



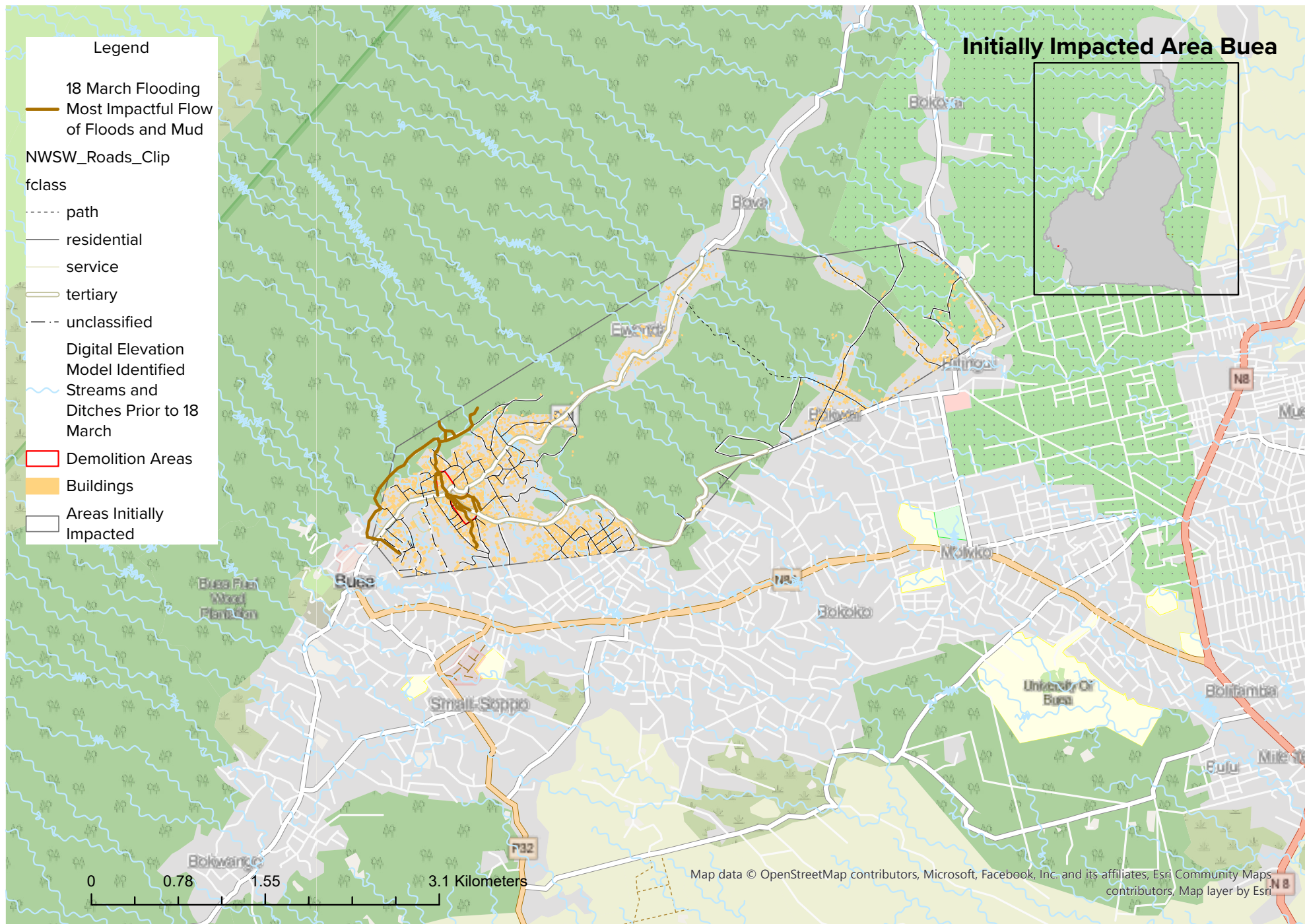
**Shelter Cluster NWSW Cameroon**

ShelterCluster.org

Coordinating Humanitarian Shelter

## Shelter Cluster Report: Buea Floods

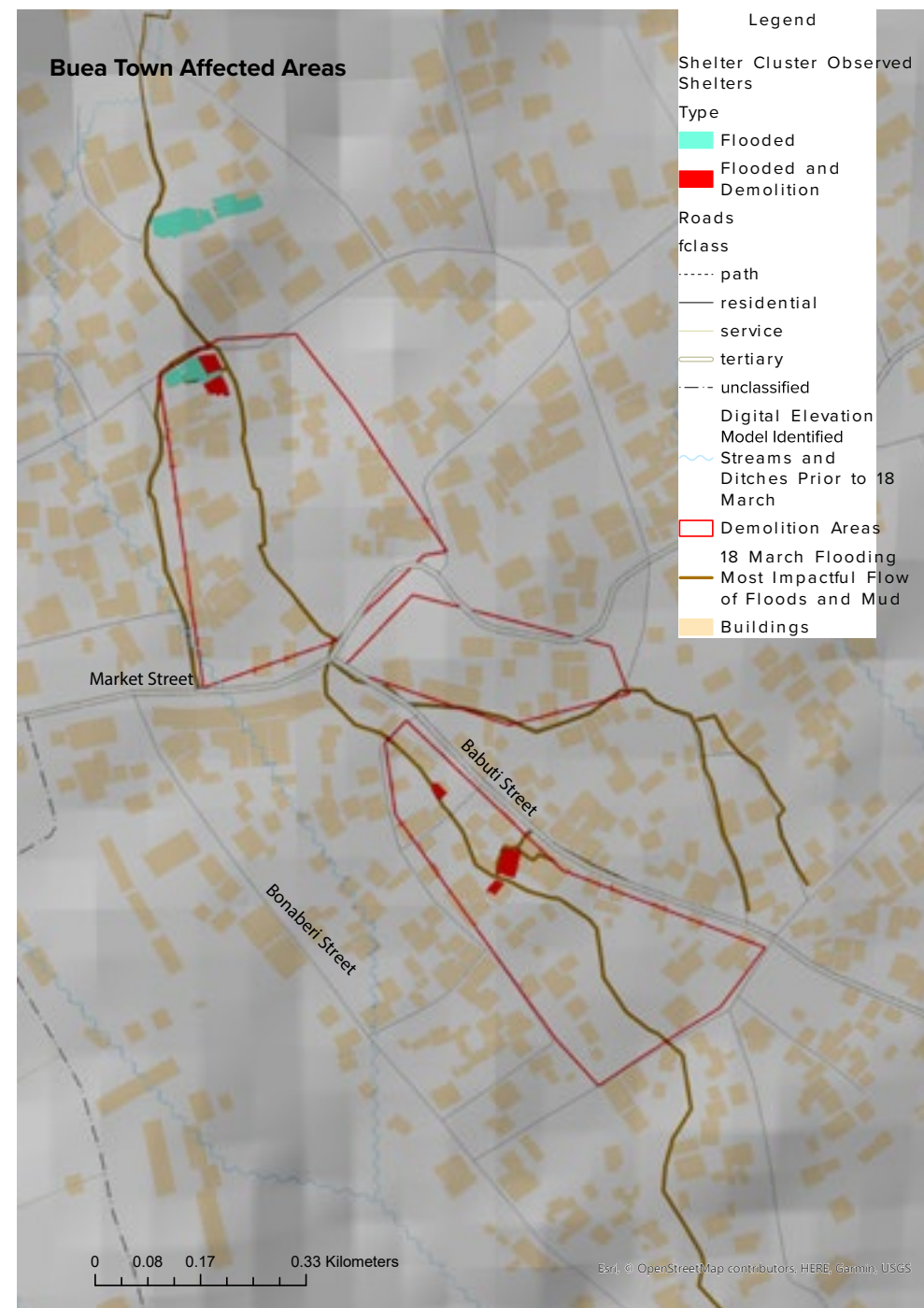




## Situation Overview: What's Known and Not

Buea is the capital of Cameroon's Southwest Region and situated on the south-eastern slope of Cameroon's highest volcanic mountain, Mount Cameroon. Buea is located at approximately 900 m of elevation. In the ongoing crisis between separatist and government forces, Buea has political significance for the separatist forces as it was also considered to be the capital of the southern Cameroon and the Ambazonian territory. Since the start of the crisis, OCHA has claimed that there are approximately 15,000 internally displaced people (IDP) living in Buea Subdivision and 600 IDPs living in Buea town. The dynamics of the conflict have also impacted Buea principally around Muea, Mile 16, and Molyko stadium. Internally displaced people arriving from other impacted areas of Buea Subdivision, Kumba, and the Southwest have sought shelter nearer to the mountain, which is close to the Federal Quarters area where security is better and where also land and shelter are more affordable. Urban sprawl has become a more common pattern in recent years with construction occurring near road and water ways. Construction of housing on slopes of 10-15% gradient are also observed in the area

On the afternoon of Saturday the 18th of March 2023, flooding and landslides swept through Buea Town near the market area and also impacted several areas including Bova and Bokwai. It is estimated that the initial area impacted covers an area of 13.52 km<sup>2</sup>. This area has approximately 2760 buildings. The most severe impact of the flooding concerns Buea town. On the 19th of March, an initial humanitarian scoping exercise put the estimated number of affected households at 158. On the 20th of March, the Buea Council conducted a demolition exercise for twenty-five buildings that were found to be less than 5m from ditches and waterways. In an area of 3.33 km<sup>2</sup>, disaster waste has remained on the site for eleven days after the demolition. The demolition included the partial destruction of parts of buildings that were serving as rooms for rent, parlour areas, and latrines at the back of shops in the Buea market area. Amongst the waste, one can observe moist wood, torn corrugated galvanized iron (CGI) sheeting, mud, lava rock, clothes, shoes, other ruined personal items, and trash. This





demolition area encompasses approximately 114 buildings.

While Buea takes on many millimetres of annual rainfall, this flooding incident was unique in its destructive force. From looking at the impacted areas, the situation may be due to a minor Lahar incident where due to the accumulation of rain water several m above on the mountain, the water and lava rock were moved by the force of water which accelerated due to the steep slopes of the Mount Cameroon. In the northern most areas of the town, coming down from the mountain, the water was moving at tens of kilometres per hour at a height of 1.5 m deep. The force of water and rocks broke a pipe that was serving as the drinking water source for several hundred households below. The floods took the lives of two people and injured several others. In addition to the origins of the water, many houses have been built in proximity to drainage, roadways, and also on precarious slopes which brought humans closer to nature.

An initial profiling exercise was done by the Protection Cluster and two national partners, Teen Alive and RAGJ. This profiling covered a total of 138 households of 529 individuals in Buea Town. As the goal of the light profiling was to get an initial overview of the needs, the data collection form was not reviewed by the Shelter Cluster Coordinator, nor were any of the [Shelter Cluster's tools](#) used to inform the design of the tool. Some indicative data can be reviewed from this profiling:

- Fifty-two per cent reported having a scarcity of essential household items.
- Between 100 to 107 people were displaced or made homeless by the flooding.
- Seventy-three per cent of households had their business or livelihoods impacted
- Sixty-four per cent of households said they lacked access to safe drinking water in the direct aftermath of the flooding.
- Twenty-eight per cent of households experienced deteriorated shelter conditions



The NGO LUKMEF also conducted an initial scoping exercise on the 19th of March which identified Babuti, Wonyalonga, and Wondongo as being the most severely impacted areas in Buea Town with Bova, Bokwai, and Bonanda also experience secondary impacts of the flooding. This preliminary assessment put the number of estimated affected to be over 200 households in the immediate Buea town area.

Beyond this initial data, it was necessary to talk to the affected community particularly in Buea town in the aftermath of the demolitions and the flooding incident. On the 31st of March, the Shelter Cluster Coordinator and UNHCR Field Associate visited with several impacted households in Buea Town which included property owners and former renters of the affected properties. This scoping exercise and site visit involved a discussion with three renters, two building property owners, and one resident. Some preliminary observations included the following:

- Primary structures of the affected houses are either wooden for the one story shelters, therefore semi-permanent; and concrete, therefore permanent, for the multi-story buildings impacted. All roofs are made from CGI.
- Assistance distributed by the government is reaching some households but not all. Not all households had received mattresses yet and where households had received one mattress, they had more than one mattress prior to the flooding incident. Kitchen sets were still lacking for all households.
- Rental costs ranged from 9000 to 15,000 XAF for one room and a parlour to 30,000 XAF for two rooms.
- Most of those renting were now displaced from where they were living before the flooding.
- During the days, some renters were returning to their residence to work at salvaging belongings, but at night many were sleeping with hosts. One person mentioned that someone had a large parlour where the person was allowing 7 people including children to sleep at night. Others were staying with friends and relatives in other properties.
- Property owners had lost their source of income with anxiety mounting as the first of the month approached. One of the property owners was a pensioner who depended on renting his property to supplement his pension.
- Property owners had not yet received communication from the council about the ability to rebuild and repair. The day of the visit, some were trying to salvage materials for re-use.
- Many of the renters were internally displaced persons from other locations in the Southwest Region: Muyuka in Fako Division, and Kumba in Meme Division. More assessments are required to understand the overall population patterns.
- Internal damage to the flooded shelters would require an alternative way of assessing damage and the proper assistance that people may need. Modifications to the household assessment form are required to measure flooding damages.
- Need to assess what assistance households have received and what are the gaps in Shelter/NFI assistance.

In order to do no further harm and to avoid rebuilding in unsafe areas, the [Shelter Cluster is planning on conducting a more detailed household assessment to find out gaps in available essential household items, extend of damage of floods, and shelter conditions.](#)

# Natural Disaster in the Context of a Protracted Crisis

Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest Regions in addition to being the center of a six-years protracted crisis are also considered to be the richest in natural resources and also to have sensitive ecosystems. Built-up areas and agricultural practices that degrade the soil have further contributed to the risk of climate change, deforestation, and the risk of natural disasters. In the weeks leading up to the flooding incident, the Shelter Cluster had undertaken a series of environmental mainstreaming workshops<sup>12</sup> where the following disaster risks had been identified:

- Flooding
- Landslides
- Volcanic eruption due to the fact that the Cameroonian Line passes through much of the Southwest, Northwest, Littoral, and West Regions
- Harmattan Winds
- Heightened disease transmission due to overcrowding and unmanaged disaster waste and lack of wastewater management
- Industrial Hazards

The situation of the Buea floods was unprecedented in the fact that a significant number of households were impacted suddenly in an area that is accessible to all humanitarian and government counterparts. Nevertheless, the Northwest, Southwest, and even West and Littoral Regions have been no stranger to natural disasters of a similar magnitude. During the rainy season of 2022, there were several natural disasters reported:

- Harmattan Winds that damaged homes in a village in Boyo taking the shelter of a reported 60 people in March 2022<sup>3</sup>
- Flash flooding in Bamenda in June 2022<sup>4</sup>
- Land slides in Widikum in August 2022<sup>5</sup>
- Heavy rains and flooding in Mamfe that damaged 30 homes and left 100 people homeless<sup>67</sup>

Some of these incidents could have also required a humanitarian response, but access and limited information dissemination were obstacles to confirmation, subsequent assessments, and then assistance. In terms of priority of response, the emphasis of the Shelter Cluster remains on direct victims of the conflict, but natural disasters are compounding the already vulnerable situation of those already impacted by the crisis. Buea presented an opportunity for the humanitarian community to see the impacts of natural disaster up close and the gaps that currently exist in disaster preparedness and response.

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1 <https://sheltercluster.org/north-west-south-west/documents/northwest-region-shelter-cluster-workshop-environment-report>

2 <https://sheltercluster.org/north-west-south-west/documents/southwest-cameroon-shelter-cluster-environmental-mainstreaming>

3 OCHA, Intersos

4 <https://mimimefoinfos.com/heavy-rains-in-bamenda-leave-two-persons-dead/>

5 <https://floodlist.com/africa/cameroon-floods-august-2022#:~:text=Two%20young%20people%20died%20after,person%20died%20as%20a%20result,>

6 <https://floodlist.com/africa/cameroon-floods-august-2022#:~:text=Two%20young%20people%20died%20after,person%20died%20as%20a%20result,>

7 <https://mimimefoinfos.com/mamfe-flooding-leaves-over-one-hundred-persons-homeless/>

## Preparedness

Currently, there is no interagency contingency plan in place for the clusters activated in the Northwest and Southwest. The Shelter Cluster also does not have a contingency plan in place. Due to the limited funding situation, the first quarter of the year has been difficult in the past two years of the Shelter/NFI response, as Shelter Cluster partners are often between project periods and do not have in-kind items in stock to respond to any new dramatic situations of displacement. During this particular emergency, one cluster partner had kits in stock that they and their donor were willing to deviate for flood victims, but a two-day lockdown was declared through the 20th-21st of April which prevented their movements. Furthermore, when distributions finally began on Sunday on the 26th of March, only 46 out of a targeted 138 households were reached due to an interruption and misunderstanding at the administrative level. A meeting on the 29th of March between OCHA, the 1st Assistant of the SDO of Buea, the Danish Refugee Council, LUKMEF, WFP, UNHCR, and the Shelter Cluster Coordinator brought a way forward to improve smooth implementation between humanitarians and government officials. It is hoped that by the 7th of April, the 138 households will have received in-kind distribution of non-food items including blankets, solar lights, mosquito nets, kitchen sets, and sleeping mats, nearly three weeks after the incident. This response reveals several aspects of preparedness that need to be implemented for future responses:

1. Shelter Cluster to work on their own contingency planning and preparedness standard operating procedures.
2. With the shift to monetized approaches, there is a need for the Shelter Cluster to advocate for having in-kind kits pre-positioned for such kind of disasters, as cash and voucher cannot yet be mobilized as quickly as in-kind emergency assistance.
3. Launch discussions and consultations with Cash Working Group about cash preparedness especially as agencies are seeking to expand this modality of programming in the future.
4. OCHA to convene an Intercluster contingency planning process which includes the response to probabilistic scenarios including that of volcanic eruption, flooding, but also conflict related increase in displacement.
5. Create planning for how to operate in situations of lockdowns. Lockdowns create many inconveniences for responding in emergency situations and usually in the event of a disaster or conflict activity, there is an increased risk of non-state armed groups calling for a lockdown. As most funded and operational partners are international NGOS and UN, our sector was particularly negatively impacted by the two-day delay in being able to collect information and distribute items.
6. Need to have in place a ready to use Joint Multi-Sector Household Needs Assessment at the Interagency level.
7. Need to invest in partners' capacity for how to operate in emergency situations. As the event happened on a weekend, it was difficult to mobilize partners on the ground on a Sunday.
8. OCHA to strengthen dialogue with authorities especially at regional level of how humanitarian community can better work together on natural disasters and preparedness. This could include training on kobo, provision of technical equipment, and secondment of staff for data coaching for improved management of beneficiary lists between the government and humanitarian actors in such situations.

## Data Reflections

As already observed, there was no joint Multisector Household Needs Assessment conducted for this response. The first dataset available was done by two Protection Cluster partners who were able to collect data despite the two-day lockdown. This light profiling was a first step for providing quick humanitarian response. During the Shelter Cluster meeting held in Buea on the 23rd of March, it was decided to do the initial distribution through the Danish Refugee Council and UNHCR by using the figures from this light profiling and to avoid fatiguing an over assessed population. Also in the response, there was no general coordination IM capacity observed in the early stages of the response. There were several highlights from this aspect of the mission:

- OCHA had asked IOM to do key informant interviews as is done for the ETT and the MSNA prior to consulting the clusters on the morning after the flood response. OCHA should always consult with the clusters prior to initiating such data collection exercises. The results of these estimates were found to be less indicative than the Humanitarian Scoping exercise conducted in the afternoon of the 19th of March which came up with the estimated 158 households impacted. It could have helped to have more IM profiles in this initial scoping, but the Shelter Cluster Coordinator had returned to Bamenda early on the morning of the incident and return was delayed by two days because of the lockdown.
- In terms of GIS support, the Shelter Cluster was the only coordination entity producing maps of the affected areas, but made some early mistakes in mapping out the affected areas due to the fact that the gps locations from the MSNA data list were not correct.
- Watershed Analysis in areas of slope in other parts of the Northwest and Southwest Region may also be necessary to map out risks of flooding and landslides, but needs higher level quality. UNHCR's headquarters was able to share NASADEM data with the Shelter Cluster Coordinator of Mount Cameroon, but even this layer missed out on the exact flood plain of this current disaster. [Hydrosheds](#) is another good open source, but is heavy and without good internet takes time to download.
- Due to capacity issues, it became necessary for two coordination bodies, the Protection Cluster and the Shelter Cluster, to work with a database that included personal beneficiary data from the light profiling. The Shelter Cluster had the capacity to support the Protection Cluster in the cleaning of the data to ensure that the data would be quickly available.
- Due to lack of experience by the enumerators, the dataset was revealed to have duplicates that were able to be quickly cleaned, but the assessment lacked other necessary controls needed for household type assessments.
- Data sharing protocols were not put in place as there was a need to accelerate the response, but as the sensitivities of the Northwest and Southwest have not disappeared, there will be a need for these to ensure that data does not get too widely circulated.
- Although the Shelter Cluster had ready to use tools available in the months prior to this response, they were not used due to the intervening lockdown days that slowed data collection.
- The government has had challenges to compile various beneficiary lists from the assistance they have provided. There will be a need to ensure that this data is also analysed with the humanitarian data.



## Shelter in Urban Contexts

The response in Buea illustrates the challenges of a shelter response in an urban context. The challenges of a natural disaster that was coupled with a demolition exercise shows the limited toolbox by which shelter actors have to respond in such environments. Currently, there are several challenges facing the Shelter Cluster for a better response:

- Need to identify all potential ditches and streams and houses that are built less than 5 m back from these homes. There are many throughout the affected area and throughout the Northwest and Southwest. Repairs or cash for rent in these areas would do further harm to the affected population who live in these areas.
- Lack of staff capacity for monitoring cash for rent and repair in safe areas both in terms of number of staff and technical capacity.
- Lack of staff capacity on recycling and reuse of disaster waste for construction.
- Lack of clarity on the part of property owners on knowing what the council will allow them to do on rebuilding their lost properties.
- Lack of formal process for restitution and compensation for those who were made homeless by the demolition exercise.

The arrow at the right represents the current response strategy for the Shelter Cluster for this response, whereby which the household assessment will be key in informing next steps.

While cash proves promising due to its flexibilities, it will require an humanitarian to maintain protection principles by monitoring whether cash is leading to more suitable shelter, less risky shelter, and shelter that doesn't expose the person to further protection risks such as eviction, disease transmission, and gender-based violence.

