
SHELTER CLUSTER POSITION PAPER
Herat Earthquake Emergency Response in Afghanistan:
The need for an immediate response towards timely, safe, and resilient shelter solutions

Herat, Version 18-October 2023



Herat Earthquake 2023



Background

On 7 October 2023 at around 11.00 local time, a 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck 40km west of Herat City in Herat Province, western Afghanistan. Since then, a series of shallow, and two strong (6M+) earthquakes and aftershocks have rocked the same area in Western Afghanistan.

As of 17th October, more than 66,360 people (12,108 families) are reported to have been directly affected by the recent earthquakes across Injil (26,380 people), Kushk / Rabat-e-Sangai (11,281 people), Zindajan (10,393 people), Guzara (10,365), Gulran (3,428 people), Herat (3,113 people), Ghoryan (1,257 people), Kohsan (133 people), and Karukh (10 people). To date, 1,480 people are reported to have been killed and 2,066 people injured by the earthquakes. Women and children are overly represented within reported casualties.

Assessments indicate catastrophic levels of damage with complete destruction of houses being reported in some villages. Injil is the worst affected district, accounting for 39 per cent of people affected. More than 3,728 homes are also reported to have been destroyed – the majority in Zindajan district – 5,006 homes severely damaged, and 2,637 homes moderately damaged. Humanitarian responders are actively engaged in ongoing community assessments on the ground, and figures are anticipated to increase in the days ahead.

According to satellite imagery analysis conducted by Microsoft in collaboration with Global Shelter Cluster, 21,300 buildings are projected to have sustained damages/destroyed from the impact of the first earthquake on 7 October 2023.

In addition to severe vulnerabilities triggered by a series of aftershock and earthquakes (3 events of MMI 6+), on 12 October, wind and dust storm in Zindajan, Kohsan and Kushk / Rabat-e-Sangai districts destroyed several hundred tents provided by partners.

The earthquake has struck vulnerable communities with little resilience to cope with multiple simultaneous shocks. Many of the communities nearest the epicenters of the earthquake are already dealing with the consequences of decades of conflict and underdevelopment. The shelter situation is catastrophic and while UN and NGO partners are supporting the humanitarian response, urgently sending emergency shelter materials, NFIs, food, health, and hygiene support to the most-affected areas and communities, numbers are expected to rise over the coming days, weeks as assessments become available.

Main Recommendations

The Cluster informed by Strategic Advisory Group, foregrounds need for immediate access to adequate, safe, emergency, and transitional shelter solutions and recommends a two-pronged approach.

- 1) To immediately prioritize and deliver lifesaving emergency shelter and NFI support to all affected families delivering emergency shelter, NFI and seasonal winter assistance.
- 2) To simultaneously initiate transitional shelter and other shelter repair efforts, contributing to acceleration of activities that reduce the duration of the emergency and the impact of temporary living conditions.

The Shelter Cluster advocates for support and, for investment directed to shelter repair and transitional shelter solutions particularly for women headed households and groups with intersecting vulnerabilities. These activities significantly improve the living conditions of affected people, and have an overarching contribution to other sectors enabling, physical and legal protection for affected families, providing a sense of normalcy, improved psychological state, their access to essential services such as health, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and causal to disaster risk reduction (DRR).

Building on lessons from the earthquake response in Paktika and Khost last year, the Shelter Cluster emphasizes need for consultative engagement with shelter partners and communities at the earliest stage in identifying localized solutions and vernacular practices in housing and settlements within Herat and other affected regions, enabling the provision of technical guidance to affected communities, engagement with DfA's in re-building of transitional shelters and repair of homes that are culturally appropriate, and resilient to earthquakes and other recurrent natural disasters.

Cross Cutting Principles

People centered: The Shelter Cluster, intends to ensure that affected populations are center in decision making and implementation of their own homes and communities. The Shelter Clusters and its partners will aim to establish community-based approaches through a scaling-up of local engagement initiatives, participation, and in consultations with affected families.

Recognize capacities not only needs: The Shelter Cluster is cognizant of the considerable capacities, skills, knowledge, and abilities, individually and collectively that affected communities hold to inform the response, including in identifying most vulnerable persons.

Coordination for scale, speed, and equity: The Shelter Cluster calls for close coordination with authorities at all levels, partners, other Clusters, and stakeholders including non-humanitarian actors to ensure maximum coverage, a consistent approach in identifying gaps, priority needs and a prompt response to and where feasible, authorities' ownership of the response.

Sustainability and resilience: The Shelter Cluster takes the view that shelter is more than just the provision of tents, materials, or the construction of a physical structure. It is a process essential to the creation of an environment where people can begin rebuilding their lives in safety, live in dignity, with

solutions that are culturally appropriate, with a goal to improve the culture of construction beyond the replacement the lost assets. This includes a strengthening of local building practices, integrating hazard-resistant practices, considerations of their impact on the environment, disaster prevention, risk reduction and mitigation measures, and a transfer of knowledge and experience advanced by local communities.

Coverage, equity, and coordination of diverse inputs: The earthquake affected area covers a wide range of context, conditions, communities, levels of damage and other emerging issues on anticipated throughout the implementation phase. The principle of achieving maximum coverage and equitable assistance aims to enable the necessary adoption for a variety of appropriate technical solutions, modalities to respond to needs. Developing a common approach does not mean uniformity, but encourages agencies to plan and work together, harnessing diverse specialist inputs and accommodating targeted mandates, investments, and activities in a cohesive manner. Equally, the Shelter Cluster calls unto partners to think and plan in terms of scale, coverage, replicability to affected population, with consideration for remote areas and villages with extensive damage.

Build upon partners experience & expertise: The Shelter Cluster partners have experience and expertise to draw upon from past emergency and transitional shelter responses, including from last year's earthquake in Southeast region and across different sectors in emergency relief, disaster risk management, earthquake resilient construction and community-based approaches. The partners also bring a diverse range of skills and resources, experience in emergencies, transitional programs, other disasters, and agency operational capacity from the humanitarian phase in affected districts and from established coordination mechanisms.

Optimize partner organization capacities and resources: The Shelter Cluster calls unto partners with capability, to mobilize sufficient and appropriate surge capacities, with both, prior experience in Shelter and NFI activities and good knowledge of the local context, culture, language, and geography, to support the response. Further, the Cluster advocates for the adoption of common approaches, tools, curricula, information materials, pooled finance, agreed through a consultative process to ensure consistency and quality in all Shelter/NFI response activities. Collective development of technical assistance resources will optimize the use of expertise and funds, ensuring benefit for all agencies and the wider shelter response.

Labor shortages and the role of women: The impact of casualties from the earthquake may have an impact on the availability of labor for emergency and transitional response activities. There will be additional burdens on women's time in addition to their already multiple and complex family roles. Women will have a critical role to play during throughout the emergency-transitional phase of Shelter/NFI assistance and should be supported in this and other roles through knowledge and skills development. Women's participation in Shelter and NFI activities, including quality assurance of construction should be supported with consideration of timing, childcare and other context specific gender roles. Accordingly, building on DfA's flexibility on participation and mobility of women in the response, including staff working with humanitarian organizations.

Outcome based: The Shelter Cluster call unto partners to ensure technical assistance needs are monitored and evaluated based on impact, including measuring the adoption of appropriate building practices and going beyond the delivery of information, shelter materials, and other Non-Food items. Quality assurance, control and risk is the responsibility of the household, the wider community, and partners in the response. The Cluster will develop upon these efforts and further advocates to agencies, donors on the need to understand these implications in terms of liability, visibility, and its value and impact on the response.

Technical assistance and capacity building: The Shelter Cluster underscores the importance of technical assistance to be planned and implemented in time, and that goes hand in hand with the assistance; at a proper scale, to support the needs of the affected population with due considerations of specific needs for vulnerable persons and communities. This includes developing tailored training modules, and capacity building of responding partners, affected communities contributing to the response, particularly for repair and transitional shelter responses.

Timeliness: The Shelter Cluster will facilitate availability of information, training, technical support, as early as possible to support partners, and communities make informed decisions on the response, consequently contributing to acceleration of activities that reduce the impact of temporary living conditions.

Technical Guiding Principles

Strategic Objective 1: Access to lifesaving emergency assistance to people whose homes have been destroyed and damaged by the earthquake.

1. To immediately prioritize and deliver emergency, lifesaving shelter and NFI assistance to all affected families. Therefore, providing physical protection from the elements, a space to live, store belongings as well as privacy, comfort, and emotional security. This will be done through the provision of emergency shelter kits, rental subsidies, NFIs, repair toolkits to those displaced or non-displaced by the earthquake event. The Cluster calls unto all partners to provide adequate technical support, training including onsite demonstrations, collaborating with community members in the delivery of emergency shelter assistance.
2. To immediately prioritize and deliver winter seasonal assistance to all affected families. Therefore, reducing exposure to harsh weather conditions, the risk of respiratory infections particularly among children U-5, hypothermia, limb amputation and preventable mortality among women, children, and elderly. This will be done through the provision of winter clothing, blankets, heating /fuel assistance and tent winterization kits for those displaced or non-displaced by the earthquake event.
3. The Shelter/ NFI Cluster advocates to immediately initiate action to clear debris on plots, working in coordination with DfA and communities. This is envisioned to help identifying spaces that can be used to set up emergency shelter, and further contribute towards psychological recovery of affected people. Shelter Cluster Partners in direct engagement with CCCM working group and

WASH cluster, will advocate for safe waste disposal, preserving where possible existing structures, and prioritizing safe harvesting of shelter materials for recycling during the transitional construction phase.

4. The Shelter Cluster aims to adopt where feasible, short term conditional cash for work programs providing affected people with temporary labor opportunities by supporting debris-clearing efforts. Equally, the Shelter Cluster will continue to coordinate with the authorities to identify and map spaces at village level for safe disposal of debris waste.

Strategic Objective 2: Access to life-sustaining shelter and dignified living condition to people whose homes have been destroyed and damaged by the earthquake.

1. The Shelter Cluster aims to quickly reach consensus on the proposed transitional shelter solutions, and accelerate implementation, where resources are available. This is aimed at reducing the duration of the emergency and the impact of temporary living conditions on vulnerable families, prior to the onset of winter. It further mitigates development of tented camps and displacement of affected people to cities. The transitional shelter response will be adapted to the context, and the affected families consulted from the outset while building on existing capacities and experience from earthquake response in the Southeast region.
2. The transitional shelter response is to be provided only as part of a wider process, as a start to a home for all affected families. It is centered on investing in knowledge, skills, and capacities to build safe, resilient shelter, building on local practices, equitable and inclusive, with equal rights to land and property accorded to women.
3. The Shelter Cluster anticipates issues related to lack of documentation and complex land tenure. The Cluster advocates to partners to ensure that the delivery modality chosen for transitional shelter and repair assistance does not exclude any groups (including women) that have lost or have never had official IDs. All families affected by earthquake, whose homes were affected (damaged or destroyed), should receive assistance, even in cases, where they may lack correct documentation. The Shelter Cluster will closely work with HLP, Protection Cluster, local authorities, and communities to support, any feasible actions that ensure the lack of documentation does not delay shelter relief efforts.
4. The Shelter Cluster advocates for the repair of existing structures, owner driven transitional shelter responses, preservations of architectural heritage and use relocation and resettlement only as a last resort. Further, the Cluster will strive to find the right balance between building back better and safer and preserving local construction practices. Inevitably, ensuring we provide solutions that can withstand further shocks and recurrent natural disasters and that are aligned to the cultural heritage of affected communities.

5. The Shelter Cluster calls unto its partners responding to prioritize technical damage assessments to understand the types of damage, the technical skills required in repair and transitional shelter construction, most common housing typologies and building techniques and investigate major causes of failure for respective categories. The assessment may also provide information on the local building skills available and training needs including the availability of labor and construction materials. Technical assessment teams should include technical specialist and must be sufficiently trained.

Strategic Objective 3: Enable community-based approaches through scaling-up local engagement & coordination, and technical local capacity building.

1. The Shelter Cluster will ensure that technical assistance and training on earthquake resilient measures for build back better and safer, is prioritized early in the response, to inform the decisions and investments made by families and communities from their own resources and the financial assistance provided by donors and other partners.
2. The Shelter Cluster encourage donors to support both transitional and early recovery strategies, providing a keen balance of projects better placed to alleviate life threatening needs, and investments that address both short and long-term shelter needs of affected people.
3. The Shelter Cluster partners will continue to ensure information and feedback mechanisms are available and accessible in relevant languages and formats enabling affected people to report sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment concerns in preferred languages and through trusted channels and be understood.

Response packages and activities

Objective	Response	Activities* ¹
<i>Access to lifesaving emergency assistance to people whose houses have been destroyed and damaged by the earthquake.</i>	Provide immediate lifesaving emergency shelter and household items (NFIs) to families affected by the earthquake (displaced and non-displaced)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Household Multisectoral Assessments (MSNA) ● Technical damage assessment ● Provision of debris removal kits ● Provision of NFI / household items (NFIs). ● Provision of emergency repair tool kit. ● Provision of emergency shelters (family tents, 2 pcs of plastic tarpaulin and gravelling) ● Provide temporary rental assistance (3 months) for displaced families with fully damaged houses. ● Provision of tent winterization kits. ● Provision of seasonal assistance (winter clothing and blankets) ● Provision of seasonal assistance (heating /fuel).

¹ All relevant standards, kits content and prices are provided in Annex 1.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site management and planning of temporary reception centres and collective centres.
<i>Access to life-sustaining shelter and dignified living condition to people whose houses have been destroyed and damaged by the earthquake</i>	Provide access to life-sustaining shelter and dignified living condition to people whose houses have been destroyed and damaged by the earthquake.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing access to dignified and safe shelter solutions and living conditions for people who have lost their homes (individuals with severely and completely damaged houses). • Provide longer rental assistance for displaced families with fully damaged houses (6months). • Providing access to shelter minor repair assistance (through cash for shelter or in-kind material support). • Providing access to shelter moderate repair assistance (through cash for shelter or in-kind material support).
<i>Enable community-based approaches through scaling-up local engagement & coordination, and technical local capacity building.</i>	Support to responders (partners, local authorities, and communities) through meaningful coordination and building technical capacities (owner-driven construction and built back better and safer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead and support the structural damage assessment processes in direct engagement with DfA, partners and communities. • Lead on community-engagement to identify existing technical capacities, local building practices and pathways for reconstruction, and identify capacity building needs. • Provide tailored training and capacity building of responding partners, affected communities contributing to the response, especially for transitional housing solutions and reconstruction. • Produce training materials on construction practices that are culturally appropriate.

Annex I: Reference Documents

1. [Shelter Cluster Standards and Guidelines](#)
2. [Shelter Cluster Guidelines on Vulnerability Criteria](#)
3. [Shelter Cluster Guidelines on Transitional Shelter Support](#)
4. [Shelter Cluster Product Catalogue](#)
5. [Shelter Cluster Cash for Rent Guidelines](#)
6. [ICCT Winterization Response Plan](#)
7. [Shelter Cluster Standard Packages and Specifications](#)
8. [Shelter Cluster Repair and Upgrade Guidelines](#)
9. [Shelter Cluster-Miyamoto Key Messages and Construction Principles Earthquake, Southeast Response](#)
10. [Shelter Cluster-Miyamoto Build Back Safer Practical Training Program, Southeast Response](#)
11. [Shelter Cluster Partners Dashboard](#)
12. [Transitional settlement and reconstruction after natural disasters](#)

Annex II: Contact Information (National & Subnational Team)

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