Photo: ESNFI Cluster

Afar Emergency Shelter Kit for IDP Responses: Technical Guidance Options (2025)

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1. Background

Afar Region is one of Ethiopia's most arid and climate-vulnerable areas, characterized by high temperatures and erratic, low rainfall. Despite the dry conditions, the region experiences seasonal flooding, particularly along the Awash River, due to heavy rainfall in upstream highlands. These floods damage homes, displace families, and disrupt essential infrastructure. In addition, intercommunal tensions along regional borders continue to affect stability and limit access to services. Although the majority of internally displaced persons (IDPs) returned more than two years ago following the Northern Ethiopia conflict, owing to incidents of conflicts and disasters, the Region still faces lingering challenges such as damaged shelter stock, strained markets, and gaps in basic service delivery.

Traditionally, displaced communities in Afar tend to settle in informal sites, often without basic services or planning. Shelters in these locations are typically constructed with minimal materials and offer limited protection against heat, wind, and rain, increasing exposure to health and safety risks.

In this context, and in alignment with the Ethiopia Emergency Shelter and Non-Food Items (ES/NFI) Cluster's goal to ensure safe, appropriate, and climate-responsive shelter for crisis-affected populations, a technical advisory mission was conducted in Afar from 24 to 28 February 2025.

The mission aimed to:

- Assess the suitability of current emergency shelter assistance for IDPs in the Afar Region;
- Update recommendations for Emergency Shelter (ES), ES/NFI, and flood response kits being tailored to the Region's needs and environment;
- Ensure affected populations' perspectives are reflected in shelter planning and implementation.

Consultations with IDPs, local authorities, humanitarian partners, and suppliers have informed the revised emergency shelter kit and response framework to improve shelter assistance's quality, relevance, and impact for displaced households in the Afar Region.

2. Rationale and Use of this Document

This document provides technical guidance for partners responding to emergency shelter needs in the Afar Region, with a focus on support for IDPs. It consolidates recommendations developed through field assessments, community consultations, and technical analysis conducted in February 2025.

The guidance aims to ensure that shelter responses are context-appropriate, climate-responsive, and aligned with Cluster standards. It offers practical options for shelter kits, including the use of industrial and local materials, and outlines key implementation considerations such as targeting, self-construction, and support for vulnerable groups. Partners are encouraged to use this document during project design and implementation to:

- Select appropriate shelter modalities;
- Estimate material quantities and costs;
- Align interventions with the Cluster's strategic priorities and humanitarian standards;
- Strengthen coordination and consistency across shelter responses in Afar.

Photo: ESNFI Cluster

3. Guiding Principles and Program Considerations

Effective shelter response requires more than just the delivery of materials. It must reflect the realities on the ground: recurring displacement, harsh climate conditions, frequent flooding, and informal settlement patterns. Many displaced households rely on self-built structures that offer little protection against the elements. In this context, shelter support must be technically sound, inclusive, protective, and responsive to community needs.

This section outlines key guiding principles and program considerations from the Ethiopia ES/NFI Cluster Strategy (2025–2027) that are particularly relevant for Afar. These principles should inform the planning, design, and delivery of all regional shelter interventions.

Guiding Principles

Context-Driven Responses

Shelter assistance must be tailored to local context addressing challenges including climate exposure, traditional settlement patterns, and limited access to formal infrastructure.

Ensure Meaningful Access

Interventions must ensure that all affected households, including women, older persons, and persons with disabilities, can access shelter support and participate meaningfully in shelter activities.

Do No Harm

The response must avoid exacerbating existing tensions or depleting natural resources. It must be sensitive to local conflict dynamics and promote safety.

Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)

AAP is a core principle of this shelter response and must be practically applied. Given the remote locations and mobility of some displaced populations, partners should use contextualized, culturally appropriate feedback mechanisms.

All implementing partners are responsible for conducting Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) for both in-kind and cash-based shelter support. This includes:

- Verifying that materials are used appropriately
- Assessing household satisfaction and protection concerns

PDM findings must be shared with the Shelter Cluster to support collective learning, accountability, and program improvement.

Program Considerations

People Who Require Special Attention

Households that cannot construct their own shelters due to age, disability, or other barriers should receive targeted construction support.

Environmental Protection

The use of local materials like *halawa* and *senan* should be balanced with sustainable harvesting. Partners are encouraged to work with local cooperatives to reduce environmental impact.

Targeting

Shelter assistance must be based on clearly defined vulnerability criteria, ensuring that the most at-risk households are prioritized. Implementing partners should use community-led identification and verification, supported by house-to-house assessments where feasible, to minimize exclusion and inclusion errors. Assistance should be transparently communicated to both recipients and non-recipients.

Participation and Empowerment

The shelter response is based on a self-construction approach. This supports local ownership and aligns with traditional practices, but must be supported with clear technical guidance.

4. Guidance Note on the Emergency Shelter Package

This section outlines the revised emergency shelter kit options for use in the Afar Region, tailored to local shelter practices, climate conditions, and displacement patterns. It provides technical specifications, guidance on materials, and implementation modalities to support partners in designing and delivering context-appropriate shelter responses for internally displaced households.

Three kit options are included:

- **Option 1:** Industrial and local materials combined — recommended when traditional materials are limited.
- **Option 2:** Fully local materials — preferred where traditional components are available and affordable.
- **Option 3:** A hybrid model that combines in-kind support with phased cash assistance. This allows households to receive core materials tarpaulins or mats while being empowered to purchase additional items or cover construction-related expenses using cash. The cash can accompany either Option 1 or 2, based on context.

Each option is based on an average size of 5.5 people per household and follows the Cluster's self-construction approach, with construction support advised for highly vulnerable cases.

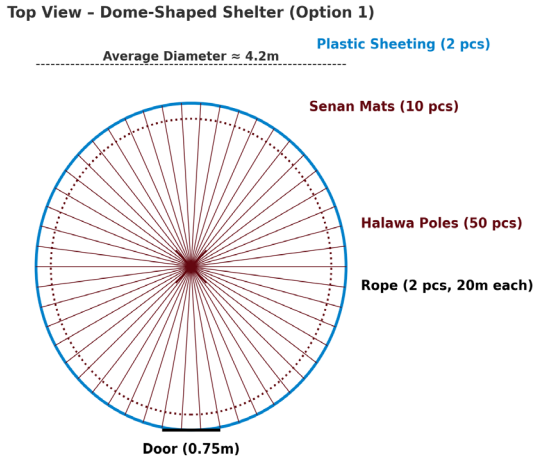
Photo: ESNFI Cluster

4.1 Option 1: Mixed Kit (Industrial and Local Materials)

This shelter option combines traditional Afar construction techniques with industrial materials to improve protection from wind, heat, and especially rain. The structure is dome-shaped, built using *halawa* and covered with 10 traditional *senan* mats and 2 plastic tarpaulins.

It is specifically recommended for zones where rain and flooding are recurring challenges, as the plastic sheeting provides essential waterproofing. This shelter can be dismantled and reassembled, making it practical for mobile or semi-nomadic households — a key consideration in the Afar context.

To maintain flexibility, beneficiaries should have the option to **choose between in-kind materials or cash based on their preference and local market conditions.** All required items are listed in the table below. This option is meant to strike a balance between cultural relevance, weather protection, and practical mobility.



Includes 1 central halawa pole; layout: 2 tarps, 10 mats, 50 halawa sticks, 2 ropes

Implementation Notes

→ **Self-Construction Approach**

Designed for self-build by households using their existing skills, supported with brief orientation or demonstration sessions. Where capacity is limited, targeted assistance is required for vulnerable groups.

→ **Material Distribution**

Materials can be provided in-kind or via cash/ voucher assistance, depending on market functionality and beneficiary preference. The full bill of materials should be clearly shared with all recipients to ensure consistent quality and usage.

→ **Material Mix**

Combining industrial plastic sheeting for waterproofing with traditional *senan* mats for thermal regulation. This balance improves weather resistance while respecting cultural preferences.

→ **Framing**

The shelter uses a dome-shaped *halawa* frame, which are sticks sourced from local areas and made of pliable wood (usually Acacia), approximately 3–4m long, and 2–4 cm wide, utilized to construct the dome-shaped structure of the shelter. They need to be flexible enough to bend without breaking. This frame is familiar to Afar households and does not require new tools.

→ **Climate Suitability**

Recommended in zones with recurring rain and seasonal flooding. The plastic layer improves protection against moisture and wind, making it more appropriate than fully traditional shelters in these conditions.

→ **Procurement and Supply Chain**

Plastic sheeting and ropes should meet minimum quality standards (UV resistance, durability). Traditional materials (*halawa* and *senan*) should be locally sourced.

→ **Community Engagement**

Shelter design and material distribution should be coordinated with community leaders, and households should be involved in decision-making, especially when choosing between cash or in-kind options.

Material Specifications

Item	Specification	Unit	Quantity
Tarpulins (industrial)	6 m x 4m sheets. Made from black low-density polyethylene (LDPE) fibers, the fabric is laminated on both sides with white LDPE. 6 Grey bands of 7.5cm width made from black woven LDPE laminated on both sides. Pre-punched 8mm holes clinched with aluminum eyelets on the two sidebands at 0.1m +/-10% intervals, positioned in the bands' center. 190g/m² ± 20g/m². **Refer to ICRC/IFRC specification for more details.*	Piece	2
Rope (industrial)	6 Vegetal, PP or PE, 3 strands, twisted. Length: minimum 20 meters, diameter: 6<Ø<14 mm, tensile strength: >200 kg.	Piece	2
Halawa sticks	Sticks sourced from local areas and made of pliable wood (usually Acacia), approximately 3–4 m long and 2–4 cm wide, utilized to construct the dome-shaped structure of the shelter. They need to be flexible enough to bend without breaking.	Piece	50
Senan mat	Hand-woven mats, approx. 1m x 2m, used for insulation.	Piece	10

Estimated Cost Range

$ 246 including contingency (15%) and overhead cost (45%).

Photo: ESNFI Cluster

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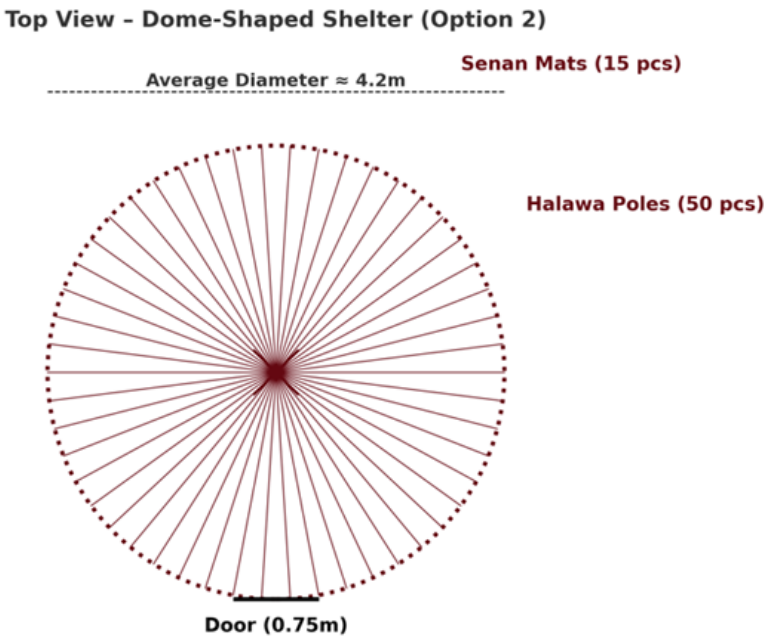
4.2 Option 2: Pure Local Materials

This shelter option uses only locally sourced materials, reflecting the traditional dome-shaped structures long used by communities in Afar. It is structured with *halawa* poles and covered entirely with *senan* mats offering insulation and ventilation suited to Afar's hot and dry climate.

Option 2 is best suited for zones with low rainfall and minimal flood risk, where waterproofing is less critical. It is also the preferred option in areas where traditional materials are easily available and culturally favored.

Like Option 1, this shelter is fully dismantlable and portable, making it well-suited for households that move seasonally or remain mobile. Beneficiaries should be given the choice between this and the mixed-material option, based on their living environment and material preferences. Where local markets are functional, cash assistance can also be considered, allowing families to source the components directly.



Implementation Notes

→ Self-Construction Model

This shelter is designed to be built by the beneficiaries themselves using familiar techniques. Basic community-level orientation or demonstration may be needed for consistent framing and coverage.

→ Material Sourcing

All components — *halawa* poles, *senan* mats, and ropes — should be sourced locally where markets are functional. Local cooperatives (e.g., women's groups or traditional mat weavers) should be engaged when possible, to promote livelihoods and supply reliability.

→ Cash or In-Kind

Materials may be distributed directly or supported through cash or voucher assistance, depending on local market availability and beneficiary preference. A clear and verified item list should accompany any cash-based programming.

→ Mobility and Adaptability

The shelter is fully dismantlable and transportable, making it ideal for households with seasonal movement patterns. This flexibility aligns with traditional Afar shelter practices.

→ Environmental Suitability

Best suited for zones with low to moderate rainfall where full waterproofing is not required. In wetter areas, Option 1 should be prioritized or offered as an alternative.

→ Protection Considerations

While culturally appropriate and climate-responsive, the shelter offers limited protection against heavy rain or strong winds. Additional shelter improvements may be needed for vulnerable households or during extended displacement.

→ Community Participation

Engage local leaders and women's groups in planning and monitoring to ensure the shelter response's acceptability, efficiency, and accountability.

Photo: ESNFI Cluster

Material Specifications

Item	Specification	Unit	Quantity
Halawa sticks	Sticks sourced from local areas and made of pliable wood (usually Acacia), approximately 3–4m long and 2–4cm wide, utilized to construct the dome-shaped structure of the shelter. They need to be flexible enough to bend without breaking. This frame is familiar to Afar households and does not require new tools.	Piece	50
Senan mat	Hand-woven mats, approx. 1m x 2m, used for insulation.	Piece	15
Rope (industrial)	6 Vegetal, PP or PE, 3 strands, twisted. Length: minimum 20 meters, diameter: 6<Ø<14 mm, tensile strength: >200 kg.	Piece	2

Estimated Cost Range

$ 205 including contingency (15%) and overhead cost (45%).

4.3 Option 3: Hybrid Shelter Assistance (Cash and In-Kind Mix)

This option combines partial in-kind support with cash assistance, allowing flexibility while maintaining technical standards. The cash provided should be equivalent to the full in-kind shelter kit value and disbursed in phases, aligned with construction stages or procurement milestones.

Option 3 can be based on either Option 1 (mixed materials) or Option 2 (fully local), depending on the context.

- In flood-prone or high rainfall areas, tarpaulins should be prioritized as the in-kind component due to low quality in the local market.
- In drier areas or where markets are functional, *senan* mats may be distributed in-kind, especially where mat availability is limited or production is seasonal.

Material Specifications

Partial in-kind support: e.g. tarpaulins or *senan* mats

- Cash: Disbursed in tranches to allow procurement of remaining items and to ensure that the cash is used for the intended purpose.

Implementation Considerations

- Market and feasibility assessments are required before implementation.
- Cash should be monitored to ensure it supports shelter objectives.
- Beneficiaries should be given a clear explanation of the hybrid option and how it differs from full in-kind support.
- This option is most effective when markets are functional and partners have the capacity to track shelter outcomes.

5. Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and Older Persons

Shelter support must actively include and accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities and older persons. These groups often face greater barriers to safe shelter access and are less able to construct or adapt shelters on their own. In such cases, the ES/NFI Cluster partners are expected to directly construct the shelters, either through dedicated teams or locally contracted labor.

Minimum Requirements:

- Identify households with mobility challenges during registration and verification;
- Ensure shelter construction is fully covered for persons who cannot self-build or supervise construction.

Design shelters with:

- Wider doorways (minimum 1m recommended);
- No elevation or steps where possible;
- Clear, level access paths.

Prioritize location:

- Situate shelters near latrines, water points, and community services.

This standard applies to both Option 1 and Option 2 and must be reflected in all partner implementation plans and beneficiary selection criteria.

Photo: ESNFI Cluster

6. Shelter Construction Training and Community Engagement

Targeted capacity building must support shelter implementation in Afar to promote safe, resilient, and context-appropriate shelter construction. Training supports both emergency response and preparedness while reinforcing the Cluster's principles on community ownership, inclusion, and environmental responsibility.

For households with members who are unable to construct shelters themselves—particularly persons with disabilities and older persons—partners are expected to carry out the full construction of the shelter. These shelters should also be used as an opportunity to train selected members of the community in proper shelter assembly. This ensures quality construction while building local capacity.

Community-Based Training

Targeted community members, particularly those receiving in-kind or hybrid shelter support, should be engaged in hands-on training that builds transferable skills and supports safe self-construction.

Training should include:

- Dome frame assembly using *halawa;*
- Installation of mats and/or tarpaulins;
- Anchoring, rope use, and basic structural stability.

This approach strengthens community ownership and reduces dependency on external labor or follow-up interventions.

Flood Mitigation and Environmental Integration

In flood-prone areas, training should also include:

- Site selection on elevated ground;
- Drainage layout and water flow planning;
- Protection of household assets from floodwater;
- Environmentally responsible practices, such as sourcing *halawa* sustainably, managing construction waste, and encouraging reuse of local materials.

By combining technical guidance with practical training, shelter interventions can be more sustainable and community-driven.

Photo: ESNFI Cluster

7. Local Sourcing and Procurement Planning

Shelter interventions in Afar should prioritize the use of locally available materials, particularly *senan* and *halawa*, to ensure cultural appropriateness and strengthen the local economy. However, local sourcing requires proper planning and coordination, especially due to the seasonal nature of grass availability used for mat production.

Key Considerations

Seasonality of raw materials: Grass used to produce *senan* mats is only harvested during specific times of the year. Large-scale production and procurement must align with this seasonal window to avoid delays.

Production hubs: The primary areas for *senan* mat production are Asayita and Awash, though smaller supplies may be available in Dulecha, Afambo, Berhale, and parts of Kori.

Supplier engagement: Partners are encouraged to work directly with local cooperatives, such as:

- Bardile Cooperative (Semera);
- Habu Cooperative (Logia). These groups can help ensure quality and timely supply of materials while supporting local livelihoods.

Procurement planning: A realistic procurement plan should be developed based on grass harvesting cycles, production capacity, and transportation needs. Partners must also account for potential delays and build in adequate lead time.

Transport and cost forecasting: Transportation costs fluctuate significantly across Afar. Early negotiations with vendors and transporters are essential to stabilize budgeting and avoid disruptions.

Material specifications: Locally sourced materials must meet basic standards. For example, *senan* mats should be approximately 1m x 2m in size and *halawa* poles should be 3m–4m long and flexible enough for dome construction.

This planning approach should be embedded in all shelter partner strategies to ensure a timely and scalable response capacity aligned with local conditions.

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