



The focus group discussion opened up a new way of communicating with beneficiaries and deepened the project staff's understanding of their situation, needs and ideas.  
Photo: IOM Pakistan.



### Situation before the disaster

The region affected by the floods is among the poorest in Pakistan, with development indicators, including global nutrition rates, already approaching crisis point before the 2010 floods.

After the 2010 floods, which damaged or destroyed approximately 1.8 million houses, the organisation supported affected families to build over 38,000 shelters (see *Shelter Projects 2010*, A.24).

Heavy rains caused flooding again in September and October 2011, displacing an estimated 1.2 million people throughout Sindh and Balochistan. Around 35% of the communities affected in 2011 were also affected by the 2010 floods.

### Situation after the disaster

Flooding in 2012 mostly affected districts in northern Sindh, whereas the 2011 floods affected southern Sindh. Whilst there was some overlap in the 2010 and 2012 flood-affected areas, all of the families selected for 2012 shelter recovery assistance were first-time beneficiaries.

In the aftermath of the disasters, communities had limited resources and insufficient technical capacity to reconstruct durable shelters.

### Shelter strategy

The Shelter Cluster's early-recovery strategy for the 2011 and 2012 floods advocated for the provision of low-cost shelter support to the most vulnerable families whose houses became uninhabitable after the floods, in a way that improved their resilience to future natural disasters. The Cluster strategy encouraged a beneficiary-driven approach, providing flexible shelter solutions tailored to the needs and capacities of beneficiaries.

### Beneficiary selection

The beneficiary selection process was unchanged since the 2011 response, identifying the most severely affected districts and forming village committees to identify the most vulnerable in their communities.

### Project implementation

The organisation continued with the same methodology it had used in response to the 2011 floods, working with implementing partners whose field teams worked in collaboration with village committees to distribute cash for rebuilding.

The cash was distributed in three tranches. The first was paid in advance for the construction of the floor plinth; the second was transferred on completion of the plinth, to pay for construction of the walls; the final tranche was given once the walls

were complete in order to pay for the building of the roof.

Implementing partners and project staff provided technical support throughout the project, giving trainings on safe construction practices and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) techniques to the beneficiaries.

### Feedback mechanisms

Recognising the growing need for active, accountable and meaningful engagement with the shelter project beneficiaries, the organisation launched a Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) initiative in its 2012 flood response.

The MEAL initiative has been a three-tier approach, comprising of:

- A Humanitarian Call Centre 'hotline'.
- Household monitoring visits.
- Beneficiary feedback focus-group discussions.

The aim of MEAL has been to increase two-way communication between beneficiaries and project teams, by offering a variety of options to promote choice, opportunity and access for the beneficiaries. MEAL has facilitated the beneficiaries' ability make suggestions, complaints and comments.

The initiative streamlined and enhanced the previously established call centre and monitoring visits, and added a new element of focus group discussions.

### Humanitarian Call Centre (HCC)

The predominant mechanism for beneficiary feedback has been the HCC 'hotline'. It promotes transparency and encourages the reporting of programme irregularities by beneficiaries, implementing partners and staff, as well as providing a way to give general information.

Data collected by the HCC is integrated into the overall M&E system to ensure timely and reliable follow-up, cross verification of eligible households and beneficiaries, and documentation of responses. The feedback loop is closed by then



**In-depth beneficiary feedback can have a positive impact on the planning and execution of a project. The project increased the value of payments when beneficiaries raised the issue of high market prices which were preventing them from finishing their houses with quality materials.**  
Photo: IOM.

contacting the caller, if a response is required.

The HCC has received 533 calls since 2011, of which 90% were related to complaints and grievances, whilst 10% were information requests or feedback on the programme. Complaints were forwarded to the organisation's management for follow-up, and 94% have been successfully resolved to date.

### **Random household monitoring visits**

Random sampling household monitoring visits have been made to at least 5% of beneficiary households. The visits were first introduced in 2010 as part of the then flood response.

Technical, social mobilisation and monitoring teams have collected feedback through community visits and verification missions. On average, monitoring teams have conducted 640 random visits per week.

### **Focus-group discussions**

A "beneficiary feedback learning exercise" was piloted in 2013. Nine focus-group discussions were held with beneficiaries in nine union councils spread across five districts.

This innovative exercise went beyond regular monitoring processes, providing a space to listen to the views and experiences of the people who benefited from the shelter project.

Social mobilisers and technical staff conducted the discussions,

which were divided into different topics:

- The objectives of the shelter assistance project.
- Beneficiary selection methods and social mobilisation.
- The construction process for the One Room Shelter response (ORS).
- Project closure.

As a preface to the focus group exercises, project teams thoroughly briefed participants on each of the topics to be covered, ensuring common understanding of the scope and purpose of discussions in order to encourage full beneficiary engagement and effective feedback. The success of the pilot and the deepened engagement with beneficiaries led to focus-group discussions being established as a standard feedback mechanism in 2014.

## **Using feedback to improve programmes**

The MEAL approach enables the project to adapt and better tailor its assistance to beneficiary needs. This is evident through numerous adaptive measures undertaken. Feedback has also informed strategic-level discussions about shelter programming, for example reconstruction in a context constrained by land ownership and property titling. Below are three examples.

### **1) Formation of new community-based organisations**

Feedback from the focus-group discussions indicated that the village committees were not performing as hoped. In many cases, beneficiaries were not aware of who the committee members were, or what their role was.

To solve this problem, household-level community groups were formed instead. These groups were made accountable for the financial and procurement processes, and monitored the quality and delivery of construction operations. This new arrangement meant that community

members had greater decision-making power and responsibility. For example, when receiving shelter cash contributions, a group could decide to procure collectively, making savings through bulk purchases.

### **2) Modification to cash transfer procedures**

Financial procedures can be bureaucratic and time consuming, involving multiple banks, transfers and signatures. Families reported that they had to borrow money at interest because cash payments were arriving late.

As a result of the feedback, project accounts have now been opened in the same local banks that beneficiaries use, significantly streamlining the whole process.

### **3) Payment changes**

Both beneficiaries and field staff had consistently reported that the overall cash support of 26,000 rupees was not sufficient at current market prices.

The organisation conducted a market analysis which confirmed that the allocated cash amount was not sufficient to support families to 'build back better'. An additional 4,000 rupees allowed families to buy the quality of materials required to fully implement flood-resistant building techniques.

## **Shelter design and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)**

In August 2013, a survey of vernacular construction techniques in northern Sindh was conducted in 20 villages and five districts, to identify DRR-enhanced interventions for shelter construction. Based on the results, a low-cost shelter solution informed by vernacular 'lohkat' techniques was developed (houses are built using poles from lohkat trees, plastered with mud on the outside). The survey results also highlighted that respondents preferred mono-pitched roofs as compared to double-pitched roofs, as the former type is easier to construct and allows people to take refuge on top of it during floods.



The hotline and complaints procedure was advertised through posters. The telephone number was shared by handing out business-cards to the community. Graphic: IOM.

As part of the 2012 floods response, an effort was made to enhance the use of lime in shelter construction. A Training-of-Trainers (ToT) programme was implemented in 2014, with key technical project staff given the opportunity to test formulate different lime compositions based on soil analysis and other tests.

Once optimal compositions were identified, this information was included in technical trainings for beneficiaries to build back safer.

**Wider project impacts**

Around a quarter of those participating in technical trainings to support safer shelter construction were non-beneficiaries, raising general awareness of DRR techniques.

Some beneficiaries who have learned new masonry techniques are now being employed by non-beneficiary families to build their houses.

The training of implementing partner organisations has filled

the gap in technical capacity that existed during the response to the 2010 floods. Some organisations that previously worked as implementing partners for the project have now applied for independent funding for similar shelter-recovery activities.

**The future of feedback**

As beneficiaries are increasingly aware of their right to be included within the planning, implementation and evaluation phases of aid programmes, feedback mechanisms are taking their rightful place as a key part of any programme. Accountability is not just a moral imperative, but also an operational need.

By providing a mix of feedback mechanisms, not only can implementation be improved but a voice can be given to the marginalised.

Diverse feedback mechanisms also help to monitor and motivate implementing partners, providing an important stream of information when the main organisation has few staff on the ground.