

paving the way for sustainable development in a post disaster situation

*the case of the tsunami-damaged village of Xaafuun
North Eastern Somalia*

This brochure examines the UN-HABITAT role in post-disaster situations from its perspective of 'Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction'* by illustrating the case of the Xaafuun town. Using its holistic approach to human settlements and its planning and design expertise combined with components involving physical construction, UN-HABITAT acts as a catalyst for framing emergency/early recovery interventions within a long-term development perspective. Disasters of the magnitude of tsunami provide a clean slate to radically rethink the set-up and improvement of human settlements. In the case of Xaafuun, UN-HABITAT, in partnership with UNICEF, took the emergency as an opportunity to set the stage for the renewed sustainable development of the area.

TSUNAMI IN XAAFUUN disaster or opportunity?

The small village of Xaafuun, located on a remote peninsula along the north-eastern coast of Somalia, was severely damaged by the tsunami in December 2004. While an estimated 30 people perished, the extent of the damage caused by this natural disaster cannot be compared with the catastrophic scale of the events in Asia. However, the impact of the tsunami was yet another blow to a marginalized area already stricken by years of drought and civil war. With this reality in mind, the international spotlight on the tsunami-affected areas provided an opportunity to tackle the multitude of problems faced by the Somali coastal region.

FROM EMERGENCY TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT The role of UN-HABITAT

As frequently happens after a major disaster, numerous organizations 'flooded' the area with pledges for assistance. As the traditional community leaders had no formal institutional set-up and no expertise in planning or coordinating development, the initial interventions were ad hoc and randomly located within the sensitive, unstable dune ecosystem near the old settlement. UNICEF, present from the start, partnered with UN-HABITAT to look at safe and sustainable solutions for the relocation of the settlement and its future development.

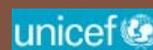


URBAN PLANNING IN A STATE OF FLUX - Towards Sustainable Urbanization

Urban planning was traditionally seen as a means to control and regulate the development of towns and cities. In the cities of the developing world, however, traditional planning approaches have failed to address the challenges of rapid urbanisation and the poverty, exclusion, informality and vulnerability it brings in its wake.

This series of brochures illustrates how UN-HABITAT has applied urban planning and design in a variety of ways, in very different contexts, to contribute towards sustainable human settlements development in general, as well as prevention, upgrading and integration of unplanned settlements, and the management of post-conflict and post-disaster situations, in particular. Each brochure introduces one thematic area or approach, and illustrates its impact on the built environment, and/or the planning legislation, policy and process. The specific context and programme within which the illustrated UN-HABITAT activities have been developed are mentioned at the end of each brochure, along with contact details for more information.

* see: www.unhabitat.org/rdmu/ and www.unhabitat.org/roaas/

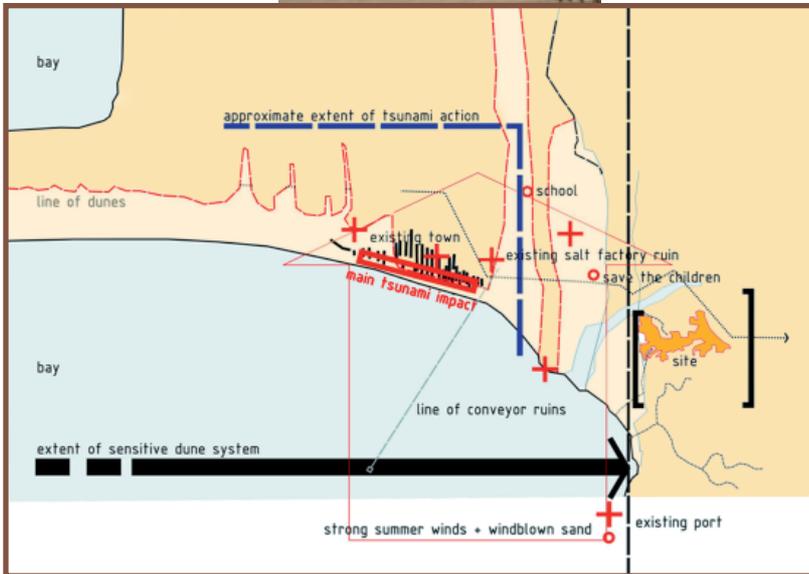


UN-HABITAT



MOVING TO SAFER GROUND *finding sustainable space for development*

The first step in the Xaafuun reconstruction process was to find a safe and environmentally sustainable site.



A multi-disciplinary team – comprised of urban planners, a local economic development expert (from ILO) and an environmental expert – recommended that the site be:

- Close to the sea and to different fishing locations (for economic sustainability);
- Protected from sand-laden winds and mobile sand dunes, and sufficiently elevated above sea level (for long-term environmental sustainability);
- Suitable for the cost-efficient establishment and operation of basic services (water, sanitation) and other public infrastructure;
- Easy to expand over time.

The final choice was agreed upon with the district authorities, the village elders and the women's representatives. It is not just

land where people can settle safely, but it is a genuinely sustainable location, in other words a 'sustainable space'.

XAAFUUN VILLAGE

Xaafuun (pronounced ha-foon) is one of the few permanent fishing settlements on the north-eastern Somali coast, oscillating between 250 and 600 families, depending on the season.

In the damaged settlement, houses had been built at sea level near the beach, destabilizing the very fragile dune ecosystem of the area.

Strong, sand-laden winds would regularly hit the village during the monsoon season, often burying structures and causing health problems, particularly for children, pregnant women and the elderly.

Fishery is the main source of income, but the rich marine resources are vastly under-exploited. The "industry" is very rudimentary: fish are sold directly to foreign boats lounging along the coast, and there is no internal market or fish processing business.



APPROPRIATE SETTLEMENT LAYOUT AND SHELTER TYPES

The new location called for a carefully considered, integrated settlement layout with appropriate types of shelter, rather than simply replicating what existed before. A preparatory sketch-plan discussed with all stakeholders allowed for swift land allocation to different agencies for immediate reconstruction activities. Meanwhile, a more detailed settlement layout was prepared by UN-HABITAT. A new mosque, a Koranic school, a meat market, a women's centre and a health centre have been built; the construction of additional public infrastructure continues. Such timely planning intervention has been vital, as organisations had a tendency to find the best 'spot' for their building without considerations for coherency and without consulting the other agencies. After this preparatory exercise, UN-HABITAT started the construction of the new houses.

The town plan is based on the following principles:

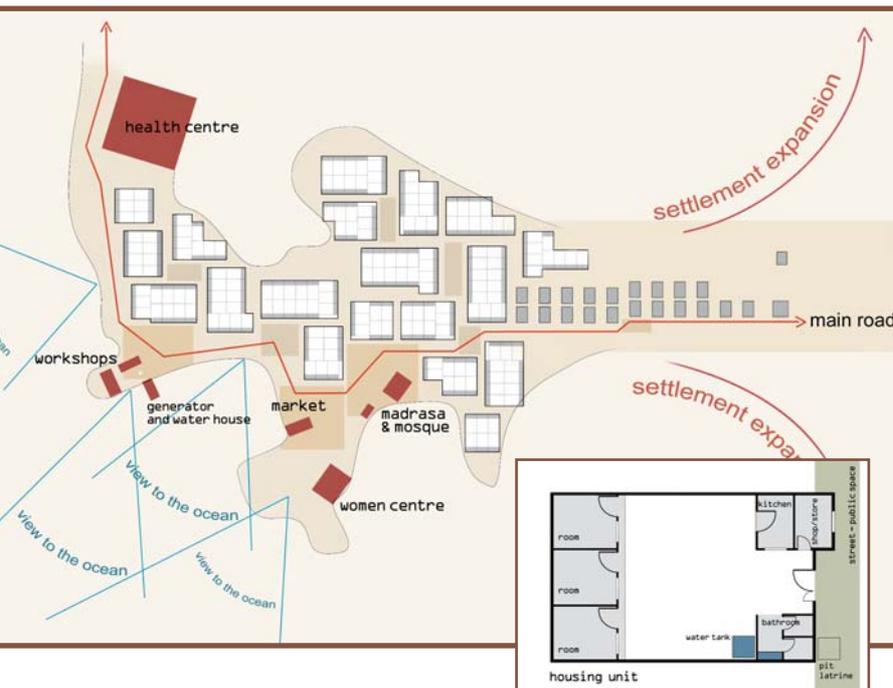
- Compact settlement: this mitigates the impact of Xaafuun's strong winds on living spaces and housing units. It also ensures the cost-efficient development and operation of basic services, reduces the extent of the area that needs to be protected against soil erosion, and controls infringements on the delicate coastal dune ecosystem.
- "Public border": a public zone, comprising public spaces and public buildings, faces the sea, acting as a buffer between the residential area and the dunes, as it was in the original settlement.

Photo credit: UN-Habitat



- Main road: this is the backbone of the settlement, as it is linked with the main public facilities and aligned with the access road to the settlement and previously built structures.
- Economic development: next to the formal market structures and the sites along the sea for a small-scale fishing industry, spaces for spontaneous economic activities and social gatherings are created.

The design of the houses was based on environmental and cultural considerations, and the community made a final choice from three different types. The selected courtyard type was modelled on the most advanced houses in the old settlement, which had protected private spaces and room for expansion. Combining several units in blocks meanwhile increased compactness and cost-efficiency.



CREATING SPACE FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Both the settlement and individual houses were specifically designed to allow women to run economic activities from home. The basic house type has a room protruding into the street that can be used as a shop, small workshop or rental room. Small public areas around the settlement provide space for such things as playgrounds for children and water points, all in a safe environment. The women's centre is positioned close to the markets. A kindergarten and a primary school will be included in the settlement, and the first school built by UNICEF will be converted into a secondary school.

STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION

As of April 2006, UN-HABITAT had built two construction workshops (to be converted into community centres on completion of the activities) and the first phase of 100 houses for the UNICEF-funded Xaafuun shelter reconstruction project. In total, it is anticipated that some 250 houses will be constructed under the presently available funding.

The buildings constructed by other agencies are in place and most of the public infrastructure has been finalized.

The remoteness of Xaafuun has presented a major access challenge. In addition, our participatory approach – adopted in the selection of the site, its layout and the design of the houses – has been time-consuming, but its benefits are clear. Houses built by another organization without proper community consultation, for instance, were not well received by the beneficiaries. Contracts are given to the community, organized through a newly created District Development Committee.



Xaafuun - Workshops (above) and houses (below) constructed by UN-HABITAT



ROAD MAP FOR XAAFUUN: PLANNING THE WAY AHEAD

A lot more work remains to be done. While finalizing the 250 houses planned for 2006, suitable expansion areas will be designed. Xaafuun has attracted substantial investments that are turning a small fishing settlement into a potential pillar of coastal development. Links to the new fishing hubs need to be formalized alongside further investments being made in this sector. With the growth of the settlement, new problems of solid waste pollution and hygiene will have to be tackled. For this purpose, appropriate community-based solutions are being developed.



ENVIRONMENTAL REHABILITATION OF THE OLD SITE



Relocation of the settlement will allow the dismantling of the original settlement and environmental rehabilitation of the dunes. This has to be properly planned, to avoid the risk that the old settlement will continue to be used, especially by seasonal workers. District authorities have so far demonstrated a clear environmental consciousness – for instance, cutting of live wood has been forbidden. The construction materials of the old settlement can be re-used in the new settlement. Youth and women's groups have shown interest in re-planting the dunes to facilitate the disrupted ecosystem's natural rehabilitation.

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The Xaafuun case described illustrates that without compromising humanitarian efforts to save lives, it is vital to introduce a development perspective in the early stages of a post-disaster situation, fully taking advantage of the opportunities that might result from a disaster. It furthermore illustrates that UN-HABITAT can make an important contribution to post-disaster contexts, using its holistic approach to human settlements and its specific expertise in environmentally sound planning and urban design. This is strengthened by the experience UN-HABITAT has gained over the years in the actual implementation of substantial infrastructure projects. Our approach highlights opportunities, but also enhances the capacity of the international community to efficiently coordinate interventions during early recovery, and shorten the period of crisis.

SUDP - urban development programme for the somali region

The SUDP is an umbrella programme for urban interventions in the Somali regions.

UN-HABITAT is the lead agency, and its partners are UNA, ILO, Novib and UNICEF, each of whom contribute in their field of specialization. The three main components addressed are (1) governance, including legal and institutional reforms, strengthening municipal governance and the role of civil society; (2) urban management, including strategic planning and development control, land management, municipal finance, delivery of basic services and local economic development; and (3) the implementation of local projects by local consortia, building on the two capacity-building elements already mentioned. The programme is funded by the European Commission, and co-funded by UNDP, Government of Italy, Government of Japan, UNICEF and DFID. The programme receives support from WFP through Food-For-Work schemes.

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