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SUCCESS STORY

Pre-positioned Plastic Sheeting Hastens Recovery in Madagascar

Within days of Tropical Cyclone Giovanna's landfall, USAID plastic sheeting reached 2,850 families, allowing them to mend damaged roofs or make other housing repairs.



Photo: Michael Keegan, USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA-funded plastic sheeting in use on a thatch-roofed house in heavily affected Brickaville District following Tropical Cyclone Giovanna.

When Tropical Cyclone Giovanna slammed into the eastern coast of Madagascar on Valentine's Day, 2012, relief agencies recognized the storm as a potentially catastrophic event—but not an unpredictable one. Such dangerous cyclones are not unusual for the Indian Ocean island: Cyclones and tropical storms significantly impact Madagascar almost every year. Giovanna's strong winds damaged homes, particularly roofs made of traditional materials such as thatch or wood, destroying more than 44,000 houses and leaving thousands homeless. While some vulnerable populations, including the elderly, female-headed households, and fishing villages in coastal areas, lack the resources necessary to prepare for extreme weather, USAID takes steps to ensure they receive the relief they need quickly.

Understanding the recurring nature of cyclones in Madagascar, USAID, through partner CARE, annually pre-positions plastic sheeting in areas susceptible to cyclones. Reinforced plastic sheeting—an inexpensive, versatile, and high-quality temporary building material—can be used in combination with traditional building techniques and locally available materials to repair damaged homes or construct temporary emergency shelter for affected families.

Before Tropical Cyclone Giovanna struck, USAID had nearly 400 rolls of plastic sheeting pre-positioned in a CARE warehouse in Vatomandry—one of the two districts most affected by the cyclone—ready for immediate distribution to approximately 4,000 families.

Within days of the cyclone, CARE had started to distribute the plastic sheeting to the most affected and vulnerable families. CARE was able to move quickly due to its established connections with local communities, as well as the proximity of pre-positioned supplies to cyclone-affected populations. In less than a week, CARE had dispatched 285 rolls of USAID-provided plastic sheeting to the most affected villages, allowing 2,850 vulnerable families to mend damaged roofs or make other housing repairs, and helping more than 14,000 people recover from the effects of Tropical Cyclone Giovanna.