



**Malawi Shelter Cluster Technical Working Group (TWG)**  
**on Promoting Safer building Practices Notes of the meeting held on 18.03.2021 from 10h-11.30h via ZOOM**

**Participants:**

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## Agenda:

### 1. Introduction and recap of last meetings findings and conclusions

### 2. how to promote better foundations?

- analysis of foundations proposed in the safer house construction guidance
- experiences and potential solutions from the field (CRS & Cadecom)
- expertise CRAterre

### 4. what kind of IEC do we need to best reach the identified target groups in a larger scale?

- local councils, housing officers, VCDCs
- vulnerable communities

### 5. AOB, suggestions for way forward

#### welcome, introduction and short recap

After all participants introduced themselves, Cecilia gave a quick recap of the TWiGs main objective to promote safer building practices with a special focus on how to reach people that self-recover after disaster with technical assistance to build back safer.

During last meeting key target audience were identified who should be targeted with communication and awareness raising on safer building practices:

- affected communities/vulnerable communities at high risk, whole population, especially those who build themselves.
- local builders, especially the ones who have not followed any trainings.
- housing officers, VCDCs, Community Development Officers and other community mobilizers who have a key role to play in disseminating safer building practices to the communities.

There was a pro, that the key messages to disseminate need to be agreed by different stakeholders in respective hazards, local building cultures, available materials etc.



### How to promote better foundations?

After looking at the four foundations proposed in the Safer House Construction guidance, field experience and good local building practices were shared by CRS/Cadecom, CRAterre and other participants.

The discussion then centred around what options could be suggested to those who do not have the financial means to build solid foundations using burnt brick, cement blocks or concrete but have little other options than building with mud-blocks.

Suggested solutions were:

- compacting the soil around the foundations to make it less permeable to water,
  - introducing a damp proof membrane,
  - protecting foundation and lower wall with plaster
  - building a separate wooden structure to hold the roof, to take weight off the walls and to save the roof even if walls collapse (solutions using wood were generally discouraged, given the scarcity of wood in Malawi)
  - erect brick pillars to hold the roof.
  - build a raised earthen plinth to lift the house above “normal” flood levels. Those plinths can be protected by masonry or burnt bricks to make them more resistant specially to moving water.
  - It was flagged that for the case of black cotton soil deep foundations should be avoided! In areas with black cotton soil it will be better to build a strong plinth or slab as base for the house. A link to a [soil map](#) of Malawi was shared, to identify areas where black cotton soil (or other vertisols) are predominant.
- ➔ It was agreed that a range of options was needed where members can choose what need to be practiced in common for all levels of affordability.

It was also flagged that some settlement level measures could be promoted such as building embankments, dykes, drainage channels or other protective installations to prevent or reduce flood risk.

A further point brought to discussion was that any sensitisation or communication strategy for better building practices should aim towards behavioural change, hence the importance of really understanding people’s ideas, aspirations and capacities as well as the context. Larger scale adoption of better practices will only happen if the solutions are affordable and easily replicable. Communications should centre around helping people to make the good choice where to invest their money when constructing or repairing their houses.

Mr. Bulukutu Chirwa stated that he was strongly in favour of promoting stone or brick foundations but could see that not everyone might be able to afford those solutions. Participants understood that the options from the housing guidelines were the “gold standards” to aim for, but that alternative solutions would be accepted where needed until such more costly options become more widely adopted and affordable. At the same time, it should be accepted that we should not be moving steps backwards but aim at changing the mind set of local people.



- All agreed that the focus should be on environmentally friendly “green technologies” with saving wood (for construction or for burning bricks) as a priority. Good assessments of the context and particularly the environmental implications of potential construction materials is of high importance.
- It was agreed to proceed with the safer housing guidance as reference and compile a number of potential alternative details for the key structural elements. Then a selection of key messages can be made jointly.

#### what kind of IEC do we need to best reach the identified target groups on a larger scale?

This point was not discussed because of the time constraints. Ideas have already been gathered in previous meeting but need to be further discussed and agreed for a consistent and effective dissemination strategy. Another meeting will be planned for this discussion.

#### AOB and next steps

- the [Shelter Response Profile](#) consolidates information related to hazards, legal framework and policies, local building practices, and other important information related to housing recovery in Malawi. It also has a link to a [soil map](#) of Malawi which shows the areas where black cotton soil or other vertisols (particular type of soil).

#### Next steps:

- The TWG will continue to discuss construction details, based on the safer housing guidance and suggest alternative options where a need is felt to have a wider range of options.
- Shadreck suggested to involve UNHABITAT and WB and invite them to join next TWG; Cecilia will take care of the invitation.
- the **next meeting will be on Thursday April 1st at 10h Malawi time.** Invitation will be sent as calendar invite.