



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

PAKISTAN

CASE STUDY

A Place to Call Home

Villagers salvage homes and rebuild communities



Photo: USAID/Suzanne Ross

Mumtaz Alisha, a village elder salvages items from rubble to add to his new shelter home.

“We love our agricultural land and our animals. Now we are beggars — but God gave us mercy to live and now we must rebuild,” said Mumtaz Alisha, a village elder.

Telling Our Story
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Challenge

The thick stone walls and ceilings typical of traditional mountain homes in northern Pakistan were built to protect people from the harsh climate. During the October 2005 earthquake, those heavy ceilings and walls collapsed, causing countless injuries and deaths. Some villages located near the earthquake epicenter lost 80 percent of their homes, leaving 420,000 people living over 5,000 feet above sea level in need of a warm place to survive the cold winter months.

Initiative

The day after the earthquake struck, USAID began distributing shelter kits, tent shelters, and other essential items to people in affected areas. A token system was set up to distribute shelter kit items as they arrived. The system was simple — beneficiaries receive itemized tokens for each of the items listed as part of a complete shelter kit. This included framing materials, plastic sheeting to construct walls, insulation materials, a plastic tarp to protect external walls, and corrugated galvanized iron roof sheets. The goal was to use these materials to create one warm room to protect families from the cold by reinforcing the non-winterized tents and shelters built from materials recycled from destroyed buildings. Later, essential items such as cooking pots, dishes, blankets, and wood stoves were also distributed. To prevent duplicate distributions, relief agencies met regularly to compare lists of registered households with the equipment they received.

Results

By December 2005, over 5,000 households in the Chatterplain area of Northern Pakistan had received shelter kits. Construction and design of each warm room is “owner driven.” Ninety master carpenters were hired to teach villagers ways to build back better structures with earthquake-resistant designs using A-frame roofs and diagonal reinforcement beams. With technical and material assistance, the villagers were able to build a place to call home for the cold winter months. One village elder commented, “We are very grateful to Americans for their help.”