

OVERVIEW OF THE KABUL AREA SHELTER AND SETTLEMENTS (KASS) PROJECT

by

Charles A. Setchell
Shelter, Settlements, and Hazard Mitigation Advisor,
Technical Assistance Group, USAID/OFDA

INTRODUCTION. After field assessments in February and April 2006, and review of concept papers and proposals from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in March, USAID/OFDA selected CARE as its implementing partner for the KASS project. USAID/OFDA involved not only USAID technical specialists and USAID staff in Afghanistan in the formal proposal review process, but also officials from the Kabul Municipality (KM), thought to be the first time that a local government was incorporated formally into a USAID/OFDA proposal review effort. Involving local government officials reflected the intent of USAID/OFDA to ensure that the project was as participatory as possible, and serve as a basis for replication in other urban-based humanitarian shelter programs. USAID/OFDA awarded the \$4.4 million project to CARE in April 2006. The project was completed 16 months later, in August 2007.

BACKGROUND. Kabul is perhaps the fastest growing city in the world. Since late 2001, the Kabul population has increased from roughly 1.5 million people to an estimated 4.5 million in 2006, a 200 percent change. In addition, while population was increasing three-fold during the period, the physical size of Kabul expanded more than four-fold, significantly altering a city originally designed for a population of about 1 million. One alarming aspect of this rapid growth was an increase in the average number of households living in a single dwelling (now 2.5 to 3), suggesting significant overcrowding. (According to several observers, the current population is actually greater than 4.5 million, with up to 80 percent of the population living in informal, or unauthorized, neighborhoods.)

The 2006 shelter assessments conducted by USAID/OFDA confirmed that, not unlike the growing gap between population growth and physical expansion, there was a corresponding gap between growing shelter needs and negligible shelter responses. In addition to rapid growth, numerous problems plague Kabul, including the lack of a strategic plan to guide growth, low quality infrastructure and services, limited governmental capacity at both the local and national level, and limited international community interest and funding to address urban shelter and other problems. Given ambient levels of housing and urban service quality, it is highly likely that much, if not most, of the Kabul area population has experienced a decline in living conditions since 2001. Again, shelter delivery and availability have likely lagged far behind population growth, lending credence to earlier concerns regarding the critical need for shelter in the city.

KASS PROJECT OUTCOMES. To begin addressing the lack of adequate shelter and other corresponding problems, USAID/OFDA received ESF resources from USAID/Afghanistan to fund a shelter and settlements project in Districts 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, and 16 of the KM to assist a minimum of 3,500 vulnerable families, including internally displaced persons (IDPs). The final number of

households actually increased to 3,774 as a result of cost savings associated with bulk purchase of selected building supplies and re-programming of project funds.

Vulnerable households benefited from integrated shelter activities, such as the rehabilitation of safe water supplies and training programs in health, sanitation, and hazard mitigation. The project also supported the establishment of 35 community councils to help prioritize and respond to local needs for public services, and liaise with KM officials on shelter issues.

Specific project outcomes include:

- Total shelter interventions, at 3,774, were 7.8 percent greater than the initial proposed total
- Among shelter interventions, 52 percent were Complete Shelters, with the balance being either shelter expansions or shelter repairs
- The primary shelter intervention -- by far -- featured the largest contribution of beneficiary labor and provision of building materials of the three categories of Complete Shelters. This finding at least suggests that beneficiaries thought it was well worth investing their own time and money to make a shelter, in large part due to the sense that the investment was a safe one, owing to official recognition accorded to the overall project -- and, therefore, formalizing previously informal/unauthorized land and housing -- through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) with the Kabul Municipality
- The rule of thumb, from earlier projects, that about 75 percent of households receiving shelter also need some form of latrine assistance, also held true for the KASS project, with 74.2 percent of shelter beneficiary households also receiving latrines
- 15.6 kilometers (9.7 miles) of drainage ditches were provided as part of the project, and
- 10.2 kilometers (6.3 miles) of graveled roadway were provided. I am unaware of any other humanitarian community project that has generated similar levels of road and drainage output in an urban setting, so these numbers should not be lost in the shuffle.

SUMMARY. USAID/OFDA understands that KASS project outputs are modest in comparison to the current and foreseeable shelter needs in the Kabul area, particularly given that prior to KASS project initiation, the international community had not undertaken an urban-based humanitarian shelter program in Afghanistan since USAID/OFDA completed an assistance program for over 16,000 households in Kabul in November 2004. Nevertheless, the project holds great potential for providing a template for urban shelter and settlements interventions, in addition to actually providing shelter for 3,774 households, or more than 26,000 people. The KASS experience thus provides the first replicable model for undertaking urban shelter interventions after disasters, and points the way for addressing the massive urban shelter and service delivery challenges that exist in Kabul, as well as other cities around the world which are affected by disasters and crises.