Shelter Assessment Report

Opinions from the host community in Hilaweyn refugee camp

Dollo Ado, Ethiopia

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Contextual background

The Somali Region of Ethiopia has over the past 30 years witnessed large displacements due to conflict and severe droughts. The main displacement has occurred from the conflict inside Somalia with refugees fleeing from two decades of conflict.

The current drought in the horn of Africa has had devastating consequences, with an estimated 12,5 million people facing severe food crisis and in urgent need of emergency assistance. The lack of rain have resulted in crop failure, loss of livestock, and soaring food prices. These conditions combined with continued unrest in Somalia, has caused a large influx of refugees into the Dollo Ado refugee camps in Ethiopia's southern Somali region. The population of the Dollo Ado refugee camps now stands at 130,2851 with refugees in one of four locations -Bokolmayo, Melkadida, Kobe and Hilaweyn camps. Since opening in August, the Hilaweyn camp population has grown to approximately 24.000[2]. The majority of the refugees currently lives in emergency shelters provided by UNHCR, others are still waiting in the transit-centre for plot allocation. Hilaweyn refugee camp site is situated in immediate continuation of a local host community village, which results in interactions between refugees and the host community.

The primary goal of the quick perception assessment was to gain information from the local host community in Hilaweyn refugee camp regarding their opinion on shelter implementation, and construction, as well as the impact the presence of the refugee camp causes on their local environment. This information will provide an general overview and serve as reference for future shelter implementation processes. Moreover, it will provide other humanitarian organisations with insight and recommendations for shelter construction in the proximity of local host communities.

Methodology

The assessment included focus group discussions (FGD), key informant interviews, and a minor field survey in the Hilaweyn area. It was undertaken by a DRC assessment team of nine people including seven male and two female members of the DRC Dollo Ado programme. The methodology used was predominant qualitative. The primary reason for choosing this approach was its ability to reveal immediate opinions of the interviewees, opinions made from the dynamics of group discussions, as well as capturing retrospective views. The assessment team underwent training before beginning data collection including briefing on DRC guidelines, regulations, basic principles, and objectives. Additionally, the team was trained in basic assessment tools and participated in exercises preparing them for the dynamics of focus group discussions. The training

1 UNHCR October 2011 (http://data.unhcr.org/horn-of-africa/region.php?id=7&country=65)
2 UNHCR October 2011 (http://data.unhcr.org/horn-of-africa/settlement.php?id=12&country=65&region=7)

was evaluated along with the provided questionnaire in order to give the assessment team optimum work conditions.

Six different focus group discussions were conducted on site differentiated by sex, age and social status. The groups can be described as following:

Focus discussion groups:

Community leaders: 6 men (Deputy chairman of the kebele adminstration in Hilaweyn, Head of water department, Head of engineering, Head of administration, Head of local neighbouring kebele, and the speaker of parliament)

Womens group: (26 women age 29-55 including head of the women's association)

Mens group: (6 men age 42-60)

Youth group 1: (5 men age 21-26)

Youth group 2: (4 men age 21-38 including head of youth association)

Kids Group: (1 girl and 3 boys age 7-10)

In total, the collection of data was gained from 51 individuals, 53 % women, and 47 % men ranging from kids to elders from different socio-economics levels. The respondents were selected on basis of making the assessment as representative as possible.

After facilitators of the interviews introduced themselves and made a short briefing on DRC's objectives, the interviewees was asked a series of questions related to the process of shelter implementation, and the impact refugee camps can have on the local environment (see annex 1 for full questionnaire). All the participants were encouraged to join the debate, and several breaks were inserted to ensure full understanding and to make room for elaborating questions. All discussions were conducted in Maay Maay or Somali, and whilst the focus group discussion with the community leaders were conducted by an international staff member, a local DRC staff member served as both translator and secondary questioner.

Findings

The host community's involvement in shelters construction in their local community and natural environment.

The host community's involvement in the process of providing and constructing shelters for

refugees in their local community/environment is minimal. None of the participants in either of the focus groups was consulted before various humanitarian organisations were assigned to construct transitional shelters in the refugee camp. The kebele administration was approached before the influx of refugees to Hilaweyn camp, but merely on a formal level, and has not yet been approached on the subject of shelter construction. Additionally, the host community claimed that they had no relationship with the organisations responsible for constructing the shelters. However, they stated that they shared a common respect for the organisations and the humanitarian nature of their programs.

Several of the participants felt that they should have been more involved in the matter of shelter construction. This was particular for one youth group and the group of community leaders, while the other youth group claimed that they had no interest in being involved with refugees, whilst they perceived refugee matters to be of no interest to the host community.

The women group claimed that the involvement had not taken place due to lack of participants amongst the host community. Whether this lack was caused by involuntary behaviour amongst the community, or the fact that none of the organisations has yet asked them to participate, was left unsaid.

Shelter construction and the impact on the local community and natural resources.

The focus group discussions with the community leaders provided a list of advantages and disadvantages for the influx of refugees and appertaining shelter construction. The major concern was the disappearance of the natural vegetation in the surrounding area of the refugee camp and therefore also in the area of the host community. Trees and bushes are cut down by refugees in search of firewood for cooking, but humanitarian operations were also criticised of participating in destroying the natural vegetation when cleaning a plot of land e.g. for building transitional shelters.

Even though other FGD participants claimed that the construction of shelters had no impact on their natural resources, it is important to note that the current shelters in Hilaweyn camp are emergency tents and the construction of transitional shelters has not yet begun. Thus, an actual impact could be perceived as difficult for the local community to foresee or even conceive.

Problems with the current shelters provided for refugees in Hilaweyn camp.

One major problem was pointed out by all community groups. The current emergency shelters are not suitable for climate conditions in Hilaweyn. During dry-seasons the inner climate of the emergency shelters is too hot to accommodate the refugees during the day. Combined with the strong wind that dominates the site, the emergency shelters are left empty during the day, ripped apart or simply lifted up and carried away by the wind.

Several of the community members indicated that several of the shelters had no partition and therefore no privacy for all the members of the family. Youth groups pointed out the lack of privacy between parents and children and elder participants acknowledged the partition lacking between the two sexes.

Transitional shelters:

During the interviews some groups were briefed on three different prototype shelters constructed by Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and AHADA respectively. To clarify a short description of each shelter is provided below:

Prototype A (DRC)**:** A rectangular bamboo shelter with dome shaped roof. Walls are made of palm leaf mats on the inside and bamboo mats on the outside. These are fastened with cable tires. Two half walls serves as partition inside the shelter.
The shelter has a lockable front door of bamboo poles and window on back wall, which can be opened for ventilation.

Prototype B (NRC)**:** A square shaped shelter with plastered mud walls and bamboo/eucalyptus skeleton. The lockable front door, windows, and roof are made of tin and both windows are covered with mesh nets. A half wall divides the shelter into two separate rooms.

Prototype C (AHADA): A rectangular shaped canvas tent with a metal frame. The tent is divided into two rooms with an additional inner canvas wall. The shelter has one front door and one window on the back wall. Both can be locked with a path-lock.

After this briefing the discussion included the three shelters' suitability for the local environment, and the needs of the refugees. Prototype A was claimed to be suitable for the dry season but would need alternations during the rainy season. A plastic sheet or grass covering the roof was recommended by the host community.

Prototype B was considered the most durable by the community leaders including the head of engineering. However, the heavy wind of Hilaweyn had to be taken into consideration, and one of the interviewees stated that the plastered mud walls potentially could deteriorate and if not re-plastered, the house would be in risk of collapsing, worst case scenario: “with children sleeping inside” (community leader).

The framing of Prototype C was perceived sustainable and well suited for the harsh environment. However, the canvas covering would result in a hot inner climate during the day.

Recommendations on how to construct shelters (minimize impact on host community/environmentally friendly ect.)

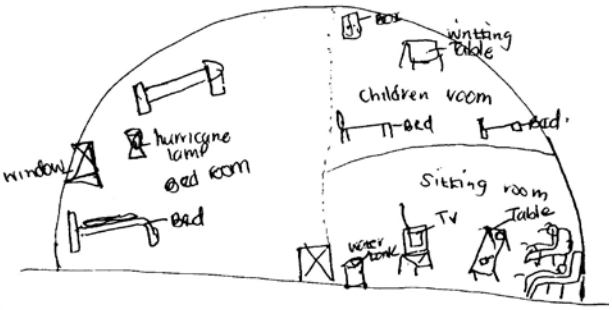
Various interviewees suggested several improvements to take into consideration when constructing shelters for the refugees. Partition of the inside of the shelters was highly priorities along with alternative building materials.

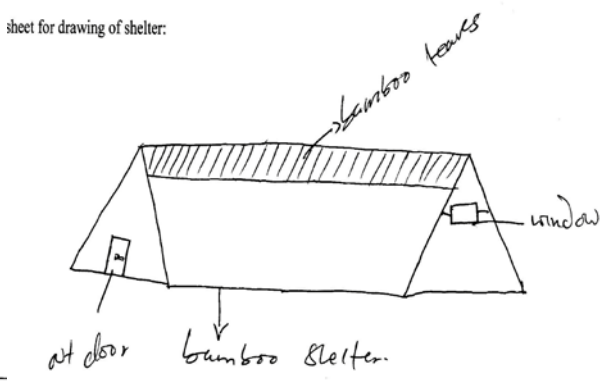
Materials recommended by the community groups included:

- Bamboo (found locally, known by the community, good for hot weather)
- Grass (found locally)
- Palm leaves
- Timber (durable, but hard to come by)
- Vines

The different groups were asked to design a shelter based on these improvements on a blank page of the questionnaire. Most of these drawing included materials such as bamboo and wood and differed from dome to triangular in shape. The shape and size of the designs varied greatly in the groups but was most distinct in the group of the community leaders. The group preferred tiles for roof and stones for walls for the rainy season but would prefer sticks, timber, and bamboo during the dry-season.

One youth group aimed high and designed a dome-shaped shelter with room for TV, water





tank and hurricane lamp, while the kids group preferred a triangular bamboo shelter:

Youth Group1 Kids Group

It is important to note that the host community in Hilaweyn has only had the opportunity to see examples of prototype A, whilst these are present in a nearby compound. The other two prototypes are not yet present in the any compound in Hilaweyn or inside the camp. Furthermore, none of the

host community members has been informed, by the respectively organisations, of materials used for the three types of shelters, or the impact that the construction of the shelters might have on their local environment. Neither have the local host community members been invited to visit the shelters for inspection and briefing. Thus, traditional shelters of the host community can be argued to be the only reference available for inventing alternative shelter designs and recommending building materials.

Traditional shelter of host community

Shelter visit in Kobe refugee camp.

In order to gain usable feedback from the host community members on shelter construction, it was decided that key informant interviews were needed from members that had actually been inside the three prototypes. Thus, a field visit to Kobe was arranged in order to introduce the three prototypes. Present was three members of DRC staff (field assistants, one working as a translator), Head of womens association Hilaweyn, Female community member and Male community member.

Prototype A:

The Bamboo was found suitable for the current weather conditions. It was stated that the weaving of the mats kept the inner climate of the shelter considerably cool on sunny days. Furthermore, the women community members pointed out, that the bamboo is familiar to them, whilst it can be located in their local environment. This was seen as an advantage, as it would make the women able to maintain the shelters without any considerably need of training. Again, it was stated that during the rainy season a plastic sheet would be needed to cover the roof, but this would also be a manageable alternation if a plastic sheets was provided by the NGO. As a result prototype A shelter would be suitable and environmentally friendly for all year round use, and particularly suitable for the dry-season.

Prototype B:

The host community members were impressed by the prototype B and continuously used the word 'house' when referring to the shelter. However, they were concerned that the construction of such a house would be time-consuming, which would be a critical disadvantage due to the refugees' desperate need for new shelters, replacing the broken emergency shelters in the refugee camp.

Additionally, the male community member noticed that the construction technology of prototype B shelter looked to be the work of high skilled workers, and such technology was currently out of reach for him personally, and claimed that it would be out of reach for most of the host community. Thus, building a similar house for themselves would be imperceivable.

Moreover, the male community member added that the house looked very expensive, and it would be impossible for the host community to build a similar house even if they were taught the technology by the NGO. The major concern expressed by the women representing the host community was, that prototype B was immobile. Once constructed, it was claimed that it would be next to impossible to move to a new location, which can be necessary when one of the major livelihood strategies of the host community is pastoralism.

On a closing note, the host community members approved of the NGO's plan of implementing prototype B as a shelter for the refugees in Hilaweyn, but they also made it clear,

that they would be most grateful to receive similar houses for the host community.

Prototype C:

The community members considered the inner climate to be undesirable. The canvas was stated to be unsuitable for the weather conditions, and the male community member stated that: “a foreigner would not last one hour in this tent”. However, the framing of prototype C resulted in good recommendations as well as the size of the shelter.

One female community member complimented the division of the inside of the shelter, but commented on the potential security risk of the thin canvas walls.

Overall the representatives of the host community expressed their appreciation of being briefed on the different prototypes, whilst they considered it to be usable knowledge for capacity building among themselves.

Conclusion

The shelter assessment outlined several attitudes towards shelter construction of Hilaweyn refugee camp expressed by the local host community.

Firstly, none of the organisations in charge of implementing shelters in close proximity of the local host village approached the community or briefed them on the impact the influx of refugees might have on their local environment. Nor did the community express that they had established a relationship with these organisations. On questions concerning environmental impact the host community addressed the issue of harvesting of local vegetation e.g. bushes done by not only refugees but also humanitarian organisations.

The major problems with the current shelters provided for the refugees in Hilaweyn refugee camp were the hot inner climate, problems with strong wind and the deficient dividing of the shelters to provide privacy for family members. Based on the combination of these three problems the host community concluded, that the emergency shelters are unsuitable for hosting the refugees.

After briefing on the three transitional shelter prototypes several issues was raised by the host community mentioning alternations needed for rainy-seasons, unsuitable covering material and deterioration of mud walls caused by heavy winds. Overall, all three shelters was considered to be more appropriate for hosting refugees compared to the current emergency shelters in the camp. Alternative construction materials were recommended for transitional shelters and several additional designs were discussed in the groups.

The field site visit in Kobe introduced host community members to the design of the three

prototypes, and produced an evaluation of the pros and cons for all three shelters. Some of the issues mentioned in the focus group discussions repeated themselves on site, such as the need for plastic covering during rainy-seasons, hot inner climate and security issues. When inspected, one of the prototypes generated additive concerns not previous touched upon by the interviewees. These concerns were excessively advanced technology unknown by the local host community, high costs, as well as time-consuming construction work. Furthermore, one of the prototypes was stated to be immobile and therefore not suitable for the livelihood strategy of pastoralism.

Annex 1: Questionnaire for FGD

Group: Host community leaders

Interviewer:

Date:

Group members: -
-
-
-

Question	Answers
Who is responsible for the shelter construction in the refugee camps? Do you have any relationship with them? What is the nature of that relationship?	- -
When there is non food items distribution and/or shelter construction, are you consulted or participating in any way? If yes, how?	- -

Do you think you as host communities should be involved in these matters? If yes, how?	- -
What is the background of shelters in the camps? When were/will they (be) build? What were/will the impact on your community and natural resources (be)?	- -
How do you try to manage the impact on your natural resources? What do you recommend to minimize such impact?	- -
What do you think about the current shelters	-

used by refugees?	
What are the major problems with the current shelters used by refugees?	-
How do you think these shelters could be improved?	-
Can you provide some recommendations?	-
Are the types of materials used suited to the local climatic conditions and environmentally friendly?	-
What do you recommend to use as construction material?	-

How should shelters be constructed? (draw a quick design on separate blank page) make sure to ask in depth questions such as: How to construct, When and Why?	- -
Of all the issues just discussed, which do you consider the most important/urgent? Who should be involved?	- -
Is there anything else you would like us to take into consideration when implementing the shelters?	-

Design sheet for drawing of shelter: