
USAID/OFDA Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements Principles

The purpose of USAID/OFDA humanitarian shelter and settlements (S&S) assistance is to provide decent, safe, and habitable living spaces to disaster/crisis-affected populations in need of shelter in geographically, socially and, often, administratively defined settlements such as neighborhoods, villages, towns, and cities.

USAID/OFDA S&S assistance is informed by the following ten principles:

1. Deliver shelter-led, but settlement-focused assistance

- Support use of qualified advisors to design and manage S&S programming to focus on both shelter (four-walls-and-a-roof) and related opportunities to enhance the impact of project activities in the surrounding environment (settlements)
- Address the needs of all beneficiaries, including women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities, by combining where possible shelter and related services (e.g., WASH), disaster risk reduction (DRR), livelihoods, social networks, and beneficiary health and security to improve existing settlements, regardless of status (i.e., formal or informal), and
- Link localized land use planning to macro-level (town or city) settlements planning efforts led by local governments or, in their absence, humanitarian actors.

2. Deliver context-appropriate assistance

- Identify disaster/conflict impacts and available local resources, emergent opportunities, and potential constraints regarding the sheltering of people, the recovery of affected economies, and the reduction of risks associated with vulnerability to human-caused and natural hazards
- Tailor assistance by supporting community-driven efforts that reflect beneficiary concerns, views, management skills, access to resources, and decision-making capacities, and
- Leverage local resources (e.g., local construction materials), supply chains, and know-how while avoiding, to the extent possible, adverse environmental impacts and the use of potentially inappropriate technologies (e.g., prefabricated housing).

3. Promote humanitarian guiding principles and standards

- Comply with internationally recognized humanitarian guiding principles and standards (e.g., The Sphere Project, International Red Cross and Red Crescent Code of Conduct, and IASC Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Code of Conduct), and
- Support programs consistent with humanitarian guiding principles and standards to establish and maintain access to beneficiaries, and deliver high-quality assistance to all beneficiaries.

4. Integrate livelihoods and Disaster Risk Reduction

- Intentionally design shelter and settlements activities to promote skills development, livelihoods, and broader economic recovery
- Reduce the social and economic impacts of present and future disasters through the integration of DRR and livelihood concerns into S&S interventions, and
- Support low-cost/low-tech actions to reduce hazard risk and protect beneficiary livelihoods.

5. Respect land, housing, and property rights

- Avoid conflicts by respecting local systems of land, housing, and property ownership
- In the absence of a formal tenure systems, rely on traditional and informal mechanisms while ensuring equitable access, and
- Establish systems to support beneficiaries on issues related to tenure rights. Seek advice and support from technical advisors on housing, land and property rights.

6. Avoid unnecessary beneficiary relocation

- Support relocation of affected populations only as a last resort, after all other options are exhausted, and in consultation with affected populations
- If relocation is unavoidable, avoid conflicts and disruptions of beneficiary ethnic traditions, kinship ties, livelihood security, and cultural/historical associations
- Ensure beneficiary access to livelihoods, services, safety, and security in any relocation effort.

7. Empower beneficiaries and build local capacities

- Provide technical assistance and capacity building support to improve the ability of locally-recognized authorities to prepare for and respond to emergencies through, for example, development and adoption of settlement plans and Disaster Risk Reduction efforts, and
- Promote meaningful participation of disaster-affected populations in decision-making processes through safe, equitable, and effective mechanisms to collect input and address concerns.

8. Protect and empower the most vulnerable

- Ensure that needs assessments identify and engage all groups within an affected population, including women, children, older people, people with disabilities, as well as people of ethnic, religious and political minorities, and involve them in the delivery of assistance
- Ensure equal access to secure occupancy of shelter and land for the most vulnerable and marginalized as determined by needs assessments, which might include the unique needs of orphans, female-headed households, widows, minorities, older people, and/or people with disabilities, and
- Promote application of accessibility guidelines for universal accessibility that is inclusive of people with reduced mobility or vision, and protect the health and safety of both beneficiaries and humanitarian actors.

9. Promote environmental sustainability

- Encourage the salvaging, recycling, and sustainable extraction of local resources, including construction materials
- Mitigate environmental damage by avoiding the use of hazardous substances and processes, and
- Promote energy efficiency by using renewable sources, and reducing energy and resource consumption in construction, transport of shelter materials, and eventual use of shelter and ancillary services, e.g., water provision and waste disposal.

10. Facilitate longer-term recovery through humanitarian action

- Promote coordinated efforts towards sustainable recovery and improvement of shelter and settlements by providing a strategic framework for subsequent investments in housing, infrastructure, transport, and environmental management.