

A woman wearing a red headscarf and a yellow and black striped shirt is bent over, working with large, rectangular bricks on a dirt ground. She is holding one brick with both hands. In the background, there are other people, some wearing white shirts, and a partially constructed brick wall. The scene appears to be a construction or brick-making site in a rural or semi-rural area.

IMPROVED HOUSING FOR DISPLACED COMMUNITIES IN SOMALIA



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DROUGHT 2021/23

Since 2021, Somalia has been grappling with its most severe drought in recent history, which has been exacerbated by five consecutive below-average rainy seasons. This prolonged drought has forced over 1.7 million people to abandon their homes in search of relief from hunger and suffering.

These newly displaced individuals have sought refuge in densely populated informal settlements located in urban areas throughout the country, where they hope to access humanitarian services and establish alternative means of survival.

Among the regions receiving a significant influx of displaced persons is Doolow, a town situated in Somalia's Gedo region. Doolow has served as a last-resort place for tens of thousands of people for more than a decade, primarily due to the presence of aid organizations, the fertile lands surrounding the Jubba River that flows through the city, and its relatively secure location in the border with Ethiopia.

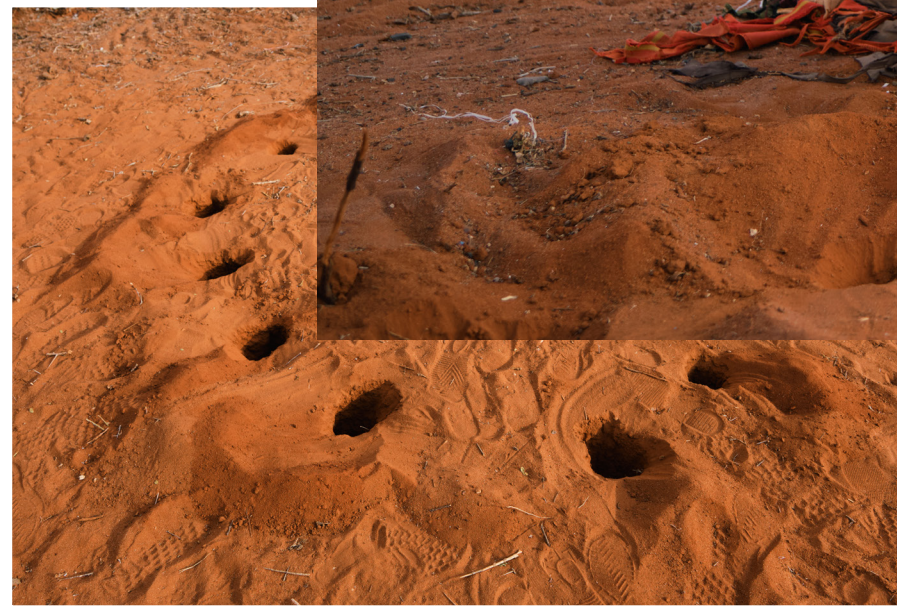


Aerial view of the displacement site of Ladan in Doolow.

INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

For decades, informal settlements in Somalia have provided temporary shelter for hundreds of thousands of displaced families who have lost everything after a crisis. These settlements offer a quick housing solution for the most vulnerable who usually construct their own shelters utilizing clothing, wood and other locally available materials.

While these settlements have served as a temporary respite for thousands of displaced people, they fail to address the underlying causes of displacement or provide sustainable solutions for residents to fully integrate and lead dignified lives in their new communities. Residents living in makeshift shelters in displacement settlements face several challenges, including limited space, restricted access to healthcare, clean water, or marketplaces, as well as insecure land tenure.



Salado, 55, pose for a portrait as she builds her shelter in the displacement site of Kaxareey in Doolow in October 2022. Most of Somalia's displaced population are women, children and elderly.

The absence of secure land tenure exposes residents to the risk of eviction, disrupting their lives and displacing them once again. Additionally, the geographical location of these settlements often makes them susceptible to flooding during periods of heavy rainfall or cyclones.

Limited drainage systems and a lack of flood mitigation measures further increase the risk, leading to property damage, loss of livelihoods, and even loss of lives. Moreover, inadequate infrastructure and overcrowded living conditions make these settlements highly vulnerable to disease outbreaks and fire hazards, posing significant threats to the residents' well-being.

Recognizing the need for long-term solutions, IOM has been actively collaborating with authorities, displaced communities and partners to reconfigure and improve the living conditions across displacement sites and offer affected populations a chance to restart their life.

Efforts are underway to address the root causes of internal displacement, while ensuring secure land tenure, improved infrastructure, and better access to essential services for those displaced.



RECONFIGURATION OF LADAN



REIMAGINING LADAN

In November 2022, IOM began a comprehensive reconfiguration and redesign project for the Ladan displacement site in Doolow, Somalia. Initially self-settled in November 2021 as a result of the severe drought, the site quickly became home to thousands of displaced individuals from various parts of the country.

Over subsequent months, additional arrivals, including those fleeing conflict, led to overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and safety concerns within the site. By March 2023, the population had exceeded 15,000, with residents living in precarious and unsafe conditions.

In 2022, IOM spearheaded a thorough decongestion and reconfiguration plan, which received full support and written approval from local authorities. The plan was developed in consultation with the community and other humanitarian partners in Doolow.

Key elements of the plan involved clearing 22 hectares of land, excavating 18 km of drainage systems, installing 570 meters of reinforced culverts, and demarcating 1,500 plots measuring 5m x 10m for relocated families. Additionally, streetlights were installed to enhance site security. These improvements attracted partners and services, including a school, nutrition center, medical clinic, and a dedicated space for women.





SHELTER SOLUTIONS

In emergency situations, temporary shelters are quickly built to meet immediate needs. However, in prolonged crises, many displaced persons end up staying in these shelters for an extended period and may not be able to return to their places of origin. Due to the large number of people in need and the limited resources available, it is crucial to consider solutions that can lay the groundwork for long-term recovery.

In the case of Ladan, IOM addressed the population's needs on a large scale by providing 1,500 families with improved shelter solutions to replace their makeshift shelters. These new shelters not only protect against the weather but also offer privacy, security, dignity, and improved health for the inhabitants. IOM has made certain modifications to the usual design of emergency shelters, allowing for future upgrades through an incremental process. IOM also supported the construction of 450 latrines to improve the hygiene and sanitation conditions in the area.

To carry out the construction works, IOM engaged 200 residents from Ladan, including 120 unskilled laborers, that were trained to build the new upgraded shelters with IOM supervision. IOM also engaged 300 residents to help with the excavation for drainage systems and another 15 people to coordinate the plot demarcation and bush clearance.

By offering these temporary job opportunities, the community not only had the opportunity to actively contribute to the construction of their own shelters but also received support in meeting their basic needs. This initiative helped prevent them from resorting to harmful coping mechanisms and played a crucial role in their overall recovery process.

SHELTER TYPES

Based on what IOM learned from previous experiences, building emergency shelters in Somalia is not cost-effective as the timber used for the frames needs to be imported. Moreover, these emergency shelters don't last very long and cannot be easily upgraded to more durable shelters over time.

To address these challenges, IOM created a new shelter design called "improved emergency shelter" that includes some basic enhancements like a stronger foundation, raised plinth row, taller height, and better roof. These improvements increase the lifespan of the shelter and allow households to upgrade their shelters easily when they have more resources available.

This new design can be gradually upgraded into a transitional shelter with mudbrick walls. Alternatively, households can choose to upgrade the shelter's walls using other materials that are locally available, such as CGI sheets.

Go to end of the publication to learn more about mudbrick shelters.







BUILDING WITH THE COMMUNITY

IOM teams actively engaged and consulted with community members and representatives throughout the entire reconfiguration planning process. This extensive involvement ensured that the aims and objectives of the activity were clearly defined. Key aspects, such as improved emergency shelter designs, target households to be supported, allocation of household plots, and the methodology for registration and relocation, were collectively agreed upon.

The primary objective of the reconfiguration activity was to enhance access to services and promote the integration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) into the broader socio-economic fabric of Doolow. To achieve this, it was unanimously decided that host community representatives should be involved in all consultations. Furthermore, it was agreed that 10 per cent of the shelters on the site would be allocated to vulnerable households from the host community.

These collaborative efforts between IOM, the community, and various stakeholders have paved the way for a more inclusive and integrated environment, promoting the well-being and self-sufficiency of both displaced individuals and the host community in Doolow.





Simaneh Sahal

Somali region, Ethiopia

“I had 300 goats, and when the drought struck most of them died so I decided to leave. I sold my last ten to get some money for transportation. We have been in Ladan now for seven months. We did not receive any assistance until IOM gave us this shelter. This is a much better place to live compared to how we were before. I own a donkey cart and contribute by transporting bricks for the construction of other shelters, which helps me earn some money to support my family. My wife, five children, and mother are all living here with me.”





Asha Mouwliid

20 years old, Somali region, Ethiopia

“We have been here for 11 months. We left our region due to drought and hunger. My mother passed away and our dad was in Doolow, so my brother and I decided to join him here. I was previously married in Ethiopia but my husband left. After arriving in Ladan I got remarried but my husband is no longer here and I am now nine months pregnant. I used to clean clothes for families in Doolow to earn some money. Sadly, due to my pregnancy, I have been unable to work for the past two months, so my dad is trying to support us doing casual jobs.”

Abdullahi Mohammed

70 years old, Bay region, Somalia

“I lived my entire life as a pastoralist and farmer. I used to possess thirty camels, ten cows, and twenty goats. Additionally, we cultivated sorghum and maize to sustain our family and make a living. Unfortunately, our region lacked a river, so when the rains failed, our animals perished, followed by our crops. One of my wives passed away, and I arrived here with my other wife and some relatives. We heard that we could find humanitarian assistance, and since we lost everything during the drought, we had no other options. I am struggling to provide food for my young children, so they are only drinking water. Our survival depends on my son, who sometimes get daily jobs in nearby farms. Thankfully, we received this shelter a month ago. Although we aspire to enhance it, it is much better than what we had previously.”





Mariam Isaak and her children were also among the relocated families

Seinab Mohamed

15 years old, Bay region, Somalia

“We are from a village near Baidoa, but we had to leave over five months ago because of hunger. Our ten family members settled on a small makeshift shelter. There was no space and constantly filled with dust. We now have this shelter which is a better place to live for all of us.”





Mohamed Ali Hassan

Oromo region, Ethiopia

“Due to the conflict between the Oromo people and the government, we arrived in Ladan a year ago. I came by myself and I was living in a makeshift shelter, my kids and wife came later. I decided to open this tea shop when I got this big space. I was a farmer, so making tea is the only skill I have to offer here. Our tea shop attracts many visitors, particularly those involved in constructing the shelters, who frequent the shop for tea and breakfast. While my wife prepares ambasha bread, I oversee the tea and soup. Our main challenge is that most people lack the financial resources to pay me, and sometimes I have to wait weeks or months.”





Muslimo
Gedo region, Somalia

IOM interviewed Muslimo in October 2022, she was living in a makeshift shelter in Ladan.

“We used to have enough to provide for ourselves, but our farm turned into dust due to poor rains. My older son was weak and one day he did not wake up. It was on that very day that we made the decision to flee, fearing for our lives. We left with our donkeys, but even them died on the way. It took us almost ten days of walking to reach Doolow. All we have now is this shelter. Our pot has been empty for days. I lived in my village all my life. but I can’t go back. I hope I can start a business to stop worrying about my livelihood.”



IOM interviewed Mulimo again in May 2023, this is what she said:

“Ever since we met last year, my whole life has turned upside down. I still remember that day. Back then, I was squeezed into this tiny, cramped shelter where privacy was non-existent, and I never felt at ease. But now, my children are attending school, and we’ve been blessed with a much better shelter. We are still facing challenges to get food, but thanks to the space and privacy this shelter provides, I’ve managed to start a small business. We offer phone charging services to other residents and sell some fresh vegetables. One of my children passed away recently, but despite the sorrow, I hold onto hope. When we first met, I was living in dire conditions, barely making it through each day. But now, things are so much brighter. This shelter gives us all the space we need, a place where we can rebuild our lives.”

NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

In Ladan, several families who were relocated have made the most of the spacious and secure environment offered by their new shelters by starting small businesses. Some have invested in solar panels to offer phone charging services to fellow residents for a nominal fee. Others have established grocery shops, tea stalls, and even a small tailor workshop.

By transforming their shelters into both a place of residence and a business hub, these individuals have created opportunities to generate modest incomes. This enables them to meet their essential needs and gradually reduce their reliance on humanitarian aid. This entrepreneurial spirit paves the way for their long-term recovery and self-sustainability.



Abdi divided his shelter in two spaces to open up a small grocery shop.



Mohamed prepares tea outside his new shelter to attract customers.



The solar panel is connected to a cable extensor nearby where Hawa's family charges phones from residents for a small fee of 0.10 cents of a dollar.





Saenab Abdi

80 years old, Gedo region, Somalia

“When the drought struck, the majority of people in my village, including my children, were forced to flee. Thankfully, some neighbors brought me here, hoping I could find assistance. Since I don’t have any relatives in this place, my neighbors have stepped in to provide support. It’s been a year since I arrived in Ladan, and only recently have I received this shelter. Prior to this drought, I had never experienced displacement throughout my entire life.”

Abdi Ahmed Hirsi

Sool region, Somaliland

“In 2019, due to the ongoing conflict between the Government and clans, my family and I made the difficult decision to leave our hometown behind. Initially, we sought refuge in Doolow, Ethiopia, where we stayed for some time. But when the drought struck last year, we decided to come to Ladan in search of better services. It has been a year since I arrived here, and while the weather is very hot, the security situation is significantly better compared to our hometown. In the past, I used to engage in buying and selling animals, but since coming here, I have established a kiosk in our new shelter, where I sell essential items and food for the residents in this community.”





Fatuma

Bay region, Somalia

“We used to stay in a makeshift shelter where we lacked security and privacy, both during the day and night. Our belongings were vulnerable to robbery, and we had to take turns staying behind to ensure their safety. We did not feel safe at night. Since they told us we were going to be relocated to the new shelters we have hope. We are happy.”



UPGRADING SHELTERS





MUDBRICK SHELTERS

When families have secure land tenure and no longer worry about eviction, they can focus on investing in improving their living conditions and recovering from the crisis. To demonstrate to the community how their new shelters can be further upgraded, IOM actively involved them in the process of enhancing the shelters using mud-bricks. IOM found that Doolow has a suitable soil for earth construction and started to train residents for the creation of mud-bricks.

Earth construction is a cost-effective, sustainable, and environmentally friendly technique. The process of making mud-bricks does not require machinery or advanced skills and enables the community to participate, learn, and replicate the activities.

Having successfully completed this pilot project, IOM is not aiming to seek additional funding from development actors who can support expanding these type of initiatives moving forward.





Hawa Hassan
Luuq, Gedo region, Somalia

“This is the fourth night we are sleeping in this shelter. We can put our bed inside and fit all of us here. The shelter is cold and we have a lot of privacy. We are grateful, and we hope our neighbours get the same type of shelter.”

“We have been living in Ladan for one year. The drought killed all our livestock so we did not have a choice. Thanks to some money that my husband made on the construction of these shelters, and a loan from relatives, we’ve managed to buy this solar panel to open a small business. We charge 0.10 cents of a dollar to charge the phone, and we usually earn 1.5 USD a day. It is sometimes not enough to meet the needs of our eight kids but it is what we have.”



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