



## **USAID's Approach to Shelter in Post-Earthquake Haiti: Providing Security, Dignity and Work**

In the immediate aftermath of the devastating January 12 earthquake in Haiti, USAID worked with the international community to provide temporary shelter to those internally displaced persons (IDPs) most in need. Four months later, USAID is moving aggressively to provide material assistance to displaced people so they can begin the transition to more appropriate permanent housing.

The actual number of IDPs who lost their homes in the earthquake is uncertain. According to the most recent International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix survey estimate, over 2.1 million individuals reside in more than 1,300 spontaneous settlements throughout Haiti—with an estimated two-thirds of all IDPs located in and around Port-au-Prince.

### **Phase 1: Emergency Shelter**

Learning from past disasters like the Indian Ocean tsunami and the earthquake in Pakistan, the humanitarian response in Haiti initially included the provision of waterproof, rip-proof, and fire-resistant plastic sheeting for emergency shelter. Plastic sheets are used as weather-resistant covering for roofs and walls of emergency shelters, and they will be integral in supporting the Government of Haiti's longer-term housing response. Plastic sheeting is more durable and adaptable than tents, which can be hot in warm weather, leaky during rainy weather, difficult to keep clean, and potentially hazardous spaces in which to cook.

In order to respond to the needs of IDPs before the onset of the rainy season, USAID and the international community set and achieved the goal of providing an estimated 260,000 households (1.3 million people) with some kind of basic shelter assistance, most commonly in the form of two pieces of plastic sheeting, rope, and related fixing materials by May 1, 2010. Due to increases in the estimated number of IDPs, the international community, in turn, increased the target population for emergency shelter to 1.5 million people (302,977 households). This target was met on May 5, 2010.

### **Phase 2: Transitional Shelter**

After immediate shelter needs are met, people need safe and sanitary housing for up to two years or more while full construction and recovery takes place. Transitional shelter is post-disaster shelter designed to jump-start or accelerate recovery and reconstruction by engaging affected populations in the incremental and longer-term housing development process.

Transitional shelter features a mix of emergency shelter supplies, such as plastic sheeting, combined with more robust items, including salvaged building materials, and kits consisting of cement, timber or steel framing, tin roofs, and nails. Transitional shelters can be upgraded and expanded to create permanent housing with a concrete slab floor, and can be easily assembled using local labor. Figure 2 provides an example of transitional shelter in Indonesia.

**Figure 1: Plastic Sheetting as  
Emergency Shelter**



Plastic sheeting can be used in a variety of ways and serve as a basis for transitional shelter.

USAID has provided funding for transitional shelter in Haiti, targeting an estimated 47,500 households (nearly 240,000 people). Transitional shelters are designed for resistance to hurricane-force winds, seismic risks, and heavy rainfall, with all USAID-funded non-governmental organization designs meeting technical specifications and complying with international “Sphere” standards, which set a minimum living space of 17.5 square meters for a family of five<sup>1</sup>. Many transitional shelter designs can be built in two to three days and remain standing for three or more years.

USAID has encouraged community-based, equitable, and cost-effective transitional shelters instead of larger pre-fab housing in order to minimize the potential for social conflict (because pre-fab housing cannot be provided to everyone), maximize cost-effectiveness, and ensure that housing solutions are culturally- and site-appropriate. This “safe shelter on safe sites” emphasis has proven successful in mitigating the effects of future hazards in other post-disaster situations, most recently in post-earthquake responses in Indonesia (2009), Peru (2007), Indonesia (2006), and Pakistan (2005).

In addition to providing transitional shelter kits to families, USAID and the Agency’s Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance partners are providing retrofitting assistance to households that have already engaged in self-recovery but may require small expansions of space and minor bracing upgrades to create a more disaster-resistant and international standard-compliant shelter.

### **Phase 3: Permanent Housing**

USAID is promoting a two-pronged shelter redevelopment approach: (1) rebuild communities in and around Port-au-Prince, and (2) develop other job centers in secondary cities to promote the broader economic development of Haiti. The President’s supplemental budget request reflects this strategy, and includes \$133 million for investments in shelter and settlements (60% of which will go toward secondary cities, 40% for Port-au-Prince). Programs funded by the supplemental request would allow Haitians to rebuild their homes incrementally. Through a “sites and services” approach, USAID and the international community would work with the Government of Haiti to identify and prepare appropriate land and provide for basic services, specifically water, sewer, roads and electricity. The major cost of housing development is the provision of these basic services, which are often lacking in poor neighborhoods. Targeting donor assistance on these services is not only cost effective, but will also have a significant transformative impact in improving the quality of life of Haitians. This approach has been successfully deployed following other major disasters.

Funding provided from the supplemental funding request would be used to upgrade and improve transitional shelters in Port-au-Prince. USAID and the international community would provide services and shelter to an estimated 9,600 homeless families, which could include the upgrading and improvement of transitional shelters that have already been provided. In one or more of the designated secondary cities, an additional 14,400 families would benefit from this program. These communities would have access to clean water, sewage, and electricity. Homes on allocated lots would be

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<sup>1</sup> Smaller shelters can be constructed where there are site limitations.

**Figure 2: Utilizing Plastic Sheeting in Transition to Permanent Shelter**



House has cement slab/base and transitional materials for the walls and roof; plastic sheeting is re-used to provide waterproof protection.

Photo credit: CHF International

constructed gradually to adequate building codes. This program would benefit up to 120,000 people. Beneficiaries would also profit from planned investments by the United States and other donors and multilateral partners in social sectors, roads, economic growth opportunities, security, rule of law and governance.

At the same time, supplemental funding for construction training would promote the use of basic building construction standards and encourage adoption of locally appropriate seismic-resistant construction methods. Experience in other post-disaster situations shows that housing for the poorest can be developed incrementally through a combination of providing basic transitional shelter materials, their own self-help – supported by training – and direct subsidies for additional materials through a targeted voucher system. Employing the local community in the construction of their homes provides a source of income for thousands, helps build valuable skills and promotes a sense of ownership of the shelter.

The Haitian middle class, those with steady, formal sector employment, can improve their housing over time through financing. USAID would use a mix of credit guarantees and capital grants to qualified lending institutions to increase the availability of affordable financing for housing construction and housing repair targeted to the middle class.

### **Challenges**

**Land:** Land availability and land tenure issues have hindered the construction of transitional shelters in Haiti. Land is the essential prerequisite for constructing housing. The sheer quantity of debris from the earthquake requires a massive effort to clear obstructed lots and roads. Lack of clarity over land ownership, compounded by the loss of critical records in the earthquake, exacerbates the problem of identifying land for housing. The U.S. Government will need to work with the Government of Haiti and other donors to identify sites for transitional shelter and to verify and grant valid land titles.

**Beneficiary Selection:** A methodology and mechanism to select beneficiaries of housing programs will also be necessary to ensure transparency, equity, and effective targeting of populations most in need. In addition, a large proportion of displaced persons were renting property prior to the earthquake, which limits the immediately available options for resettlement.

**Viability of Communities:** The long-term viability of communities also depends on access to jobs, health services and affordable schools. IDPs consistently identify jobs and schools as their two top determinants for choosing a place to live. Housing development must be coordinated with other complementary investments that provide incentives – such as economic opportunities and social services – for IDPs to move out of camps.

### **Interim Solutions**

USAID partners are addressing these issues by focusing on individual neighborhoods, identifying families who'd like to depart spontaneous settlements for neighborhood shelter sites, and encouraging nearby landowners to allow transitional shelter construction on their plots. Partners are increasing land availability through rubble removal activities, as well as employing less formal, but rapid, means of clarifying land ownership by requesting verification from neighbors, local officials, and recognized "honest brokers" in the neighborhood to ascertain prior land occupancy, as many individuals lack formal titles or legally documented access to land.