

# Tent Community in Kashmir, 2005: To IDP or Not to IDP?

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**M**uzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistani-administered Kashmir, was devastated by a powerful earthquake on October 8, 2005, that measured 7.6 on the Richter scale. More than 79,000 people were killed, and in excess of 3.3 million Pakistanis were made homeless by the quake.

An estimated 97% of homes in Muzaffarabad were either completely destroyed or rendered uninhabitable. People were afraid to stay inside the buildings that still stood, fearing the strong aftershocks that for weeks afterward flattened structures that had survived the initial earthquake.

The cover photo, taken 1 week after the earthquake, shows one of the many tent communities that sprouted up around Muzaffarabad. By the time foreign aid arrived, many locals had already constructed makeshift shelters like these, made from large advertisements scavenged from nearby billboards. These tent communities were usually located in the inhabitants' own neighborhoods, often right beside their destroyed homes.

At first, these tent communities caused confusion among aid agencies. Should they be classified as "IDP (internally displaced person) camps" and given the same services? Are people who are essentially camping out in their own backyard even considered "displaced"? After all, the people in tent communities used the same markets, schools, and health centers that they had before the quake, provided they were still operational.

In the end, aid agencies coordinated to provide the tent communities with food, proper shelter, and other necessities, and to rebuild local services in time for the coming winter. Our team from the International Rescue Committee, with participants from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Harvard School of Public Health, provided aid throughout Kashmir and the North-West Frontier province.

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