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for managing natural resources and a better life for all”

Assessing the contribution of climate-resilient UN shelters to humanitarian-development-peace outcomes in Mozambique and Pakistan

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Abstract

In contexts affected by climate- and conflict-related displacement, the construction of temporary humanitarian shelters has long been a preferred method of humanitarian intervention by UN agencies and international organisations. However, as the average length of displacement has grown more protracted, shelters have evolved – in outcome, if not always intent – from short-term mechanisms of humanitarian response to longer-term communal formations. This evolution mirrors a discursive shift among UN agencies and international actors away from “simple” humanitarian responses, and toward those that simultaneously target humanitarian, development, and peace (HDP) outcomes. For shelters interventions, this has resulted in new strategic objectives that include sustainable development, climate action, and peacebuilding.

To explore how UN-led shelters interventions perform against these targets and identify ways that future interventions can better achieve their goals, this paper assesses and compares two ongoing climate-resilient shelter interventions: one led by UNHCR in Maratane, Nampula, Mozambique, and another by IOM in Mirpur Khas, Sindh, Pakistan. Maratane is Mozambique’s sole official refugee encampment, and UNHCR is constructing several hundred climate-resilient shelters for host and refugee communities to replace housing destroyed by cyclone Gombe in 2022. Similarly, in Mirpur Khas, IOM is building approximately 500 shelters to replace housing destroyed by unprecedented flooding in 2022.

A mixed-method approach was employed to explore how each intervention has influenced humanitarian, development, and peace outcomes. Approximately 200 intervention participants that received shelters were surveyed at each site, while key informant interviews were convened with intervention participants, UN staff, and government officials.

Preliminary results show that while shelters performed strongly against humanitarian objectives, development gains were harder to identify. Concerningly, shelters seem to have had a negative impact on peace, with intra- and inter-communal tensions increasing, trust and participation in local governance structures decreasing, and anti-UN sentiments increasing in their wake. Opportunities for improving future shelter interventions include increased community control and ownership of future interventions, implementing processes that support collective action and community dialog, and the mainstreaming of conflict-sensitive and peace-positive approaches.

Keywords: Development, displacement, host communities, shelter interventions, social cohesion