

Disaster Risk Reduction and Response in Chikwawa, Malawi

Climate change is having a detrimental impact on the people living in rural Chikwawa, Malawi. Unprecedented rainfall has caused flooding and severe seasonal droughts often leave families without food or access to vital resources for days on end. These unpredictable shifts in weather are intensifying the need for safe and resilient housing as homes are damaged or destroyed frequently throughout the year.

In March 2019, Cyclone Idai caused devastation in Chikwawa. In response to this emergency, from May 2020 to November 2021, Lloyd's Charities Trust collaborated with Habitat for Humanity Great Britain and Habitat for Humanity Malawi to implement a project that would support those affected families by improving their resilience to future flooding by the end of 2021. As part of this project, two rescue centres were constructed in Bester and Nkhwazi.



Pictured Above: Children play at the newly constructed rescue centre in Chikwawa, Malawi.

Constructing Rescue Centres

In the first year of the project key learnings were gained as to why some communities choose to live in flood-prone lowland areas. These understandings were gained through feasibility studies and comprehensive training programmes using the Participatory Approach to Safe Shelter Awareness (PASSA) methodology which is designed to enable communities, local authorities and other stakeholders to prepare for, withstand and recover from future disasters. By engaging with community members in this way, 1,037 community members were trained in PASSA methodology and 150 people were trained to become PASSA facilitators. These facilitators are now able to take their learning forward to help others to understand different approaches to building safe and resilient shelter.

The second year of the project was largely focused on the construction of two rescue centres. These centres allow families to access training and materials to 'disaster proof' their homes and also enable families to seek refuge during emergencies.

Beyond the basic provisions of the rescue centres, the community prepared sustainability plans to ensure that they were put to full use when not being used during a disaster. Following discussions on sustainability, the centres were seen as the perfect place to conduct community and children's activities. By utilising the centres for community activities, it is hoped that there will be increased social cohesion amongst the community, a possibility to generate revenue to maintain the centres by hosting weddings and other paid events, and the opportunity to generate local jobs as people work at the centres as security guards.



Pictured above: GVH Nkhwazi in TA N'gabu and GVH Bester in TA Lundu in Chikwawa District.

The regions of Bester and Nkhwazi are highly susceptible to flooding. As such, the centres have both been built with raised foundations to address the risk of becoming

flooded. Each Centre has two different chambers with one on each side. When disaster strikes, one chamber is to be used by males and the other by females. Each chamber has an office that can be used as a storage unit throughout the year or as an administration centre if needed.

“We are so grateful for the provision of the Rescue Centre here at Bester. We are no longer going to have school closures when disaster strikes because we now have a safe and appropriate place to host victims of disasters” – Watson Solobala, Chairperson of the Village Civil Protection committee (VCPC) for Bester Rescue Centre

Looking to the Future

With construction completed, Habitat for Humanity Malawi are now working closely with the communities of Bester and Nkhwazi to ensure that the centres are put to full use as decided upon during sustainability discussions.

Throughout the programme, aside from the construction of the centres, the project was able to institute 35 PASSA group committees that will be managed by the heads of each village in Chikwawa. As a result of these group committees, communities across Chikwawa have a developed understanding of community-based disaster risk reduction strategies. This knowledge will enable these communities to make informed decisions to build safer and more resilient homes.



Above: Head of Bester Village, Jordan, stands outside the new Bester rescue centre.

“I have seen the worst and how impoverished my people in my community become in the time of disasters. The Rescue center standing in my community brings hope and dignity. I am excited that my people will always have a safe and decent place to live in the face of disasters. Disasters will always come but Bester will surely conquer them!” – Village Head Jordan for Bester Rescue Centre;

As part of the sustainability plans the community has had discussions to consider using the centres for adult literacy education sessions three times a week and community based child gatherings to ensure that children are learning in a better environment. In addition to this, there are also plans to use the centres as a resource for disaster preparedness, to host mobile community clinics for antenatal and community care givers and for leisure activities in a shaded and ventilated space.



Pictured Above: Rose, chairperson of VCPC, stands in front of the new Nkhwazi rescue centre.

“Women and children are the most affected when disasters strike. We are very happy to have the Rescue Centre right within our community. This will be our place of safety and our community home. We have been honored!” – Rose Fuluzado, Chairperson of the Village Civil Protection committee (VCPC) for Nkhwazi Rescue Centre

Projects like these make a vital impact in vulnerable communities. With an ever changing climate, we at Habitat for Humanity Great Britain will continue to work with people around the world to help create smart and sustainable solutions that lessen the impact on people’s homes. We would like to thank Lloyd’s Charities Trust for their invaluable support on this project.