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From Disaster to Opportunity: Building-Back-Better Housing after Cyclone Idai in Mozambique

Submitted By: UN-Habitat Mozambique



Organization Profile

Organization Name: GREPOC, Ministry of Public Works, Housing and Water Resources (MOPHRH) & UN-Habitat

Organization Type: United Nations entity; National government

Website: https://www.grepoc.org.mz/poc/

Practice Details

Country(ies): Mozambique

City(ies): Buzi District (Guara-Guara locality)

Start Year: 2019 **Ongoing:** Yes **End Year:** N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Housing Rights & Social Inclusion
- Housing in Crisis & Displacement Contexts
- Housing & Climate Adaptation
- Housing, Land & Spatial Planning

Relevant SDGs:



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Problem & Context

Tropical Cyclone Idai, which struck central Mozambique in March 2019, stands as one of the most devastating disasters in Southern Africa. With winds over 200 km/h, it hit the main city of Beira and neighboring districts, including Búzi, killing 603 people and affecting over 1.8 million, with mass displacement.

The impact on housing was catastrophic: the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment reported 116,000 houses destroyed and 111,000 severely damaged, leaving 1.1 million people without shelter. The urban dimension of the disaster was evident, with public infrastructure and livelihoods affected. Housing losses reached USD 410.5 million.

The disaster exposed gaps in urbanization policies, building standards, and climate risk integration, as well as persistent shortcomings in the national housing policy, which amplified its impacts. In response, the Government established GREPOC to coordinate build-back-better reconstruction, turning emergency actions into steps toward resilient settlements.

Solution Developed

1. A Housing practice in Búzi District was part of a large-scale, area-based recovery program across several provinces, providing cyclone-resilient housing and relocation options for families displaced from flood-prone areas to safer sites such as Guara-Guara, where 1,466 of 2,693 planned units were implemented by multiple partners. Beneficiaries were vulnerable households, including female-, child-, and elderly-headed households, persons with disabilities, and low-income families.

2. Through the Post-Cyclone Housing Plan (PALPOC, 2019), prepared by the Government with UN-Habitat, objectives were to establish a framework for large-scale reconstruction, set building standards, promote social and territorial sustainability, and foster innovation and resilience.

3. In Búzi District, particularly in Guara-Guara, multiple partners converged around an area-based strategy promoted by UN-Habitat in support of GREPOC. Innovative scope, it extended beyond housing to address land tenure, participatory planning, infrastructure, and economic recovery, while its effectiveness was reinforced by cyclone-resistant housing models and construction techniques adapted to local materials.

Implementation

1. In Guara-Guara, activities included assessments and beneficiary identification; community mobilization and participatory settlement planning; plot demarcation and land titling; construction of resilient housing with sanitation; and training for masons and youth to ensure quality and sustainability, including SSB production supported by IFRC and AICS-ILO.

2. GREPOC ensured institutional coordination; provincial and local governments supported settlement planning and land regularization; UN-Habitat provided technical assistance on resilience standards and capacity building; NGOs delivered projects on the ground; the private sector contributed to construction; and local communities actively participated in planning.

3. Recovery in Guara-Guara began in 2019 after hosting around 10,000 IDPs. In 2020, activities included assessments and pilot housing. From 2021–2023, cyclone-resilient housing advanced through an area-based approach with multi-stakeholder engagement. Since 2023, efforts have focused on scaling up housing and training, with 1,466 units completed of 2,693 planned, to be finalized by 2026.

4. Mainly funded by international partners (≈USD 30 million) and government allocations, with contributions from the Tzu-Chi Foundation (the main contributor with 2,063 units), Associação Muçulmana, AICS, USAID, and IFRC-CVM (Korean & American Red Cross), supported by technical assistance from UN-Habitat, FAO, and ILO, in collaboration with academia and local communities.

Enablers & Obstacles

1. Implementation was enabled by strong government commitment to “build back better” and coordination between national and local levels. International cooperation was vital to secure funding. Technical support to establish reconstruction standards and strengthen capacity-building was crucial. Community participation enhanced social ownership and ensured solutions adapted to local needs.

2.The main obstacle was the scale of damage in the context of vulnerability and fragile housing. Limited technical capacity and mobilization delays hampered the transition from humanitarian aid to resilient reconstruction. Divergent partner approaches, from rigid international models to business-as-usual resettlement, added complexity. GREPOC, as a new body, and local governments managed with limited experience, while organizations and companies struggled to rapidly deliver housing amid shortages. These challenges were addressed through coordination, training, partnerships, and adaptive learning.

Results & Impact

1. The post-Cyclone Idai housing reconstruction in Guara-Guara achieved major results. By 2025, 1,466 resilient houses had been built, of 2,693 planned, benefiting over 13,465 people. More than 2,300 technicians, masons, artisans, and youth were trained in resilient construction, disseminating standards and influencing the value chain. Private companies strengthened their capacity and are expected to keep applying these standards in future work.

2. The intervention had a clear positive impact: female-headed households, the elderly, and people with disabilities were prioritized. Improved habitability, access to land rights and

services, combined with community participation, reinforced ownership and equity. Training of artisans, who build most houses in Mozambique, has long-term implications for housing quality and climate resilience.

3. The intervention reduced risk exposure, revitalized local economies through private sector engagement and construction cooperatives, and strengthened resilience with cyclone-adaptive training. Its area-based approach consolidated safer, more inclusive settlements, advanced land tenure regularization, and established a replicable housing model that supports climate adaptation and territorial sustainability, while promoting environmental safeguards and worker protection throughout implementation.

Replication & Scale Up

The first cyclone-adaptive housing designs and pilots promoted by UN-Habitat and IFRC in Sofala province influenced housing processes in Búzi (Guara-Guara) and were replicated in Nhamatanda and Dondo, incorporating continuous improvements and cross-learning among projects and actors. The process built a technical-institutional memory with GREPOC and partners. Housing typologies and materials secured community acceptance, while cascade training of masons and municipal technicians strengthened ownership, improved sustainability, and enabled replication in other districts.

The housing practice offers a model for replication in Mozambique and international post-disaster contexts. Its success depends on political commitment at all levels and effective resource mobilization. Clear guidelines and continuous capacity-building for builders, technicians, and communities will support replication. Embedding housing reconstruction into national housing policy with a disaster risk reduction focus can drive expansion. Incorporating resistant local materials and techniques could accelerate implementation while ensuring sustainability and scalability.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice is a new or innovative practice that is not yet adequately or fully integrated into formal policy frameworks.

Since Cyclone Idai in 2019, the concept of safer housing has shaped national ministerial discussions, informing Mozambique's National Urbanization Policy (2024) on housing and climate resilience, drawing on practical experiences such as Guara-Guara. Embedding this approach into specific housing frameworks will require a broader lessons-learned process and sustained advocacy across levels and actors to validate recommendations that could underpin a resilience pillar in the national housing policy and reinforce strategic plans such as PALPOC.

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Lessons & Takeaways

Accelerating reconstruction processes could facilitate timely delivery while fostering stronger community collaboration and engagement by minimizing delays. From a technical perspective, broadening housing prototypes to incorporate vernacular materials and models would enhance impact by reaching more beneficiaries across diverse geographic areas, while also contributing to cost efficiency and addressing affordability—an enduring challenge in large-scale recovery efforts in the post-Idai context. In parallel, it is important to complement financing mechanisms such as owner-driven reconstruction.