

CASE STUDY

PARAGUAY 2019–2020 / FLOODS

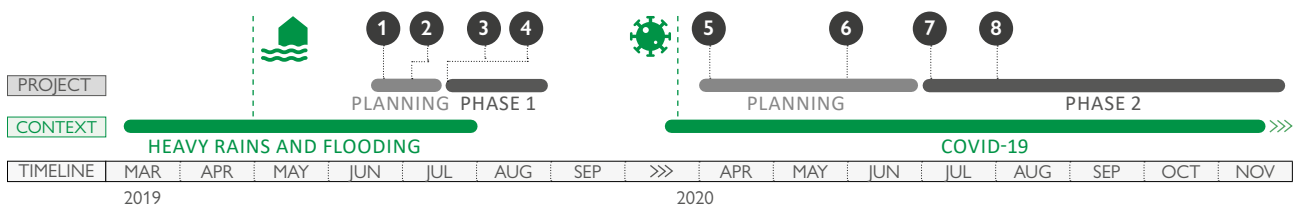
KEYWORDS: COVID-19, IEC materials, NFIs distributions

CRISIS	Flooding & COVID-19, May 2019 onwards
PEOPLE AFFECTED	70,000 HHs (273,000 individuals)*
PROJECT LOCATION	Asuncion, Paraguay
PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT	2,925 HHs (8,775 individuals): 2019 Flood response: 15,000 HHs : 2020 COVID-19 response:
PROJECT OUTPUTS	2,925 packages of Shelter kits and household items 1,941 individuals trained on use of shelter kits 13,000 HHs received general COVID-19 mitigation messaging 2,000 HHs received shelter specific COVID-19 mitigation messaging
DIRECT COST	USD 100 per HH (Shelter Kits and household items) USD 0.25 per HH (COVID-19 messaging)
PROJECT COST	USD 200 per HH (Shelter Kits and household items) USD 0.80 per HH (COVID-19 messaging)
* Source: Secretariat of National Emergency - Paraguay	



PROJECT SUMMARY

This project provided emergency shelter support and training in the form of Shelter Kits and household items to 2,925 households affected by flooding in Asunción. This was then followed by a COVID-19 specific project in 2020 which provided general messaging on COVID-19 risk mitigation and specific advice on how communities could adapt their shelters to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.



May 2019: Heavy rains affected Paraguay causing rapid flooding of the Paraguay River.

- 1 25 Jun–2 Jul 2019: Needs assessments.
- 2 3–15 Jul 2019: Community engagement and targeting.
- 3 16 Jul–30 Aug 2019: Training, community engagement and distributions.
- 4 16 Jul–30 Aug 2019: Post Distribution Monitoring.

11 Mar 2020: WHO declared the novel COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic.

- 5 Apr–May 2020: Needs assessment and planning.
- 6 Jun 2020: Project design.
- 7 Jul–Aug 2020: Distribution of messaging.
- 8 Aug–Nov 2020: Post Distribution Monitoring.



Throughout the project the partners consulted with community members and community leadership structures.

CONTEXT

From March to July 2019 intense rains affected Paraguay causing rapid flooding of the Paraguay River and affecting more than 70,000 households, including 13,000 households in Asunción. The flooding caused internal displacement, forcing households to move to both planned and spontaneous camps.

In Asunción, the areas along the Paraguay River are occupied by informal settlements, characterized by precarious housing, a lack of infrastructure, lack of access to services and irregular land tenure. An estimated 45,000 people live in flood-prone areas within the capital city. The river usually experiences a flood every 10 years but since 2014 the frequency has increased, becoming almost annual. Floods can last between two to ten months. The heavy rainfall between March - July 2019 resulted in floods that lasted for seven months.

SITUATION AFTER THE FLOODS

As households living in flood-prone areas of Asunción experience floods on a recurring basis, over the years many households have identified nearby areas of land where they can take refuge during floods. The 2019 floods occurred with very little notice, and households had to leave homes as quickly as possible and move to open areas of land and public spaces where they could take refuge, initially building make-shift shelters using materials such as plastic sheeting and cardboard. In Asunción, 118 planned and unplanned sites were established following the floods. The government administered some sites as emergency camps while in other cases households were forced to spontaneously occupy unsafe and unprepared public spaces.

Coordination was organized locally, from grassroots and municipal organizations. The declaration of a national emergency was made almost four months after displacements had started. The mobilization of resources from the national government was limited. Whilst the government provided some shelter materials such as plywood and metal sheeting to some displaced households, the shelter needs of all households were not met.

PROJECT APPROACH

The project aimed to augment the Government response by providing Shelter Kits (tarpaulins, tools and fixings) and household items (solar lights, mosquito nets and blankets) to displaced households to provide protection from the elements, provide improved privacy and security, make living conditions more dignified and provide protection from vector borne diseases.

The project was designed as a partnership between three organizations and was embedded within a global level partnership agreement. Governmental support for the project was sought and given by the department responsible for disaster management.

The “response package” to be distributed by the partners was based on the standard response to emergency shelter needs adopted by the partners globally. Through needs assessments and community consultations, the response package was locally adapted in relation to cultural appropriateness, items needed, infrastructure conditions and affected population capacities.

The partners opted for an in-kind approach rather than using cash-based interventions as they felt the required shelter outcomes were most efficiently met through in-kind. The partners’ capacity to include cash-based modalities as well as in-kind was low and so it was felt that the most equitable approach was in-kind to achieve the shelter outcomes.

With the exception of some additional blankets procured locally, all goods were imported from prepositioned stocks in order to maximize project efficiencies and timelines. The partners were able to import stocks within three weeks of the project starting, a timeline that would have been much longer had local procurement been a main pillar of the response. Through consultations with communities and Government early in the project, it was thought that certain key materials required for the project were of lower quality locally than could be imported from prepositioned stocks.

TARGETING

Targeting was carried out in coordination with National Government and key sections of Municipal Government in Asunción. The aim was to identify sites hosting displaced households who had received the least assistance so far. As the overall capacity of the project partners to cover all shelter needs of this kind in the city were limited, prioritization was given to sites hosting households whose status prior to the flood was the most marginal and who it was felt would be displaced the longest. The partners decided to take a blanket approach to distribution within identified sites as the majority of households within these sites were in a similar position.



Trainings were undertaken on the use of shelter materials and household items.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the project the partners consulted with community groups and community leadership structures to orient communities on the proposed project, understand their needs and wishes, and to make arrangements for distributions and trainings. Whenever possible, community members were involved in supporting orientations, trainings and distributions. Communities were consulted on technical matters such as Information Education Communication (IEC) material development, and suggestions made during focus group discussions led to significant changes to the messaging and language used in IEC materials. There were some protection concerns within some of the communities and the partners worked with community representative structures to try to understand these concerns and ensure that the project did not exacerbate them. One reason for taking a blanket approach to distribution was to lessen feelings of disparity within communities, which it was felt could heighten protection concerns.

TRAINING AND ORIENTATION

Orientations on the overall project were carried out within communities. Orientations were supported by more technical training on the use of shelter materials and household items. During orientation sessions it was outlined that distributed materials could be useful both during households' period of displacement and also to enable and facilitate return to their usual areas of residence. The partners carried out 'train the trainer' sessions where community leaders and identified community members were enabled to further continue trainings and share explanations to those unable to attend, and all participants were encouraged to spread the trainings to others and to assist those who had reduced capacities. In this way the partners aimed to foster a sense of community ownership and participation in the use of materials post distribution.

DISTRIBUTIONS

Distributions were carried out centrally in each target community. Community members were mobilized to support distribution set-up and further orientations, distribution marshaling and assistance in taking items home. Households identified as having specific vulnerabilities were assisted with transportation of items from distribution points, and certain community members were identified and trained in offering construction and repair assistance. Exit surveys were carried out at all distributions so the partners could gain an understanding of community members' views on the distribution process, fostering continuous improvement in the distribution process. Feedback mechanisms were put in place through community leaders enabling community members to bring any issues that were not captured in exit surveys to the attention of the partners. Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) was carried out approximately seven days after each distribution was carried out.

COVID-19 FOLLOW-UP RESPONSE

Eight months later, with the intensifying of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project partners planned follow-up programming to assist national efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in vulnerable communities in Asuncion.

The project was primarily aimed at the communities previously assisted with Shelter Kits, but was then expanded to include further communities in which one of the partners had ongoing projects. Households had returned to their original community areas once the floods had subsided, but their shelter typologies remained very similar as those utilized during their period of displacement.

The partners worked with the Department of Health on key messages, including on social distancing, washing hands, and cleaning of shelters. The partners also designed a bespoke set of messaging related to shelter and COVID-19 mitigation, with information on how previously distributed shelter materials could be used to create additional living space and create divisions between living spaces, how to improve ventilation of shelters, and how to construct an isolation space if a household member was taken ill and could not isolate elsewhere.

Due to COVID-19 contact restrictions, messaging was distributed to households and community leaders via WhatsApp. Materials were also printed as posters and banners that were publicly placed in communal spaces within communities.

"Response Package" content:	
Item	Quantity/HH
Household Items	
Thermal quilted blanket	3
Cotton blanket	1
Solar light	2
Mosquito net	2
Shelter Kit	
Tarpaulin (4m x 6m)	2
Rope	1
Handsaw	1
Nail for roof sheets	1/2kg
Shovel	1
Hoe	1
Machete	1
Shears	1
Nails (large)	1/2kg
Nails (small)	1/2kg
Tie wire	25m
Claw hammer	1
Woven sack	1

MAIN CHALLENGES

Importation of relief items. Some initial challenges were faced in relation to the importation of relief items. Stocks in country were low and it was decided that importation was the most feasible option to bring items to those in need. The partners coordinated with Government departments to arrange permissions and exemptions and then worked with regional partners to access stocks and import items.

Limited budget. The partners had limited budget, meaning that the number of households targeted would be lower than the overall needs. The partners coordinated with national and local Government, other NGO actors and community groups to identify the communities that were in most need. This information was triangulated by the partners and assisted in decision making. Decisions were then fed back to stakeholders and discussed prior to the intervention beginning.

Coordination between partners. There were three main partners to the project. This led to some initial challenges in terms of coordination and planning. However, the national partnerships were embedded in regional and global partnerships held between the partners ensuring that challenges of this nature were quickly overcome.

Restricted access due to COVID-19. In the COVID-19 programming, the greatest challenge to overcome was one of meaningful access. There was a great need to reach communities, but physical access was constrained. After discussion with community leaders and representatives, the partners and communities decided upon an electronic transmission modality, coupled with the placement of IEC banners in communal spaces where COVID-19 risks could be minimized. Restricted access also created challenges to monitoring the effectiveness of messages. A survey was initially embedded in a QR code on the messaging but the uptake was low, so the modality switched to conducting surveys over the phone.

Scarcity of existing IEC materials on COVID-19 shelter adaptations. In developing IEC materials in the context of COVID-19 there were very few existing resources that the partners could draw upon. A literature review was conducted and whilst there was information around general COVID-19 mitigation measures, the partners could not find existing literature on the shelter specific consideration. Therefore, the partners needed to conceptualize and design the messaging, and create designs that would be easily understood by households, which required coordination with subject matter experts in a variety of countries.

WIDER IMPACTS

Some of the impacts shown from PDM data following the 2019 distributions included that 92.5% of households reported that receiving shelter materials meant that they were then **able to focus on other household needs**, 44.3% reported **feeling less stressed** as a result of receiving materials, 86.7% reported feeling **better protected**

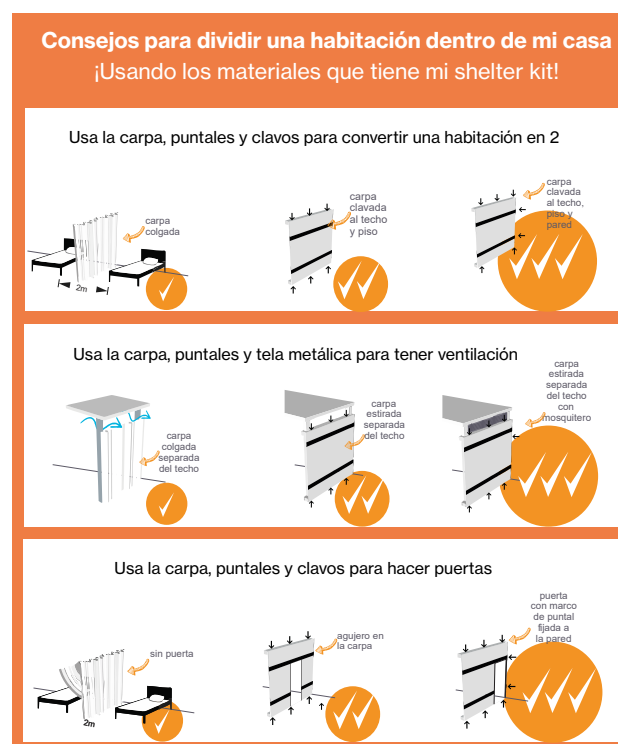
from mosquitos, and 71% reported **feeling safer** due to receiving the solar light.

The displacement cycle within these communities follows a pattern of movement from marginalized areas prone to flooding to displacement sites within the city during flooding. Many households take materials from their usual shelters with them to a new temporary location and then rebuild, and then reverse the process when return is possible. Many households reported that the **items received would be valued during their period of displacement, for use when returning to their homes, and for use during future expected displacements.**

Relationships, trust and acceptance built with target communities through this project acted as a gateway enabling the national partner organization to maintain a good connection to communities, enabling further dialogue as to their long-term housing needs.

At national Government level it was noted to the partners that the involvement of international actors **drew governmental focus to the issue of recurring floods**, which it was noted had become relatively normalized. A sense of solidarity or psychosocial support was also anecdotally noted by community members due to the attention brought to the flooding issue through the involvement of international actors, which was not a usual part of their cyclical displacement patterns.

The project served as an **opportunity to build a response mechanism between the partner organizations** that serves as the basis for partnership responses in other countries. Additionally, IEC materials created specifically for this project have been further used in other countries and contexts.



A series of IEC materials were developed to communicate key messaging related to shelter and COVID-19 mitigation.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

- √ **Strong community engagement.** The project partners engaged with communities throughout the project design and implementation, with many suggestions from communities being incorporated into the project design and the distribution processes.
- √ **Trust and flexibility between partners.** This project was embedded within a global partnership framework between the partners. Continued dialogue and joint efforts on partnership development at regional and global levels brings benefits at national response level.
- √ **Multipurpose uses of shelter materials.** The materials provided could be used in a variety of ways. The approach taken was intended to facilitate the ability of each households to meet their own shelter needs in their own way, rather than promoting a design based single solution for all households. Both anecdotally and through PDM it was seen that communities and households had a wide variety of uses for the items, which met their individual needs.
- √ **Joined-up nature of follow-on Covid-19 programming.** Partners maintained continuity of contact and support with communities, and built on relationships and trust built in the flood response project to provide further assistance in response to COVID-19.
- √ **Exit surveys and Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM).** Successes and failures were measured through exit surveys immediately following distributions, and PDM, with feedback used to improve the project while it was still ongoing.

WEAKNESSES

- × **“Train the trainer” approach had limited success.** Sessions with community members during the 2019 flood response intended for those trained to then assist other community members with utilization of items. Evaluation of this process showed some weaknesses. It appears that many people identified as community trainers did not feel they had the time and knowledge to conduct further trainings or support within communities.
- × **Appropriateness of IEC materials.** IEC materials to support the 2019 flood response were developed from global tools. Feedback suggested these materials were too technical and were difficult to understand. Development of IECs was discussed with communities but less so than other aspects of the project.
- × **Evaluation of COVID-19 support limited.** Evaluation was challenging to undertake due to restricted access. An opt-in approach was utilized, which had little uptake within communities. Therefore, it was not possible to obtain enough data to make a statistically viable evaluation.
- × **Unable to provide longer-term support.** Although providing much valued assistance, the project was not able to adequately address the longer-term needs of the affected population in terms of adequate housing and increasing resilience.
- × **Trade-offs in providing imported in-kind items.** Project partners opted for an in-kind approach using imported items as it was felt this was the best approach to support the timeliness of response and ensure better quality items. Trade-offs in taking this approach related to potential missed opportunities in enabling greater choice to households and supporting local markets.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Further work is needed to improve the ‘train the trainer’ model.** This could include enhanced engagement on roles and responsibilities, clarifying expectations, and ensuring that adequate resources and support are made available to the community trainers.
- **More time spent with communities on development of IEC materials would have been beneficial.** Some changes were made to draft IEC materials following engagement with communities, but enhanced community dialogue on IEC messages and communication would have been beneficial.
- **Humanitarian actors have a role to play in drawing attention to recurring crises.** Involvement of international actors in the form of surge capacity can help to raise awareness and lead to an enhanced sense of focus from national governments and agencies in situations of recurring crises, where events can become relatively normalized and become challenging to resource. Through engagement with coordination architecture more could be done to elevate levels of donor interest which could lead to greater levels of response capacity.
- **Relationships built through emergency response can link through to longer-term support.** Resources and mandate permitting, emergency responses projects can lead to enhanced community dialogue and involvement in longer-term development focused programs.