Women Build: an evaluation of women's participation in shelter in Mozambique.



"I am a strong woman. I have no issues with the work, and I feel as if I am now a woman with dignity and standing in this community."

Report of WiSDiM, Women in Shelter Design in Mozambique, a research collaboration between CARE Mozambique and CARE International UK exploring the participation of women in shelter programming.

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Executive Summary

The Women in Shelter Design in Mozambique (WiSDiM) project was conceived as a collaborative research venture between CARE Mozambique and the Global Shelter Team at CARE International UK (CIUK) in early 2025. CARE has been implementing humanitarian Shelter assistance projects in varied contexts in Mozambique for many years, responding to crises triggered by natural hazards and conflict. CARE has evolved its approach to be more gender responsive, and even gender transformative[1]. The research aimed to document and evaluate the roles and perspectives of women in CARE's humanitarian shelter activities in Cabo Delgado, including areas of innovation where women's agency and participation have been enhanced. The research explored women's participation in emergency and transitional shelter projects and the impacts of such participation. The research also aimed to gather evidence on the wider impacts of shelter (such as health, livelihoods and climate change resilience).

Given the known constraints on conducting participatory qualitative primary research in the conflict-affected context of Cabo Delgado, the research approach and associated data collection plan was pragmatic, iterative, and focused on creating actionable recommendations for humanitarian policy and practice.

The research questions and methodology were co-designed by CARE Mozambique's Humanitarian Team in Pemba and CIUK's Shelter Researchers. The primary research consisted of field visits to five sites of past and ongoing Shelter projects, in Chiure, Meluco and Mecufi, in May (Phase 1) and July (Phase 2) 2025, with a consultant[2] undertaking Phase 2 of the data collection and analysis. Over 150 male and female project participants took part in group discussions and 29 women were interviewed. Observational walks around the project sites and interviews with key informants (such as CARE staff members, Shelter Cluster actors and local government officials) allowed further insights into the nature and impacts of programming and the factors influencing these impacts.

The findings, derived from a thematic analysis of the primary data, are organised into those related to the impacts of shelter support, the impacts of women's participation in shelter programming, especially transitional shelter construction, and the factors affecting impactful shelter programming. The findings and preliminary recommendations arising from them were validated and further developed through a multistakeholder workshop hosted by CARE Mozambique in Pemba in November 2025. These workshop discussions enabled the production of final actionable recommendations.

The recommendations are organised by their primary audience: organisations implementing Shelter and Settlements assistance, the Shelter Cluster, and government entities.

The WiSDiM study emphasizes the importance of inclusive participation, partnership, coordination, and capacity-building as essential components for ensuring effective, sustainable and gender-responsive shelter interventions. The research points to the benefits of shelter projects engaging with gender norms and having open conversations with communities about what could be possible from the outset. In this way even shelter projects can have the potential to be gender transformative.

Shelter programming has the potential to support positive social norms shifts and create an enabling environment for women's voice and leadership, and holistic recovery. It is hoped that the evidence-based recommendations arising from the WiSDiM research offer direction to future Shelter programming by CARE and its partners in Cabo Delgado, and elsewhere in Mozambique and the region.

[1] For a definition of these terms, see CARE's 2016 *Gender and Shelter Good Programming Guidelines*

[2] Julio Langa, a Mozambique anthropologist, conducted the field visits in Phase 2 and contributed initial data analysis, which is included in the findings.

Introduction to the WiSDiM research project

Shelter is one of the four core sectors of CARE's humanitarian work[3]. CARE's Global Shelter Team believes that adequate, dignified and safe shelter is fundamental to the process of recovery after disaster. This belief is at the heart of CARE's people-centred approach to responding to crises provoked by natural hazards, conflict, and displacement. Regardless of the magnitude or cause of the crisis, losing one's home is invariably devastating, and adequate shelter is critical for restoring stability and dignity. The Shelter Team promotes evidence-based, inclusive programming and advocates for adequate housing as a human right. The **theory of change** and **principles** below underpins CARE's approach to Shelter support.

IF ...

- Shelter responses are timely and tailored to local contexts and evolving needs.
- Shelter responses are inclusive, gender-sensitive, holistic and evidence-based.
- Guidance, recommendations and tools reflect communities' priorities as well as practitioners' experience.

... THEN

- In the **short term**, affected populations access safe, dignified shelter and achieve their rights to basic needs.
- In the **medium term**, shelter solutions are sustainable and climate-resilient, enabling **long-term** recovery and resilience for crisis and disaster-affected people.

Guiding principles of Shelter at CARE:

- Affected populations are always the first responders; shelter activities should be community led and guided by households' priorities and capacities.
- Shelter solutions must be adapted for the unique context of each crisis. Off-the-shelf solutions are inappropriate beyond the emergency phase.
- Gender, age, disability and intersectionality shape shelter needs and capacities. Responses should be gender-sensitive and inclusive.
- Research and practice should be linked, ensuring learning within and between contexts and the development of evidence-based best practice.
- Shelter should be linked with other sectors (e.g., WASH, protection, livelihoods) and will benefit from the development capacities of CARE country offices.

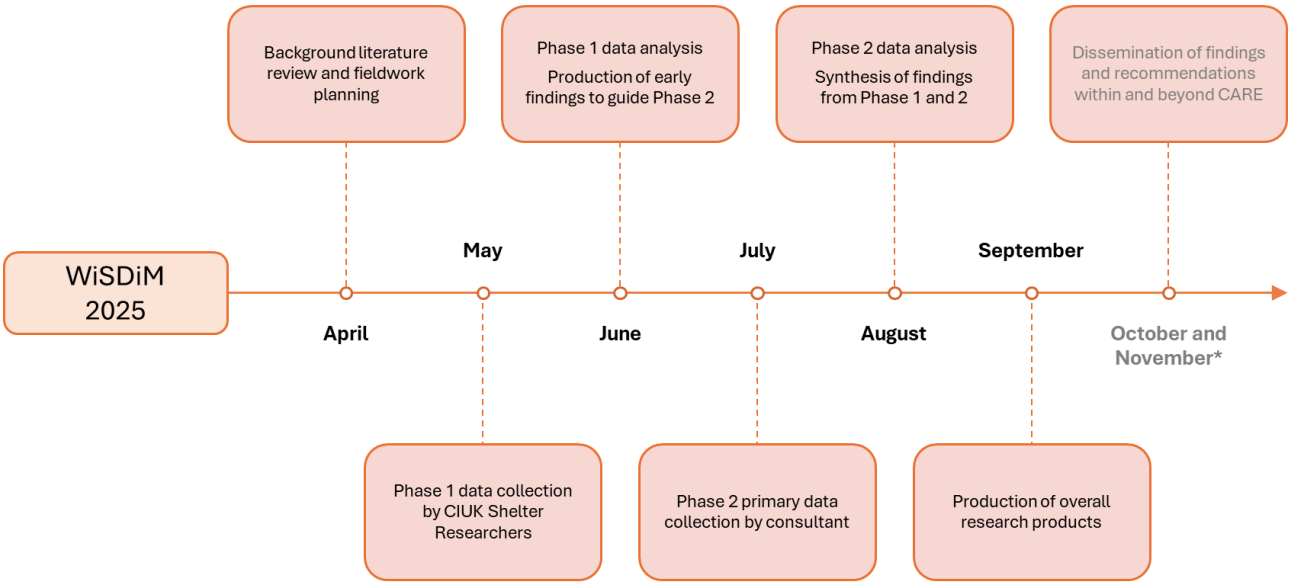
CARE Mozambique has been implementing Shelter assistance in Cabo Delgado[4] for many years, evolving its approach and paying increasing attention to the need for gender-responsive programming. The Global Shelter Team's Technical Advisors have been involved with several projects; a deployment in 2023 triggered the inclusion of women in construction activities and this area of programming has since expanded.

The Global Shelter Team's Researchers co-designed the WiSDiM research project with the Humanitarian Team in CARE Mozambique's Pemba Office to investigate the women's experiences of Shelter programming, and the impacts of the programming on their lives. The research was funded by Mozambique Appeals and Buro Happold and provided an opportunity to learn from previous and ongoing Shelter programming in Cabo Delgado. It was intended from the outset that the research findings should contribute to future evidence-based Shelter programming in Mozambique and that relevant recommendations cascade forward into other contexts, ready to inform shelter (and multisectoral) programming proposals.

[3] Alongside WASH, Food & Nutrition Security and Sexual, Maternal & Reproductive Health.

[4] CARE Mozambique's operations in Cabo Delgado Province include preparing for and responding to ongoing conflict-induced displacement and recurrent cyclones and flooding. It should be noted that future responses will be in the context of the 'Humanitarian Reset' and reduced international funding , in a region experiencing the compounding and cascading impacts of climate change. See Annex B.

WiSDiM timeline



*A WiSDiM project extension was agreed to allow the dissemination of research findings, including with communities in field visits, and exploration of how to disseminate and operationalise the recommendations.

Methodology

Given the known constraints on conducting participatory qualitative primary research in the conflict-affected context of Cabo Delgado, the research approach and associated data collection plan was pragmatic, iterative, and focused on creating actionable recommendations for humanitarian practice.

Research Questions

RQ1. What are the roles of women in shelter projects: emergency response and shelter construction?
This required learning about women's roles before, during and, where possible, after a shelter project to evaluate changes—especially in decision-making, financial management, implementation (access to institutions and materials), and how skills have evolved.

RQ2. What are the impacts of shelter on other aspects of women's lives?
This concerned positive and negative impacts of Shelter assistance, including, for example, well-being, dignity, livelihoods and protection risks.

RQ3. What are the impacts of women's participation in shelter programming?
This concerned positive and negative impacts of women's active participation in construction, including, for example, on well-being, social cohesion and protection.

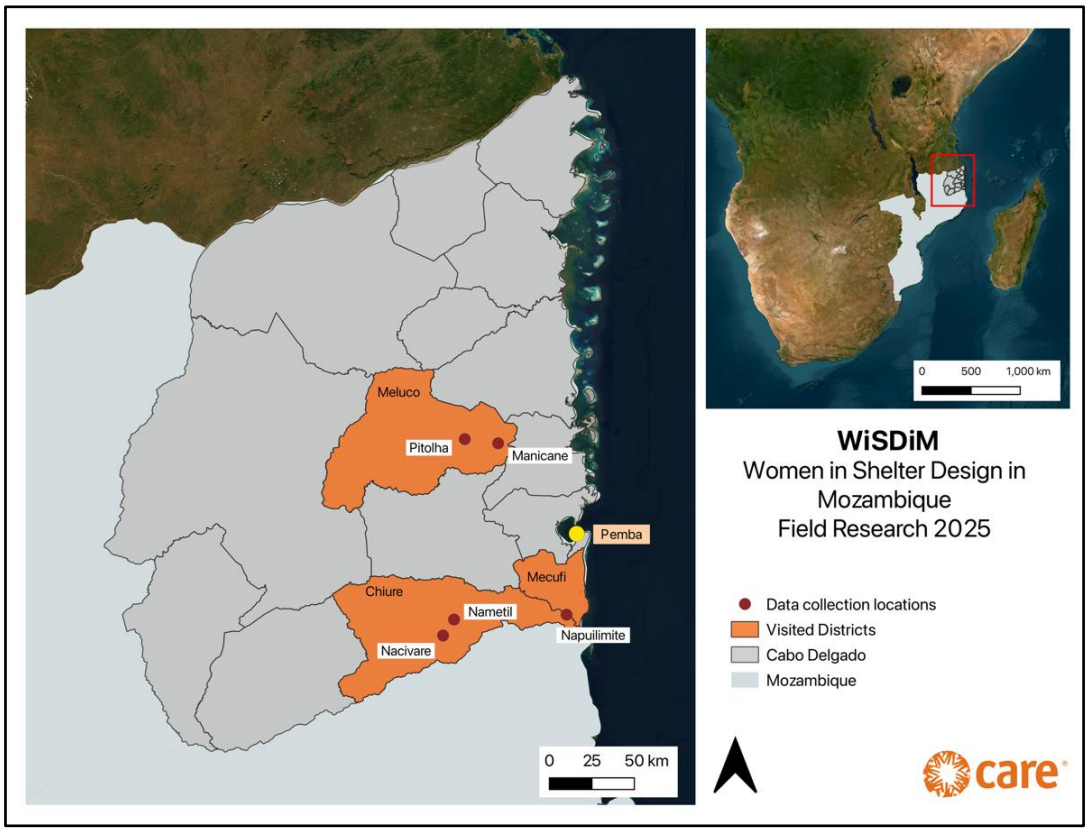
RQ4. How can research findings be used to refine future shelter interventions?
This final research question was addressed in consultation with CARE Mozambique's Humanitarian Team, and through a workshop hosted in Pemba on 18th November 2025. CARE Mozambique brought together

partner INGOs and NGOs of the Shelter Cluster and government representatives[5] to discuss and validate the initial findings related to RQ1, 2 and 3 and to contribute to actionable recommendations.

Data collection

Project documents related to the likely fieldwork locations were collected prior to Phase 1; these enabled an oversight of the Shelter activities and outputs, informing the development of tools for primary data collection. The identification of project sites in Cabo Delgado that could accommodate field visits was guided by the Humanitarian and Security Teams in the CARE Mozambique Pemba office. The selection of sites was in large part constrained by access issues and the progress of ongoing projects. In consequence, five sites were visited: two sites of recently completed projects (one emergency and one transitional project) in Chiure, one site of an earlier project in Mecufi and two sites of the same ongoing transitional shelter construction project in Meluco (see map[6] below).

Primary data was collected in two phases, in May and July 2025. The time between Phase 1 and Phase 2 enabled reflection and subsequent adaptation of interview and discussion guides for return visits to the same sites, and an additional project site in Mecufi.



Interview and discussion guides were adapted to the contexts and known and emerging constraints. Prior to the field visits, coordination with local government entities was managed by CARE staff. In all sites, project participants were informed of the research objectives and invited to contribute, through household (HH) interviews and group discussions. The sampling strategy for HH visits and interviews was opportunistic, guided by the community leader and officials from local government. Most interactions with former and current project participants were short, often constrained by interviewees' livelihood and

[5] Government representatives included the District Service for Planning and Infrastructure (SDPI) and the Provincial Directorate of Public Works.

[6] NB in some available maps, Manicane is in Quissanga District, not Meluco.

construction responsibilities. In all locations, semi-structured interviews and group discussions needed community leaders and CARE staff to translate between English, Portuguese and Macua[7]. In addition to conventional KIIs, group discussions and HH interviews, an attempt was made to include a more innovative qualitative data collection methodology, PhotoVoice[8], in alignment with CARE's Global Shelter Team's ambitions of understanding the impacts of programming better[9].





Photovoice: using photos taken by community members to enhance conversations about the impacts of shelter





See Annex 1 for more information on primary data collection and a discussion of its limitations, risks and risk mitigation.

Data synthesis and analysis

Rapid thematic analysis of Phase 1 data led to some amendments to the HHI and KII interview guides to enable more targeted and in-depth conversations during Phase 2 data collection in the same, and new project locations.

Following Phase 2 data collection, all the primary field data was collated and synthesised, allowing qualitative thematic analysis. Findings related to RQs 1-3 were identified, and illustrated with reference to specific project contexts and narrative material. The findings were organised into those relating to impacts of the provision of shelter assistance, and those relating to the active participation of women in

[7] In Phase 2, only translation between Portuguese and Macua was required. This enabled more free-flowing conversations.

[8] For more background on Photovoice, see, for example, Wang C, Burris MA (June 1997). "Photovoice: concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment". Health Education & Behavior. 24 (3): 369–387

[9] See, for example, *Building Impact*, co-produced by CARE International UK in 2024.

transitional shelter construction. While the focus of the research questions were on women and girls, the impacts of Shelter programming on all community members were included.

The initial findings were then sense-checked with the Humanitarian Team in Pemba, in order to collectively consider RQ4. Next, the findings and draft recommendations were shared in a workshop in Pemba in November 2025 for validation, and to enable the co-production of actionable recommendations for future programming and advocacy.

Findings

The research findings are based upon primary data collected in a limited number of CARE's Shelter project sites in Cabo Delgado, past and present. The qualitative methods used and constraints on field visit time (see Annex A) inevitably mean that findings are drawn from a very limited database and therefore can only offer partial and potentially biased answers to the research questions. Evaluating the contribution of humanitarian programming to positive and negative 'wider impacts' on participants' lives is problematic and is acknowledged in the sector to need greater attention[10]. Nevertheless, observation, key informant interviews, group discussions with Shelter project participants and individuals' stories offer insights into some of the impacts of Shelter programming.

The impacts of shelter support on women's lives.

Emergency shelter support

The research locations provided scant opportunities to evaluate the impacts of emergency shelter and NFI provision. Distributions of tarpaulins and NFIs (non food household items), plus associated training of how to use tarpaulins to repair roofs in cyclone-damaged Nametil had certainly contributed to post-disaster recovery. Repaired roofs had improved cyclone-affected households' living conditions and had made people's homes (often referred to as 'makeshift shelters') weather-proof, at least in the medium term. Most families had followed the guidance of using the tarpaulin below locally-collected roofing materials, prolonging the useful life of the tarpaulins. Those who had not followed the guidance were receiving additional training and support.

Nevertheless, the project participants were calling for more permanent solutions to making houses weather proof, comfortable and resilient to future storms. They were also calling for support beyond emergency shelter assistance, particularly for food security and livelihoods.

In Mecufi, where communities had experienced repeated damage and destruction of their homes by cyclones, interviewees (project participants and local authority representatives) made strong requests for durable shelter support, rather than repeated and inadequate distributions of emergency shelter materials.

> *It would be better not to have something temporary. Since the cyclone hit, we have had many organizations supporting us, but the houses were damaged - you can't see anything left. The tarps are all ripped apart. By the end of this year, there won't be any sign of the earlier emergency support. By the end of the year, the communities won't have any more shelter. We need to look at things in the long term. We're distributing tarps, but by distributing tarps, we're counting on providing [durable] shelter, but it won't help until much later on, if at all.* (*Mecufi KII*)

Transitional shelter support: Improved living conditions and physical comfort

Transitional shelter provision, notwithstanding different shelter designs seen in Meluco and Chiure due to different funding levels per shelter, generates significant improvements in living conditions for women and their families[11]. Transitional shelters were widely acknowledged to provide greater comfort, safety and dignity compared to makeshift shelters for people displaced by conflict and disaster. Actual and anticipated improvements include space, security, physical comfort, peace of mind, safety and resilience to future climate-related hazards. Having an adequate, safe and secure home enables disaster- and conflict-affected project participants to begin to recover and participate in household and community activities. Particular elements of the transitional shelters were pointed out as important to comfortable living.

[10] See, for example, a Global Shelter Cluster report on understanding the impacts of Shelter assistance: *Building Impact*.

[11] Most of the interviewees in Meluco had not yet occupied shelters under construction with CARE support, so there are significant limitations in assessing the impact of shelters on women's well-being and dignity. In Nacivare, Chuire, people were already living inside the transitional shelters.

The height of the new houses, especially the door height, is seen as a positive change and the fact that the houses have (or will have) zinc roofing was much appreciated. While building the foundation of the house with stakes and bamboo might be within the reach of some families, they would have difficulty affording a zinc roof without such outside assistance.

> *The old houses [makeshift shelters] and the ones we're building aren't the same. And after the sheet metal roof is installed, it'll be even better. When you enter these old houses, you have to stoop over inside until you get out. So, when these houses are finished, that won't happen. You'll enter the house in a normal position, without stooping, and stay like that until you come out. (Manicane HHI)*

Women were anticipating that the zinc roof would reduce their workload, as they would no longer need to repeatedly travel to the forests to collect the straw/thatch that is often used to roof their houses. Time saved would be dedicated to other household concerns. Shaded verandas provided a place for family members to gather, cook, process crops and relax.



Family photo taken by a community member outside their transitional shelter in Nacivare

There is a perception that the transitional shelters have contributed, or will contribute, to increased safety for men and women, due to more protected space to sleep and manage their daily activities. There is also a perception that this space can be further strengthened to reduce the risk of protection issues and GBV, with the provision of lockable doors and secure windows. However, in smaller transitional shelter designs (as in Nacivare), the lack of private space and single bedroom for the whole family can increase protection risks for women and girls and decrease mental well-being.

Transitional shelter support: Improved resilience to future hazards

Well designed and constructed transitional shelters were seen to protect people from future storms and floods better than makeshift shelters. Cross-braced walls and well-secured roofing sheets are expected to withstand high winds and make people feel safe. Earth plinths around the shelters are expected to protect inhabitants and their belongings from seasonal flooding. In Nacivare, several households had added features to make their shelters more resilient, such as sandbags on roofs and wire roof ties attached to large rocks on the ground.





Households' shelter additions to protect roofs from high winds in Nacivare. Small earth plinths are also visible.

The construction training provided as part of the shelter projects was also expected to enable former project participants to maintain their homes and repair any future damage themselves, making communities more self-reliant and resilient.

> *CARE came to help our communities, and the legacy it leaves is the experience that should be applied across multiple communities. Let's imagine that tomorrow houses are destroyed. There will be no need to call CARE again to fix them; the community is already doing it. They're already prepared. They've learned how to build and how to care for their own homes. This will serve as a legacy for that community; the experience and knowledge will remain with those communities.* *(Meluco KII)*

The impacts of women's participation in shelter programming.

Women's traditional roles and redefinition of gender roles in humanitarian contexts.

Traditional social expectations for women and men appeared to be similar in all the communities visited. Most research participants were people who had been displaced from elsewhere in Cabo Delgado, yet it appeared that all communities are exposed to socialization processes in which men are considered the leader, authority, primary provider, and decision-maker. As a female interviewee in Nametil stated:

> *The man has the most say in the house. If he tells you not to leave the house, you don't. If he says you're not going somewhere today, you shouldn't go because the man is the master of the house. He's the one responsible for making decisions. When the husband threatens his wife, the wife accepts it. (Nametil HHI)*

Women are usually expected to ensure the social reproduction of families through a range of activities that include homemaking, caring for children, cooking, fetching water, and working in the fields. Therefore, women's roles are primarily exercised in the domestic sphere rather than in the community, where management tasks are attributed to men. Both women and men interviewed viewed men as the ones with the 'natural' and unquestioned responsibility to lead activities, from the family to the community level:

> *The man is more important because he does everything in the house. What's missing in the house, the man takes responsibility for. (Pitolha FGD)*

The situations in which households are headed by women, common in all the sites visited, could suggest a shift in perception about women's social position prompted by conflict-induced displacement. Yet even women who live only with children (and therefore carry out the responsibilities that would be held by men in the household) also view men as leaders, including in home building activities.

> *Women don't know how to build a house. This mother's husband passed away. She doesn't know how to build a house. In a house, the woman's head is the man. It's the man who starts building the house, and the woman helps to finish it. (Pitolha FGD)*

Emergency situations can reinforce the differentiation of traditional gender roles mentioned above. Lack of access to essential services such as water, food, and healthcare often requires women to redouble their efforts to manage household chores. This situation is particularly critical for women who lead their households, as, in addition to their traditional responsibilities, they must also perform tasks considered masculine. However, displacement or humanitarian contexts can also impose the need for rapid adaptation, challenging and prompting transformation of traditional roles. The context of humanitarian crisis and communities' interaction with external actors such as CARE is also generating important opportunities for redefining the social positions of men and women. CARE's evolving approach of encouraging communities to include women in construction committees has prompted some changes to social norms.

> *The culture back then wasn't always good and supportive, but nowadays, when we see women building houses, it's a very good thing because they can help themselves. (Pitolha HHI)*

Wide acceptance of women's participation in construction

Evidenced by contrasts between Mecufi, Chiure (Nacivare) and Meluco (Manicane and Pilolha) completed and ongoing transitional shelter projects, CARE has steered progress towards equal inclusion of women in construction committees. In Meluco, women make up half the construction groups. The evolution and implementation of CARE's approach towards the equal inclusion of women in construction was clear and interviewees reported women's willingness to perform new social roles. There is also a perception that this flexibility is highly advantageous for women and other household members, contributing to positive impacts for the women themselves, and for their wider communities.

The good thing here is that they helped each other. The man working and the woman there too. In our parents' time, it wasn't always like this, but today we see that it's good for both of them to help each other. That woman over there is trying to earn money to buy soap because she has no work, no business. There, together with the man, at least she's doing something. And men like it too because it helps them too. (Pitolha FGD)

Men and women's support for the mixed construction groups suggest a willingness to accept changes to traditional gender roles. CARE's work before project implementation to explain the operation of the construction committees and ensure openness meant that any potential distrust was limited.

The other women aren't badmouthing us in construction because there are others there too [...]The community doesn't object. They're not complaining. They already know that this doesn't ruin tradition. When we dig the house, we dig together. We're not choosing that you're a woman and you do this. We didn't say that we're women and we're going to do this and men that. No. If it's dragging





Mixed gender construction groups in Manicane

bamboo, everyone does it. If it's digging holes for the poles, we're together. (Manicane HHI)

The data collected doesn't allow a determination of whether this redistribution of roles is lasting or simply an adaptation to an immediate situation, and to CARE's creation of construction opportunities, with associated financial incentives. Nevertheless, it is a strong indicator that social norms are not completely rigid, and that community support for these changes at the time of the research was almost wholly positive.

Skills acquisition, ongoing use of skills and economic recovery

Women have gained new skills through participating in transitional shelter construction. There was also some evidence, in Nacivare, of ongoing use of skills following project completion, including adding private washing/toilet structures close to household shelters.

Last year, there were groups of women who were building houses. Afterwards, these women are building bathrooms for themselves because they have learned a lot. And they're tying houses

> *together, digging foundations. They didn't know these things before, but they took advantage of the training.* (Nacivare HHI)

The field research found limited evidence that women's participation in construction committees is directly or indirectly contributing to their own and their family's economic recovery, probably due to the fact that most committee members had not yet received compensation for their work. However, the interviewees shared the expectation that after receiving this income, they intend to cover typical household expenses as well as develop business initiatives such as small shops. Observations in Nacivare suggested that some occupants of CARE transitional shelters were already making structural changes to allow the addition of a shop front.



Alterations to Nacivare transitional shelter, apparently for a shopfront

In a context where livelihood opportunities are incredibly limited for both men and women, the financial element of the shelter construction was of considerable importance and pointed to the creation of future opportunities to improve personal and family situations, self-reliance and resilient recovery.

> *It's good to do this work to get paid and to know how to build a house. And my family is also enjoying me being in construction because they know I'll make something out of it.* (Manicane HHI)

One woman in Nacivare, the head of a household of seven children, reported that she has been able to generate income by completing paid building work on other community members' houses, in addition to maintaining her own home. This case also speaks to a shift in community roles and empowerment (see below).

> *I am pleased that I now have the skills to maintain my own home and support my family. I took strength and confidence from the community around me working towards a common goal [...] My whole community was suffering, and I wanted to be part of the solution.* (Nacivare HHI)

Many project participants referred to their ongoing struggles to find other income generation opportunities following transitional shelter construction and recommended that future projects should include livelihood components. A common sentiment expressed by research participants was that shelter support is a starting point for recovery, but it is not enough.

> *We want businesses, because here we are just staying without much. If they had given us money last year, it would have changed our experiences because that's what money does. Now we're left with nothing, it's not good.* (Nacivare FGD)

Women's empowerment

For individual women, participating in construction was empowering for them, perhaps due to raised status in the community and recognition of the community's appreciation of the work. Greater 'visibility' outside the domestic sphere seemed to be embraced by women.



Female construction committee members completing a variety of constructions tasks in Manicane

> *I am a strong woman. I have no issues with the work, and I feel as if I am now a woman with dignity and standing in this community.* (Manicane HHI)

However, some contributions to group discussions suggested limitations to women's empowerment through participation in construction committees. There were some suggestions that women would not have control over money earned. When asked about the importance of women's participation, a male response was:

> *We like having women on the committee. When we talked to their husbands, they authorized us to work with them. And others were building bathrooms [like that one]. And every man is happy because when the women receive their money, they will hand over the money to their husbands.* (Manicane men's FGD)

This type of comment suggests that some, perhaps many women still lack the autonomy to decide for themselves whether to participate in these committees and it also raises questions about the extent to which women maintain control over the resources that arise from their participation. Consideration is needed to reduce the risk of men's authority becoming a constraint on women's ability to enjoy their own income and maintain raised status and decision-making power.

Community engagement and social cohesion

As well as women's engagement in construction creating changes in the traditional gendered division of

labour, broader community positive impacts were discernable, such as strengthening mutual collaboration and the community's unity around a common goal.

> *The construction committee mingled with the women. It was good for them to participate because they had already learned the men's work. So there were no men, no women; we worked together. It's like ants because ants work together. And we like each other because we learn things together. (Nacivare men's FGD)*

While there was recognition of possible negative opinions of women working with men in construction, many interviewees could see broader positives for the community:

> *The community can support women's participation in housebuilding. They will. And they'll even comment that the woman is good and can build the house. There will be support for whatever she does. They would like to learn. Some families may even try to speak ill of her, but their bad words won't count because the work they're doing is valuable. [...] And today it's about gender. Women and men both do the work. Even men can enjoy it. (Mecufi women's group)*

Limitations on women's participation and decision making

Despite findings above related to positive social norm shifts and community cohesion, the research also uncovered limitations to women's full participation and leadership. Questions remain over the extent to which social norm changes will be sustainable. The new roles assumed by women in construction may, over time, be perceived as a source of disrespect for traditional culture. Women's adoption of traditionally male activities may represent a risk factor, as it threatens one of the main symbols of male power, the ability to provide, and reduces women's availability to perform domestic tasks. It was also noted that there are risks and pressures for women of being enrolled in construction committees. Women's existing responsibilities for caring and household management often remain. Additional pressures on women may prove to be negative for their well-being, especially if construction extends beyond anticipated timelines.

> *Once she's at construction work, she hasn't stopped doing her homework. She leaves early in the morning, goes to the well to fetch water, wash the dishes, and then leaves at 7 a.m. for construction work. (Manicane HHI)*

Under widely accepted social norms, discussed above, women are often represented as men's helpers. While many women stated that completed the same building tasks as men, and were observed doing so during site visits, some interviewees contradicted this as they discussed women's roles during the shelter construction work:

> *One of the advantages of women being there is that during construction, the woman fetches water from the well for the man to drink in the house and cook, because the man can't build anything without food. The woman provides support. When the man says, "Give me this," she delivers. Give me that, she delivers. The man's part is to tie the ropes and dig. The woman also brings the bamboo there. She brings the stakes. (Pitolha FGD)*

During the time period of the field visits, roofing and rendering tasks were not being done. Such tasks are often gendered - mud rendering of completed wood and bamboo walls is one construction activity traditionally completed by women, while reportedly there can be barriers for women (such as unsuitable clothing) to participate in roofing work. Further observation across the whole construction period is needed for fuller understanding of the possible barriers to women's full and equal participation in all construction tasks.

Factors affecting the impactful completion of Shelter projects

Alongside evidence of the impacts of the transitional shelter projects, especially on women, findings also relate to factors affecting these impacts, and their longevity. They point to aspects of the design and implementation of Shelter projects that would benefit from further consideration and iteration.

Delays related to logistical gaps

Project participants and KIs repeatedly raised the issue of project delays, affecting people's living conditions, enthusiasm for construction, livelihoods and relationships with local government actors. While it was acknowledged that many delays (for example, the timely delivery of materials) were out of CARE's immediate control, better expectation management and communication would mitigate frustrations among project participants and other stakeholders, such as local government staff. It appeared that the 'on-the-ground' implications of upstream administrative and logistical delays were not fully understood at all levels within CARE's organisational structures. This caused frustrations within CARE's field teams and for partners, in addition to real consequences for project participants, or beneficiaries.

> *Our relationship with CARE is positive. We are in constant interaction with CARE. We have no reason to complain, and if everything is moving, it means there's a good partnership. However, we are currently working on a shelter project, but there are still some things missing that should happen simultaneously. While the shelter program is underway, the water program should also happen simultaneously. The borehole system hasn't started yet [...] They should hurry up with the roofing process. The first houses were built a long time ago.* *(Meluco KII)*

Perceived inadequacy of support and supervision during construction

Project participants, especially those actively involved in construction of transitional shelters, complained of a lack of 'visibility', such as CARE branded vests and delays in the provision of PPE, such as gloves. Construction committee members reported that their responsibilities had been explained clearly at the start of the project. However, as construction activities continued for weeks and months, some felt that more frequent supervision visits and encouragement would boost their morale and enthusiasm. The level of financial incentives for active participation was felt to be inadequate, especially when delays were considerably extending the projected completion of dignified transitional shelters. Despite their frustration, project participants and community leaders had little or no power to influence progress towards completed, occupied housing.

Shelter designs and adherence to designs

Although the transitional shelters in Meluco (ECHO-funded project) were incomplete at the time of the field visits, their size and design was anticipated to be preferable to the smaller shelters completed in Chiure, using the smaller unit budgets of the Irish Aid project. Project participants in Nacivare were dissatisfied by shelters with insufficient space for adults and children to sleep separately.

> *Almost everyone who received a house complains that it's too small. It's not enough for their family. We're grateful because it's something we were given, but every person who received a house is complaining. We're asking for houses with more space and security [....] We're already like animals in a barn, like chickens. We're in a bad situation, we're not living well. And diseases can spread because we're so cramped. Water here, bed there, kitchen there with heat, smoke. And we don't know if we'll return home because the war isn't over.* *(Nacivare men's FGD)*



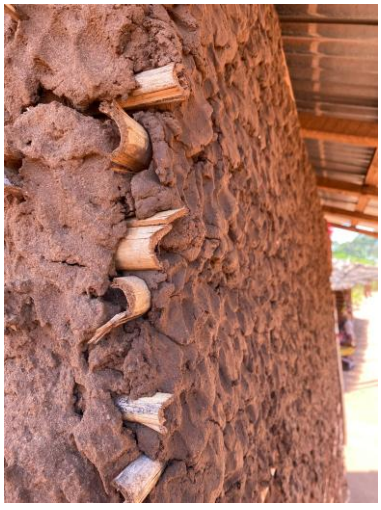

The interiors of transitional shelters in Nacivare, with a single bedroom for the whole family

While hazard risk mitigation design features such as raised plinths around transitional shelters, positioning of doors and verandas, and cross-bracing of walls were part of selected designs, there was evidence that these design elements were not always adhered to throughout project implementation. Observation of completed shelters and KIs suggested community resistance to cross bracing of walls, to retaining windows for ventilation and to completion of mud rendering. Very few shelters in Nacivare had fully rendered walls and very few intact earth plinths were observed. It was unclear whether they had been completed or had deteriorated since the project's completion.

Durability and maintenance challenges

Either due to incomplete mud render at the time of project completion in Nacivare, or due to inadequate maintenance since, there were signs of shelter deterioration. Walls were lacking render and wooden poles and bamboos were rotting. Despite the metal roof and verandas, seasonal rain and storms have already taken a toll on the comfort and safety of the structures. Even though the transitional shelters are larger and more robust than makeshift shelters, they are still vulnerable to heavy seasonal rain, flooding and high winds.





Transitional shelters in Nacivare showing signs of deterioration

The problem with the walls is when it rains. When it rains, the grass falls and becomes a skeleton. The walls were made strong, but those panels are short, and there's no large veranda, so when the rain falls, the water enters the wall and starts to grind away the clay. And the house becomes a skeleton. (Manicane men's FGD, referring to makeshift shelters)



Nacivare transitional shelter showing signs of weather damage and attempts to waterproof walls

Observed maintenance gaps in completed shelters in Nacivare and the destruction of shelters in Mecufi point to dwindling positive impacts of transitional shelter assistance over time. Careful maintenance of wall mud render is important and relatively cheap, yet many interviewees in Nacivare asked for cement instead and/or requested financial resources to enable seasonal maintenance to be completed.

Environmental concerns and procurement of materials

Transitional shelter projects for IDPs in government-designated resettlement sites inevitably contribute to local and regional environmental changes and resource depletion. KIIs indicated that CARE uses combined strategies that contribute to sustainability in access to materials, namely the acquisition of materials from licensed local suppliers or from sources authorized by environmental authorities; community involvement in the procurement of materials; community awareness about the quality of the materials to be extracted and the importance of respecting the closure period. In the sites of the ongoing project in Meluco, environmental assessments (using the NEAT+ tool) had preceded implementation. Consideration had been given to the procurement of materials, including CARE acting as a broker to enable local material procurement. CARE liaises closely with local government (SDPI) on settlement planning and on monitoring of building standards. In different projects included in the research, availability and sustainability of building materials varied depending on the district, the type of material and guidance/regulations regarding its procurement. There are many challenges regarding materials and these contribute to delays and environmental concerns for CARE and local authorities.

It was beyond the scope of the research to evaluate the environmental impact of the previous and ongoing construction sites and future plans to mitigate environmental risks, such as planned tree planting. However, resilience to future hazards, such as floods, extreme heat and storms will necessitate close attention to how to reduce environmental impacts of construction, improve environmental protection and consider thermal comfort and adequate indoor air quality. For example, deforestation necessary to create the large settlement site will increase flood risk and increase temperatures through loss of shade and evapotranspiration.

Persistent broader unmet needs: livelihoods and access to services

Recovery, resilience and avoidance of aid dependency risks being compromised by limited durability of

transitional shelters and gaps in 'nexus' programming. Project beneficiaries are concerned about lack of livelihood opportunities and access to services, healthcare and education. While good coordination with other humanitarian sectoral provision (such as WASH) and local government settlement planning was noted, gaps and challenging delays were also clear. Project participants' and other community members' access to materials for shelter self-recovery and future maintenance of walls, roofs and plinths will mean the inevitable deterioration of shelters and the inability of those not included in the projects to replicate safe shelter designs.

> *Reducing dependence has to do with resource availability. We don't have local stores that offer construction materials, nor do we have a market where construction materials can be sold. If an organization sells stakes and bamboo, there might be a shortage of rope or zinc sheets. If these elements were located near or very close to the population, this could significantly reduce the need. Recently, we witnessed a situation where an organization offered support to provide zinc sheets, but it was only sheets. There were no nails etc., not to mention the limited supply of materials. [...]. But we've become so dependent because these resources are far from where we are. We need to create availability of these materials.* *(Mecufi KII)*

Further cooperation and training with SDPI was advocated for wider understanding of how to create an enabling environment for safer, resilient and self-reliant communities.

> *Training is needed even for SDPI technicians so they can better monitor and advise communities on the techniques and methods of building these houses. If we're facing these difficulties today, one day a similar storm could hit. There needs to be an awareness campaign to establish a single criterion for building safe homes.* *(Mecufi KII)*

Recommendations

The recommendations below arise from the initial research findings and draft recommendations discussed and validated during the workshop held in November 2025. They are grouped according to their primary audience. Many are relevant to several audiences, working in parallel on humanitarian practice, policy and advocacy, for example.

Recommendations for INGOs and NGOs implementing Shelter and Settlements and multisectoral programming.

CARE's Shelter Team in Pemba bears responsibility for the implementation of Shelter programming, already working closely with WASH and other humanitarian sectors, in partnership with Protection, MEAL and other teams. These recommendations are also applicable for other agencies implementing Shelter assistance.

Sustain and extend gender-transformative approaches in Shelter and multisectoral programming.

All aspects of Shelter programming should be reviewed through gender and intersectional lenses to ensure no opportunities are missed. Gender considerations should be integrated throughout all phases of the shelter construction cycle, ensuring inclusive participation and responsiveness to the needs of women, men, girls, and boys. The following points are not exhaustive, but provide examples to consider.

- Disaggregate data by sex and age, as a minimum, for assessments, monitoring and evaluations.
- Make humanitarian field teams gender balanced whenever possible. This is especially important to have women staff members when consulting with women in the community.
- Consult women and girls from the start of program design/implementation in separate groups with women facilitators during assessments and evaluations.
- Consider making the female head of households contract signatories by default to give them more agency in the process.
- Women should continue to be included in paid construction committees building shelters and receive construction training.
    - If necessary, set inclusion targets to encourage systemic inclusion.
    - Strengthen the leadership capacity of women committee members.
    - Monitor possible negative impacts on women of their inclusion in construction.
    - Consider rotating members of construction committees in order to accommodate other responsibilities and social functioning.
    - Encourage men to engage in activities and roles traditionally allocated to women.
- Provide mixed and specialized technical training to dispel misconceptions in the whole community and strengthen skills, promoting equitable participation across genders.
    - Break down the construction process into clear phases and demonstrate that women are fully capable of participating in each stage, from planning to completion.
- Scope out opportunities for engaging with WLO/WRO[12] in programming, such as MULEIDE.

Improve user satisfaction and durability of Transitional shelters.

- Embed maintenance into project design.
    - E.g. Incentivise participants to complete mud render.
- Advocate for T shelter designs, with appropriate unit budgets, that provide adequate accommodation and safety.
    - Ensure that the house/shelter designs address gender needs, internal compartmentalization, and safety, providing privacy, dignity, and protection for all household members.
- Ensure technical recommendations are consistently applied.
    - E.g. Monitor that planned plinths are completed and maintained to improve flood damage mitigation.

[12] Women-led and women-run organisations

Improve programme management and training.

- Include training on the Core Humanitarian Standards for the entire time (Program Team, Support Program Team, Finance Team, etc.) before a project starts, especially to understand impacts of delays on project participants.
- Ensure timely delivery of PPE and 'visibility' for construction committees.
- Increase capacity to recognize gender-based violence and further develop mechanisms for preventing and monitoring sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Ensure inclusive targeting. Advocate for support for the most vulnerable, particularly those unable to access income generation opportunities.
- Develop MEAL processes/activities that move towards evaluating impacts and outcomes of S&S and multisectoral programming, using, where possible, community-led measures of success.

Improve communication with humanitarian partners and government counterparts to strengthen alignment, coordination, and timely decision-making.

- Use existing construction guidelines from Shelter Cluster, especially those related to resilience and risk-informed shelter design.
- Further strengthen planning with SDPI and other key stakeholders, such as the Provincial Directorate of Public Works, to ensure technical oversight, alignment, and institutional ownership.
    - Advocate for better access to services for long-term displaced communities.
    - Stress the need for market support to improve affordable availability of materials and reduce dependency on external actors.

Promote multisectoral interventions that are responsive to the priority needs of affected populations, ensuring that Shelter actions are integrated with WASH, Protection, Livelihoods, and other relevant sectors.

- Strengthen Livelihoods support to enable long-lasting recovery.
- Coordinate more closely with WASH activities. Prioritise including latrines close to shelters to improve dignity and health, ideally for each household.

Advocate for longer-term and more durable shelter support, including integrated multisectoral support.

- Further embed activities to support self-recovery, such as technical guidance and improved access to materials, to enable replication of shelter designs and safe shelter upgrades and maintenance.

Embed environmental (including climate) considerations into S&S programming.

- Map available local resources and prioritize the use of local vendors for procuring shelter construction materials, taking into account the resilience, durability, sustainability and contextual appropriateness of the shelters.
- Use and contribute to the Global Shelter Cluster's Environmental Country Profile for Mozambique, for specific guidance and tools relevant for environmentally sustainable programming.
    - Specific actions could include ensuring that activities identified in NEAT+ assessment prior to programming are completed (e.g. planting seedlings to replace some trees removed for site clearance in Manicane).
- Follow CARE's Minimum Requirements for Climate-Smart Shelter from the start of projects.

Recommendations for the Shelter Cluster

CARE is an active partner in the Shelter Cluster in Cabo Delgado and elsewhere in Mozambique. The Shelter Cluster, led by IOM, plays a key role coordinating INGOs and NGOs planning and implementing Shelter and multisectoral programming, in partnership with local authorities. The Shelter Cluster's collective, evidence-based guidance and advocacy with donors and policymakers can therefore be powerful.

Champion and extend efforts to make all Shelter programming, as a minimum, gender responsive.

- Shelter programming has the potential to support positive social norms shifts and create an enabling environment for women's voice and leadership.
- Ensure strong gender inclusion and participation throughout all phases of shelter construction (with awareness of intersectionality) to promote empowerment and challenge pre-existing stereotypes, thereby supporting women's financial independence and ensuring their needs are adequately addressed.
- Establish mixed groups/committees responsible for awareness-raising and monitoring the infrastructure, contributing to improved sustainability and durability of the shelters.
- Ensure that the house/shelter design addresses gender needs, internal compartmentalization, and safety, providing privacy, dignity, and protection for all household members.

Enhance close partnership with SDPI and other key institutional stakeholders and their technical teams, such as the Provincial Directorate of Public Works.

Advocate for durable shelter support, beyond the provision of emergency Shelter and household items.

- Transitional shelter support, rather than repeated distributions of emergency shelter and household items, has potential to build resilience to future shocks and enable recovery from disaster and displacement.
- Based on the resources available locally, communities can innovate and leverage what they have, but this requires on-site technical capacity-building.
    - Provide clear guidelines, visual materials, and practical training to enable communities not only to use the knowledge themselves for household shelter recovery, but also to develop skills that qualify them for future work and service opportunities.
    - Build community capacity on basic parceling, shelter planning, and resilience techniques, including the use of available tools and resources such as GPS, drones, and transportation means where feasible.

Advocate for transitional shelter designs that provide adequate accommodation and safety.

- Transitional shelter can create long-lasting safe spaces for people recovering from disaster and displacement. Shelters should be adequate in size and design to enable people to live in comfort and carry out their daily activities.

Advocate for and support better integration between Shelter, Livelihoods, WASH and Protection.

- "Shelter is a start. But it is not enough." For sustainable recovery from disaster and displacement, Shelter programming should be as fully integrated as possible with other sectoral activities. Area-based multisectoral support is needed to create an enabling environment for sustainable recovery.
- A house/shelter cannot be assessed in isolation but must be viewed holistically. Therefore, during planning and construction, basic services and all relevant sectors must be considered to design and deliver long-lasting solutions.

Advocate for market-based programming and other indirect support for self-recovery.

- Given the inevitable mismatch between humanitarian needs and available funding, direct and indirect support for self-recovery, such as training, technical guidance and activities to improve access to affordable materials, have the potential to allow greater numbers to be reached and positively impacted with long-lasting safe and dignified shelter.

Recommendations for local and national government entities

National and local government institutions with an interest in preparedness for, and response to hazards and displacement include INGD (National Institute for Disaster Risk Management) and SPDI (District Service for Planning and Infrastructure) and the Provincial Directorate of Public Works.

Further strengthen coordination and cooperation with CARE and other Shelter Cluster actors to improve

durability and sustainability of programming and promote holistic recovery.

- Promote environmentally sustainable site planning, increasingly relevant in the context of climate change.
- Ensure preparation for hazards and insist on climate-resilient reconstruction, to avoid repeated crisis response in conflict-affected, resource-poor settings.
- Clearly ensure land and property tenure protocols, enabling households to build and occupy shelters with legal clarity and security.
- Strengthen intersectoral coordination among all district-level programs and encourage government authorities to assume a greater sense of ownership in leading coordination and monitoring efforts.
- Promote and operationalize existing legal and normative instruments (such as PEGDI[13] and others) to guide shelter planning, land use, and sustainable settlement development.

Plan ongoing provision of basic services for host and displaced communities, with a focus on stronger engagement with beneficiary communities, ensuring their participation in decision-making.

Enhance training for local government officers so they are better equipped, and resourced, to advise and monitor safer construction.

- Build clarity regarding institutional strengthening mechanisms to enhance ability to implement capacity-building activities at multiple levels and sustain improvements over time.

[13] National Action Plan for the implementation of the policy and strategy for the management of internally displaced persons (PEGDI).

Annex A: Primary data collection details

The tables below summarise the data collection activities in Phase 1 (May) and Phase 2 (July).

Location and Shelter Project	Data collected during Phase 1 and Phase 2
Nacivare, Chiure Irish Aid project: 91 Type C shelters constructed 2023-2024 in an IDP resettlement site.	2 introductory FGDs: 20 women and 21 men. 5 short HHIs during an OW. 1 extended HHI with a female member of the construction committee. 'Photovoice'
	1 KII 2 FGD: 8 women and 7 men 4 HHIs 1 TW
Nametil, Chiure Site of completed ECHO project to distribute ES/NFIs as a response to the destruction of Cyclone Chido in December 2024. The distributions were completed in 2025.	1 introductory group discussion: 4 women and 6 men together. A short OW allowed some interactions with former project participants.
	2 FGDs: 5 women and 8 men 3 HHIs
Manicane, Quissanga Ongoing ECHO project to construct 227 Type C shelters in an IDP resettlement site.	1 introductory group meeting/discussion: 17 women and 23 men. An initial OW around the site of makeshift shelters and the T shelter construction site allowed an insight into the construction process, with men and women observed working together in the mixed-gender construction groups. 3 HHIs with women active in the construction groups.
	2 FGDs: 7 women and 5 men 4 HHIs 1 TW
Pitolha, Meluco Ongoing ECHO project to construct 91 Type C shelters in an IDP resettlement site.	2 FGDs: 10 women and 10 men 4 HHIs 1 TW
Napuilimite, Mecufi Ongoing ECHO project to distribute ES/NFIs as a response to the destruction of Cyclone Chido in December 2024. The distributions were completed in May 2025.	3 KIIs 2 FGDs: 8 women and 7 men 5 HHIs

Key to data collection

OW	Researchers completed at least one observational walk, or transect walk, around each project site. These were usually directed by, and accompanied by, community leaders and often others, such as SDPI staff, which meant that spontaneous interactions with project participants were not private.
TW	Observational walk with the intention of focusing on shelter technical aspects, signs of shelter/material deterioration, and compliance with shelter designs.
HHI	Household interview. These ranged from short interactions with individuals/couples/families encountered during OWs, to more extended interviews with individuals. In Manicane and Pitolha,

	where construction was ongoing, people had limited time to talk.
KII	Key informant interviews with professional stakeholders, such as humanitarian practitioners and local government officials. KIIs were held at project sites, in office locations, and online. Some were pre-arranged, others more opportunistic.
Phase 1 May 2025	Primary data collection led by CARE UK Shelter Researchers, with support from CARE Mozambique MEAL specialist, including for translation between English and Portuguese.
Phase 2 July 2025	Primary data collection led by a Mozambican consultant, with support from CARE Pemba team, including accompaniment by CARE Gender specialist at all locations.

Phase 3

Following the data analysis and production of findings, the preliminary recommendations and draft report were discussed by CARE Mozambique's Humanitarian Team. Then various stakeholders at district and provincial levels, including government representatives and Shelter Cluster partners[14], were invited to an in-person workshop in Pemba in November 2025. They were asked to validate the findings and contribute to final actionable recommendations for CARE and other implementing agencies, the Shelter Cluster and government entities.

Research limitations and risks

Evaluating the impacts and long-term outcomes of humanitarian programming is widely acknowledged to be challenging, particularly when project monitoring processes are generally set up to measure only outputs[15]. Questions of impact attribution and contribution are beyond the scope of this report, yet are important to be more closely considered. This qualitative research was attempting to explore some of the impacts of shelter assistance, yet was very limited in the range of possible impacts.

In addition, the limitations of selecting and recruiting participants directly through an implementing INGO and local implementing partners. The dangers of selection bias and lack of neutrality when conducting research through an organisation was considered in research design, data collection and data analysis. The power imbalances inherent in recruiting participants to the study was mitigated whenever possible. The research design and activities needed to be flexible to ensure participants' daily lives and responsibilities were not unnecessarily disrupted.

There were some significant, yet unavoidable, limitations to the primary data collection, many due to the particular context of resettlement sites for IDPs in Cabo Delgado. Security and access issues steered the selection of sites and meant that time at each site was limited. All interactions with Shelter project participants, past and present, were facilitated and mediated by community leaders, all male, who often translated between local languages and Portuguese. During phase 1 of the field visits, a male CARE staff member translated between Portuguese and English. Observational walks and impromptu interactions with project participants were controlled by the community leaders and often accompanied by local government officials. As a consequence, the extent to which interviewees and those taking part in group discussions, particularly women, could speak freely and honestly is impossible to determine.

The use of the Photovoice technique was promising, but had logistical challenges. Printed photos were only returned to research participants in Nacivare. These did prompt some insights into completed transitional shelters and ideally this and other community-led methods of impact evaluations should be pursued in the future.

[14] Also including IOM and CCCM (camp management and camp coordination)

[15] For more on this topic, see, for example, *Building Impact (CARE, CENDEP, OBU, 2023)*



Interview with a female member of the construction committee in Manicane, with the community leader translating

Mitigation of research risks and limitations

At the start of each field visit, the research projects' aims and parameters were explained as clearly as possible. It was emphasised that participation in the research was voluntary and that there would be no negative consequence to not participating (such as withholding of services). There was financial compensation for participating. Researchers were accompanied by a CARE Mozambique Gender specialist and efforts were made to put interviews at their ease. Nevertheless, CARE was conducting research in locations of recent and ongoing programming; some participants could have felt compelled to comply with requests for interviews and their responses are likely to have been constrained.

Annex B: The context of Cabo Delgado Province

Mozambique is a high-risk country for humanitarian crises and disasters, ranked 16th out of 191 countries by the 2025 Inform Risk Index (DRMKC, 2025). The varied geography of Mozambique means that it is exposed to a broad array of environmental hazards (hydrometeorological as well as geophysical), some of which are exacerbated by the impacts of climate change (World Bank, 2022). From 2000-2019 Mozambique was recognised as the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change hazards in Africa according to the GermanWatch report of 2021. The most frequently occurring hazards are floods, storms and drought. Mozambique is subject to regular cyclones and flooding with Cyclones Idai (2019) Freddy (2023) and Chido (2024) being the strongest and most damaging in recent years. Projections of climate change and associated higher temperatures and extreme weather events, poverty and demographic changes suggest that Mozambique's population will be both more exposed and vulnerable to disasters in coming years.

Conflicts are an additional trigger of displacements and loss of homes and this is especially pertinent in Cabo Delgado Province. Mozambique has been experiencing violent attacks from a jihadist group across the northeast Province of Cabo Delgado since 2017, with some extension into the Province of Nampula. Since the beginning of 2020, the intensified conflict has attracted international attention, leading to increased humanitarian interventions. This caused a significant increase in IDPs, especially in the city of Pemba. Although in 2023 the attacks saw a decline, they resumed in 2024, perpetuating long-lasting instability and bringing most recovery efforts to a halt. Conflict and a lack of security can have negative consequences on security of tenure, making emergency shelter and settlement responses and longer-term projects harder to implement or making already implemented efforts meaningless. Weak security of tenure can also lead people to resort to harmful environmental practices to sustain their daily needs.

Annex C: References

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