include participatory workshops, simpler language and accessible locations. The "harmonious family life" workshop received the highest rating, suggesting a need for partnerships with psychological assistance organizations and training in psychological first-aid treatment for field teams.
- **Construction of new houses** concluded the model implementation, addressing immediate housing needs. Challenges for families partnering on the new houses included considering the area's development potential, such as proximity to educational and health centers, accessibility to public transportation, and job availability.
- **A reasonable amount of time is needed for beneficiary families to settle into their new homes** and become familiar with the area before assessing the effectiveness of this component.

Hurricane Matthew • 2016

 **Grand'Anse, Nippes and Sud provinces • Haiti**

Types of intervention



Technical assistance



Capacity building



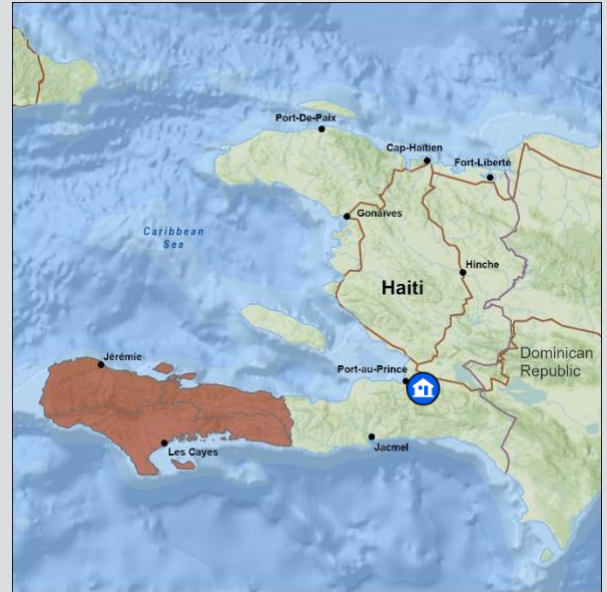
Construction

Project targets

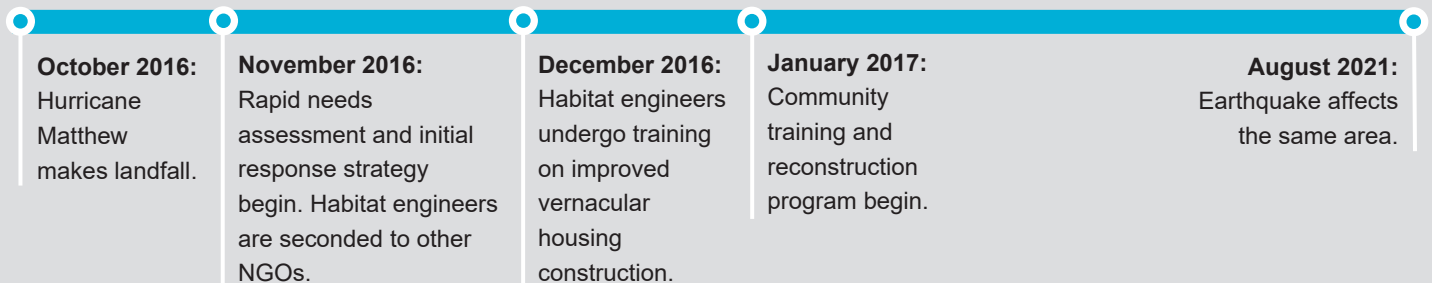
- **315 new homes.**
- **1,500 improved or repaired homes.**
- **Shelter/housing solution size:** Full TECLA house, approximately 45 square meters; TECLA core house: 25 square meters.

Stakeholders

- **Implementing organization:** Habitat for Humanity Haiti.
- **Partners:** Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), Cesvi, Christian Aid/KORAL, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Islamic Relief, MercyCorps, Oxfam.



Timeline



Summary

After Hurricane Matthew devastated southern Haiti, Habitat for Humanity Haiti implemented a strategic, partnership-centered intervention to maximize its impact without a physical presence in the affected area. Habitat Haiti leveraged its technical expertise by embedding civil engineers with other humanitarian organizations. These engineers provided crucial construction training and monitoring support, ensuring that rebuilding efforts met safety standards and incorporated disaster-resilient techniques.

At the same time, the project emphasized a local building cultures approach. By adapting traditional vernacular architecture with structural improvements and capitalizing on local knowledge, Habitat for Humanity empowered communities to rebuild more resiliently, a success later proven when the homes withstood a subsequent earthquake.



Background

Hurricane Matthew struck southern Haiti in October 2016, tearing through the southern Haiti departments of Grand'Anse, Sud and Nippes with devastating effect. An estimated 1.5 million Haitians were displaced or left homeless after more than 180,000 homes were damaged or destroyed. Les Cayes and Jeremie saw over 60% of their structures affected, and Grand'Anse experienced up to 80% destruction of housing stock.

Habitat for Humanity has been operating in Haiti since 1984, with significant experience in post-disaster shelter interventions. Habitat's portfolio expanded considerably after the catastrophic 2010 Port-au-Prince earthquake, when the organization played a leading role in housing resilience and recovery. By 2016, Habitat's capacity in technical support and resilient construction was well-established, but the organization did not have a physical presence in the area most affected by Hurricane Matthew.



Project programming

Instead of acting as a primary relief and reconstruction provider, Habitat Haiti opted for a partnership-centered model, guided by the need to complement existing aid efforts, given the scale of the destruction and the number of NGOs mobilizing in the affected area.

Habitat Haiti's intervention focused on leveraging technical expertise and promoting sustainable, community-based rebuilding. The core elements of this approach included:

- **Technical expertise and capacity sharing:** Habitat engineers were deployed and embedded with other agencies. They provided construction training and technical oversight to ensure rebuilding efforts met safety standards and incorporated disaster-resilient techniques. Partner organizations handled the funding and implementation, while Habitat provided the technical framework and monitoring support.
- **Vernacular architecture and local knowledge:** The design of the new houses was based on the traditional local architecture of rural Haiti, with structural and constructive improvements. This strategy promoted the use of locally available materials and capitalized on community knowledge.
- **Community-based training:** The reconstruction sites served as "laboratory classes" where local masons, builders and homeowners were trained in resilient building practices. This approach helped create enduring local capacity for safe construction beyond the immediate recovery phase.

This collaborative strategy allowed Habitat Haiti to significantly impact the recovery process by strengthening the capacity of other organizations and empowering local communities to rebuild more resiliently.



Implementation

After Hurricane Matthew, Habitat for Humanity Haiti faced a crucial challenge — despite having contingency funds, materials, vehicles and a roster of experienced engineers, it lacked a physical presence in the most affected areas. To overcome this, Habitat Haiti adopted a partnership-centered model, strategically collaborating with international organizations already on the ground, such as Mercy Corps, Cesvi, Oxfam, and the International Organization for Migration, or IOM.

Habitat Haiti's engineers were seconded to these partner organizations to provide essential technical support. A prime example of this was the collaboration with Oxfam's cash transfer project, in which Habitat Haiti engineers trained local artisans and families on safe construction techniques and then monitored the self-construction process. This approach empowered community members to take the lead in their own rebuilding efforts.

To ensure the houses were both culturally appropriate and resilient, Habitat's engineers were trained on the government-led "TECLA homes" initiative, which promoted safer, more sustainable vernacular construction. They

then used construction sites as “laboratory classes” to transfer this knowledge directly to community artisans and homeowners, many of whom received materials or cash from partner organizations.

The success of these projects in building durable homes and strengthening local capacity allowed Habitat Haiti to establish a permanent office in the area, securing a lasting presence and impact.

In July 2021, a magnitude-7.2 earthquake struck the same region. The homes built by Habitat for Humanity demonstrated remarkable resilience, with an impressive 98% of them sustaining no severe damage.



Lessons learned and promising practices

- **Effective use of resources:** Habitat for Humanity successfully leveraged available assets — engineers, materials and funds — to make a significant impact without a direct physical presence. This demonstrated a highly effective “light-footprint” model.
- **Strategic partnerships:** The organization collaborated with other NGOs and the government’s TECLA initiative to provide technical support. This approach allowed Habitat to share expertise with a wider range of partners, increasing then organization’s overall impact while avoiding the duplication of aid efforts.
- **Promoting local building cultures:** Habitat worked closely with communities to incorporate traditional building practices and materials, which ensured that homes were not only durable and sustainable but also culturally appropriate, capitalizing on valuable local knowledge.
- **Creating long-term resilience:** By focusing on training local masons and homeowners on improved vernacular construction, the project built lasting capacity for safe construction within the community. The success of this strategy was proven when 98% of the homes withstood a magnitude-7.2 earthquake in 2021.

Syrian Refugee Crisis • 2018

Lebanon

Types of intervention



Construction



Community infrastructure



Livelihoods

Project targets

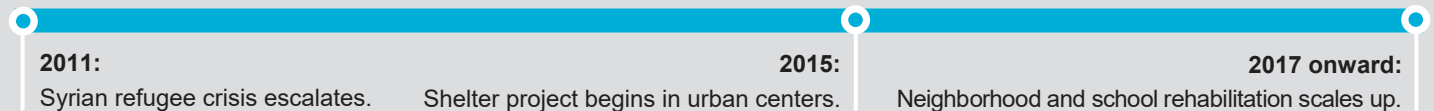
- **Over 30,000 individuals** reached through renovation and repairs, making substantial impacts on households, including those with single mothers or elderly caregivers and those coping with health challenges.

Stakeholders

- **Implementing organization:** Habitat for Humanity Lebanon.
- **Partners:** Lebanese Local Authorities and Municipalities; Rene Moawad Foundation, or RMF; local community groups and volunteers.



Timeline



Summary

Habitat for Humanity's Lebanon project addressed the Syrian refugee crisis by providing dignified, long-term shelter solutions. The "Pathways to Permanence" strategy focused on rehabilitating existing homes, upgrading community infrastructure, and providing vocational training to refugees and vulnerable Lebanese. This multifaceted approach, implemented through partnerships and community engagement, not only improved living conditions and security of tenure but also strengthened the local housing market and promoted economic resilience. Key to its success was the owner-driven model, which empowered those who were helped and fostered self-reliance.



Background

Lebanon absorbed nearly 2 million Syrian and Palestinian refugees after the Syrian conflict began, equating to roughly 30% of the national population. Lebanon's "no camp" policy for Syrian refugees led to a humanitarian situation where most displaced individuals settled in urban and peri-urban areas. This resulted in refugees living in **dilapidated or unfinished buildings**, often in substandard conditions. The influx of people drove up rents, increased competition for basic services, and exacerbated the poverty of vulnerable Lebanese families.

Meanwhile, Syrian households, facing restricted access to work and mounting debt, resorted to living in inadequate shelter, reducing food consumption and pulling children out of school. Palestine refugees who were living in Syria but had to leave also faced the compounded challenges of poverty and limited work opportunities, which further highlighted the need for a comprehensive, multifaceted humanitarian response.

Project programming

The project's main activities were structured around three key tangible outputs:

- **Home rehabilitation and secure tenure:** This involved technical assessments of substandard shelters and providing grants for residential rehabilitation, negotiating legally binding contracts with landlords, securing tenure for 12-18 months in exchange for a rent freeze.
- **Upgrading community facilities:** Through community engagement and focus group discussions to identify shared needs. Activities included the rehabilitation of schools and communal structures, and the installation of critical infrastructure such as lighting, water systems and sewage networks.
- **Construction-related livelihoods:** The program provided vocational training and hired small teams of local and refugee laborers. It created a pool of skilled workers and local contractors.

Implementation

Habitat conducted **technical assessments** of shelter elements, reviewing issues such as leaky roofs; inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities; and lack of privacy and security (e.g., doors and windows). This data-driven approach allowed the project to prioritize homes with the most pressing health and safety concerns.

Beneficiary selection was based on a multifaceted set of criteria beyond income, including socioeconomic vulnerability, household composition, health conditions, and the gender of the head of household. This ensured that assistance reached the most vulnerable.

Given the complex humanitarian landscape, **coordination** was vital. Habitat collaborated closely with agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, along with other international and local NGOs. This allowed for knowledge sharing and helped to avoid duplication of efforts, ensuring a more efficient and comprehensive response. Working with local organizations was particularly important for verifying cases and identifying beneficiaries, leveraging their on-the-ground knowledge and trust within communities.

The **owner-driven approach** was a key implementation strategy. It empowered beneficiaries by involving them in the decision-making process, from prioritizing needs to selecting materials and contractors. This not only built capacity but also fostered a sense of ownership and accountability. The project also created a pool of local contractors and laborers, providing employment opportunities for both refugees and host community members. Construction activities focused on essential upgrades such as weatherproofing, improving sanitation, and enhancing safety and security.

Challenges included economic strain and complicated project implementation caused by the rapidly changing political landscape and shifting government policies, such as new restrictions on refugee employment. The high saturation of NGOs in certain areas, such as Burj Hammoud, led Habitat to relocate services to more underserved locations, such as the Shatila and Burj el Barajneh camps, to maximize impact.

Lessons learned and promising practices

- **The rent-in-kind model was a major success**, providing a dual benefit: secure, dignified housing for refugees and tangible improvements to property for landlords. The model reduced rent inflation and prevented slum proliferation by strengthening the housing market.
- **Continuous community engagement** ensured that interventions met actual needs, and Habitat's direct relationships with both host and displaced populations encouraged buy-in and sustainability.
- **The multidimensional focus — housing, livelihoods and infrastructure — established a replicable response** for other protracted urban displacement settings.

Tropical Storm Idai • 2019

 **Zomba, Phalombe and Chikwawa districts • Malawi**

Types of intervention



Non-food items distribution



Construction



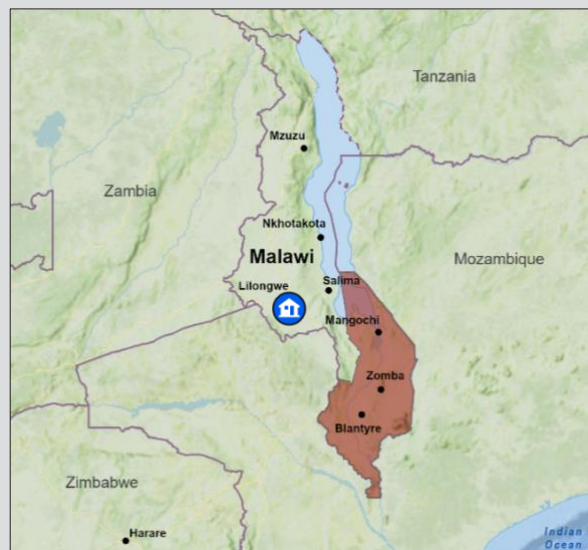
Basic services and community infrastructure

Project targets

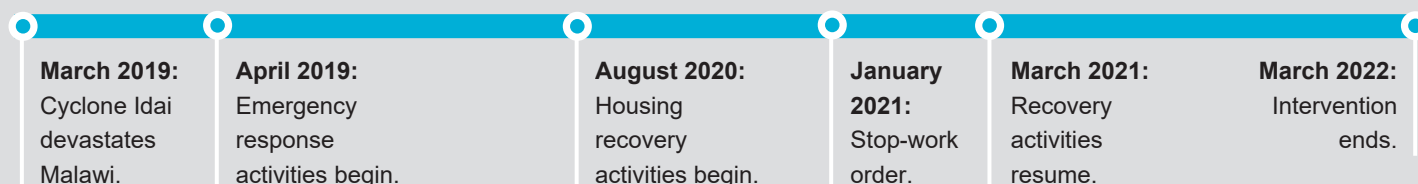
- **2,000 households** received emergency shelter non-food items.
- **680 households** supported with elevated flood-resilient core houses.
- **Core house size:** 32.6 square meters.

Stakeholders

- **Implementing organization:** Habitat for Humanity Malawi.
- **Partners:** ShelterBox, Aktion Deutschland Hilft, Hope and Healing International, Korea International Cooperation Agency, the government of Japan, the government of China, Habitat for Humanity International.



Timeline



Summary

Malawi faced severe devastation from Cyclone Idai, which destroyed nearly 300,000 houses in 2019. Habitat for Humanity Malawi's response aimed to build long-term community resilience through a "Build Back Better" strategy. The project constructed 680 flood-resilient houses, trained local artisans, and empowered communities through participatory workshops. Despite initial quality issues and budget overruns, the project demonstrated adaptability and a strong commitment to delivering high-quality, durable shelter, serving as a model for future community-led, resilience-based recovery efforts.



Background

Malawi is highly susceptible flooding and cyclones, which have been intensified by climate change. In March 2019, Cyclone Idai affected an estimated 975,000 people and displaced 86,976. The disaster had a severe impact on socioeconomic infrastructure and livelihoods, pushing many people into poverty. Housing was one of the worst-hit sectors, with 288,371 houses damaged or destroyed, creating a critical need for emergency shelter and long-term housing recovery.

The Malawi government's post-disaster needs assessment identified key challenges, including the need for a "Build Back Better" approach to increase community resilience and a lack of resources for procuring quality building materials and training local builders. Habitat Malawi, which has had a presence in the country since 1986, was well-positioned to address these needs and partnered with other organizations to initiate an emergency and recovery response.



Project programming

The intervention aimed to increase the resilience of vulnerable communities in the event of future floods.

The initial **emergency phase** focused on life-saving activities and immediate needs. Distributing emergency shelter kits and non-food items to nearly 2,000 families provided essential temporary protection, a critical first step.

After this, the project transitioned seamlessly to the **recovery phase**, which focused on building back better and fostering long-term resilience. A key output of this stage was the construction of 680 permanent, elevated core houses. By making these homes flood-resilient, the project did more than replace lost shelter; it actively prepared communities for future shocks. All households secured housing and land tenure.

The focus on training and community empowerment was crucial. Training 1,933 local artisans created lasting capacity for safer construction practices. The participatory approach for safe shelter awareness, or PASSA, empowered residents to advocate for their own safety and improved housing conditions.

Building community water points and markets restored essential infrastructure while supporting livelihoods and strengthening public health.



Implementation

The project's success was built on strong partnerships and a commitment to community-led solutions. By working closely with district and community Civil Protection Committees, Habitat Malawi ensured that the response was well-coordinated and aligned with local needs. Leveraging needs assessments from district councils, the project precisely targeted the most affected communities, focusing on critical areas such as water, shelter and local infrastructure.

A key to the initial rapid response was the vital partnership with ShelterBox, which delivered immediate relief to nearly 2,000 families with essential shelter kits, water filters and solar lights. This collaborative effort provided a strong foundation for the long-term recovery efforts.

The project encountered challenges, but these were ultimately catalysts for positive change. An initial stop-work order from the government, prompted by quality issues, became a crucial opportunity for improvement. This intervention led to enhanced worker training and a strategic shift to more reliable, commercially produced bricks, which significantly improved construction quality and efficiency. When material theft and logistical issues arose, the project team demonstrated remarkable resourcefulness by adapting quickly to external suppliers and securing additional funding from Habitat for Humanity International to keep the project on track and maintain a strong donor relationship. This flexibility and determination ultimately ensured the completion of high-quality, resilient homes.



Lessons learned and promising practices

- **The collaboration with ShelterBox** for emergency response was a highly effective way to provide immediate relief, showcasing the value of multiorganizational efforts in the initial phase of a disaster.
- **The project's flood-resilient houses** provided shelter for the entire community during subsequent hazardous events. For example, during Cyclone Ana in January 2022, the residents of these houses provided shelter to affected families, demonstrating the positive impact of the project on the community beyond the mere construction of houses.
- **The project successfully promoted the use of sustainable building materials**, particularly stabilized soil blocks, which created interest among residents for future projects. There was, however, a challenge of limited access to these materials within the communities. To address this, Habitat Malawi launched a new Production and Resource Training Center in Blantyre to make these sustainable blocks more accessible.
- **The project's inclusion of PASSA** empowered community members to advocate for safer settlements. Local facilitators trained through PASSA were actively recruiting new members and collaborating as a group to develop strategies for transitioning their communities from unsafe to safe housing situations.

Nepal Floods • 2017

 **18 Municipalities in Morang, Sunsari, Jhapa and Saptari districts**

Types of intervention



Non-food items distribution



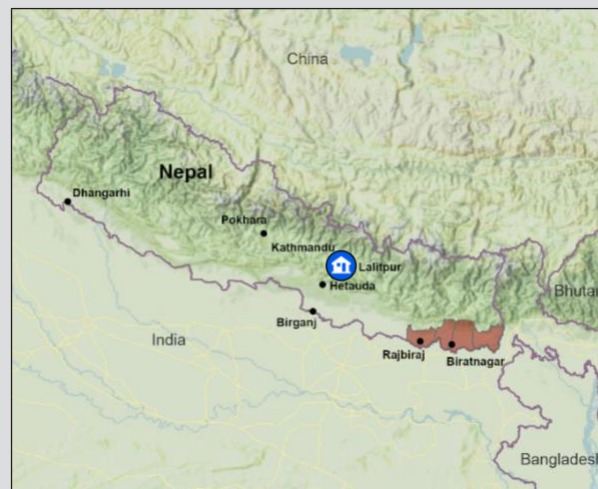
Capacity building

Project targets

- **400 households** supported with non-food item kits.
- **1362 households** supported with transitional shelter.

Stakeholders

- **Implementing organization:** Habitat for Humanity Nepal.
- **Partners:** Jeevan Bikash Samaj, Sahara Nepal, Mahuli Community Development Center and Mahila Upkar Manch.



Timeline

August-September 2017:

Distribution of 400 non-food item kits.

September-October 2017:

Assessments, planning and fundraising.

October 2017:

Design and construction of first demonstration unit and training on construction of transitional shelters.

January 2018:

1,362 transitional shelters constructed.



Summary

In response to the devastating 2017 floods in Nepal, Habitat for Humanity implemented a two-phased, community-driven humanitarian response. The project began with the rapid distribution of emergency non-food item kits, including tarpaulins and water purifiers, to meet immediate needs.

This was followed by a recovery phase focused on shelter construction, in which Habitat worked in close partnership with local governments and communities. The project successfully provided safe, temporary homes for 1,362 households by empowering families to build their own bamboo shelters through the provision of technical training and the leveraging of government resources.

This case study highlights the importance of collaboration, a community-based approach, and the use of locally available materials in creating an effective and sustainable disaster recovery model.



Background

In August 2017, days of heavy, incessant rain caused large-scale flooding that affected 35 districts along Nepal's southern plains. The floods destroyed over 41,000 houses and damaged more than 150,000 homes.

Displaced families were forced to live in cramped tents made of flimsy plastic sheeting or any other materials families could salvage near the highways or higher grounds. These tents provided little to no privacy and had no access to electricity or safe drinking water.

Habitat Nepal's project areas, namely Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari and Saptari in the east and Banke and Bardiya in the west, were among the heavily flooded districts.



Project programming

The main objective was to help families affected by the floods meet their needs for shelter and non-food items. During the emergency phase, non-food items were distributed.

In the recovery phase, processes grounded in a community-based, owner-driven approach were employed for building shelters using local techniques and materials.

The intervention took a fully participatory approach, involving all stakeholders, including the government, civil society and the community.



Implementation

During the initial emergency phase, Habitat for Humanity Nepal provided immediate aid by distributing non-food item, or NFI, kits, which included essential supplies such as tarpaulins, mosquito nets and water purifiers to meet families' urgent needs. As floodwaters receded, the focus shifted from immediate relief to a community-based, owner-driven approach for transitional shelter construction.

Habitat's technical team designed a transitional shelter prototype using bamboo, a material chosen for its local availability and environmental sustainability. They constructed a demonstration unit, created a procedural guide, and trained both local masons and the flood-affected families on the building process. Vulnerable families received shelter kits and hands-on support from community volunteers to construct their own homes.

The project was executed in close coordination with local government authorities, local NGOs and community disaster management committees. This partnership was crucial for making key decisions on project locations and family selection. The selection process was a three-step collaboration: local government provided a list of potential beneficiaries, which the Habitat Nepal team finalized through on-the-ground field visits.

Community leaders and family members were active participants throughout the entire project. Habitat Nepal's partner NGO took the lead on distributing shelter kits by managing logistics and mobilizing the community. Local leaders were instrumental in the beneficiary selection process, volunteer mobilization, and lobbying government officials to secure additional resources. In a major win for the project, this advocacy was successful, resulting in the government matching grants from Habitat Nepal to provide funds for permanent house reconstruction.

Families themselves were at the heart of the project, participating directly in finalizing the design of their houses and constructing their own transitional shelters. The use of familiar materials like bamboo meant they quickly learned the building process, with community volunteers stepping in to assist vulnerable families. This collaborative, owner-driven approach not only expedited the construction of all 1,362 shelters but also fostered a powerful sense of ownership and empowerment among the affected communities.



Lessons learned and promising practices

What went well

- **Collaboration** of local government, implementing partners and communities.
- **Use of appropriate construction materials and contextual shelter design** resulting from thorough consultations with families.

- **Participation from homeowners, women and the community** in the construction and completion of shelters. Volunteer and community mobilization helped homeowners build the basic framework, floors, roofing and additions.
- **Compilation of a database** of all beneficiary households through a mobile system. This database will be useful in supporting these families on their path to permanence through future projects.

Lessons learned

- **For emergency response, a streamlined procurement and logistics management process should be in place** to prevent delays in the order and awarding and to ensure the availability of the quoted items and materials.
- **The involvement of the local government in the relief program** made the shelter kit distribution process smoother and helped reduce project implementation challenges.
- **Soliciting feedback from families is important** during preconstruction consultations and during the construction of the shelters, including on the selection of building materials and the location of interior walls.

Aspects to be improved

- **The pre-identification of vendors and the pre-positioning of materials** accelerate post-disaster procurement processes and logistics management.
- **Alternative materials for wall panels** may be explored for use in future recovery work. The tarpaulins used were not durable and could be replaced with prefab bamboo panels, which are more environmentally friendly and durable.
- **In addition to housing, recovery projects should ensure other necessary aspects of shelter**, especially secure land tenure and water, sanitation and hygiene.
- **A shelter design with two-way sloped roofs** would be more easily adopted by the existing local Nepalese building culture.

Disaster-affected communities require an informed, tailored recovery plan. Community-led practices empower survivors to develop solutions and establish priorities that are culturally aligned and compatible with local practices. Habitat uses this collaborative approach to assist communities as they restore infrastructure, livelihoods, health and social cohesion.



Guatemala: Following the volcanic eruption, Habitat Guatemala mobilized to locate displaced households staying with host families.





285 Peachtree Center Ave. NE, Suite 2700, Atlanta, GA 30303-1220 USA
322 W. Lamar St., Americus, GA 31709-3543 USA
(800) 422-4828 fax (229) 410-7629 publicinfo@habitat.org habitat.org