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◀ The dense settlement patterns of urban areas pose a significant challenge to humanitarian agencies when implementing shelter and settlements assistance programs. In this picture, a portion of a backyard was used to host six neighboring households who were friends and family of the landowner. In this example, programmed hosting support was provided primarily in the form of transitional shelter. An estimated 20 percent of all transitional shelter assistance in the Port-au-Prince area was actually provided in support of a hosting arrangement.

fuel, education or livelihood assistance, as well as provision of bedding, cooking and eating utensils, water/sanitation and shelter upgrades to support people living with host families.

Hosting was vital in the wake of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and the 2009 conflict in Pakistan. These major events generated considerable media coverage and resource commitments to support conventional “four-walls-and-a-roof” shelter efforts. However, less attention has been given to the important role that hosting support has also served in overall humanitarian shelter and settlements sector assistance efforts.

Hosting in earthquake-affected Haiti

The devastating earthquake killed an estimated 316,000 people and affected approximately 3 million others, according to the government of Haiti, while damaging and destroying over 180,000 housing structures. The earthquake also generated a mass exodus of over 600,000 people from Port-au-Prince and other disaster-affected areas to seek shelter with family and friends in home towns in outlying areas that were not damaged by the earthquake. Although an unknown number of those who left the affected area have likely returned, many chose to remain in a



Humanitarian community actors have increasingly recognized in recent years the utility and acceptance of hosting as a form of spontaneous sheltering among affected populations. As a result, these actors have come to provide various types of basic support to ensure that hosting does not strain relations or host families' pocketbooks, while also facilitating the role of hosting as a durable shelter solution. Such assistance can entail

▶ Program support by humanitarian agencies often supplements shelter that is provided spontaneously through friends and family, and sometimes strangers. In this picture, the new shelter for the displaced family is located next to the existing host family shelter in the same compound. In Haiti, this spontaneous assistance was often supplemented programmatically with livelihood, nonfood item (NFI), water/sanitation/hygiene (WASH) and other forms of humanitarian assistance to ensure that hosting arrangements were sustainable, and not burdensome.

Hosting Support

▶ An overlooked humanitarian shelter solution.

By **Charles A. Setchell**, Senior Shelter, Settlements, and Hazard Mitigation Advisor, USAID

WHEN DISASTERS OR CRISES strike and homes are lost, people don't always wait for governments and international humanitarian agencies to lend a hand, but instead often rely on those close to them: family and friends. Perhaps because this spontaneous sheltering of people doesn't always entail four new walls and a roof, and is thus often difficult to see, the shelter that family, friends and neighbors provide to disaster or crisis survivors can be overlooked or even dismissed by some policymakers and shelter advisors as inappropriate, not “real” or not truly durable shelter. However, hosting by family and friends, or even by strangers, is socially defined, self-selected, culturally appropriate and typically provided before humanitarian actors arrive and—importantly—long after they leave. Hosting is, in fact, an effort to help, be it for social, family or even altruistic or nationalistic reasons, so how could it not be considered humanitarian in nature?

hosting relationship. Without some form of support, however, these relationships would have strained the patience and resources of all concerned, possibly resulting in movement of people to the then-burgeoning spontaneous camps, thereby exacerbating conditions. Although numerous humanitarian actors initiated shelter and settlements sector programs, not all included hosting support in their efforts, in part due to the difficulty of locating and identifying hosting arrangements, and defining assistance packages.

Still, the level of hosting support has been notable, resulting in the provision of humanitarian shelter for thousands of families. However, what is even more notable is the apparent evolution of nearly 18,500 hosting arrangements, or 70 percent of hosting total supported by three NGOs (see sidebar), into *permanent* housing solutions for those families, as they have decided to stay in hosting arrangements and host communities for the foreseeable future. Moreover, many families have stated in post-project interviews that they never want to return to the disaster-affected area. Hosting is thus not only an important humanitarian shelter solution, but also

USAID and Hosting

USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA), as part of its effort to support a range of humanitarian shelter solutions, approved grants to three implementing partners to engage in hosting support after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti: CHF International, the Centre d'Etudes et de Cooperation Internationale (CECI) and Mercy Corps. Although initially designed to support a total of 19,550 hosting arrangements in communities north of the earthquake-affected area (in Center, Artibonite and Northeast Departments), the three NGOs eventually combined to support 26,523 such arrangements as of mid-November 2011. An estimated 95 percent of hosting families were either related to, or friends of, the hosted families, and assistance to support hosting arrangements ranged from \$250-\$800 per hosting arrangement.

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appears in Haiti to be helping address longer-term housing needs at a cost far below housing reconstruction efforts, and long before those efforts even commence.

Finally, although assistance in support of hosting arrangements provided by some NGOs was located in communities away from Port-au-Prince, even the better known transitional shelter efforts of humanitarian actors in Port-au-Prince and other earthquake-affected communities included shelters that were built on land provided by host families. USAID/OFDA grantee activity suggests that the percentage of hosting through transitional shelter assistance may be as high as 20 percent of overall output. This finding is consistent with experience in other countries that hosting support can occur in both rural and urban settings.

Hosting in conflict-affected Pakistan

During 2009, a complex emergency due to fighting between the Pakistani government and militants in the northwest caused more than 3 million people to flee the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPk) province for safer areas. Later that year, additional military operations in South Waziristan displaced another 380,000 people. The ongoing conflict resulted in a steady stream of internally displaced persons (IDPs) into KPk.

Between January 2009 and January 2011, more than 3.4 million people had been displaced from their homes, and nearly 90 percent of this total was hosted. Often, families hosted strangers and did not know how long they would be staying. However, thousands of host families readily provided shelter, food and water to IDPs for several months. Due to the overwhelming number of individuals living with host families for months or more at a time, the international community focused

not only on providing IDPs with assistance, but also on providing support to the families hosting them. Direct support to host families often included programs to alleviate crowded conditions by expanding living spaces, often through the construction of an additional room or stand-alone shelter. Some relief agencies also established mobile medical clinics that served multiple host communities and voucher programs that allowed IDPs to purchase additional food and household items, thereby reducing the strain on host families.

Other cash-for-work, cash grant, and rental assistance programs also allowed IDPs to pay for a portion of their host family's household expenses. Nearly two-thirds—more than \$75 million—of OFDA's combined assistance for Pakistan's conflict-affected individuals in our 2009 and 2010 fiscal years directly benefited IDPs and host families in KPk, supporting the kinds of activities promoted by the humanitarian community, with the remainder benefiting families returning to former conflict areas.

A willingness to help

Haiti and Pakistan present diverse settings, events and circumstances, but what is common in both countries is the willingness of people, whether compelled by family, friendship or community ties, or simply compassion for others, to help those in need by creating hosting arrangements. This activity occurred in both post-disaster and post-conflict settings, be they in urban or rural areas. It did, however, impose social, economic and other strains on the arrangements, making it important for humanitarian actors to support them where possible and feasible using a range of measures.

Hosting is not a universal panacea. It will always be context-driven, and is best implemented when family and friends are involved. However, supporting this form of sheltering can sustain it to the point that it becomes an important element of humanitarian shelter assistance, and can even lead to the evolution of hosting arrangements into permanent housing solutions, as the Haiti experience indicates. Finally, hosting support can be provided expeditiously and on a cost-effective basis when compared to higher cost approaches, particularly the creation of camps. There will likely be even greater support of hosting in the future, as budgets tighten and the scale and frequency of disaster events increase. 