



International Medical Corps Partners with KUN Humanity System+ to Support Earthquake Survivors and Protect the Environment in Sulawesi

International Medical Corps is partnering with the Indonesian humanitarian group KUN Humanity System+ to build new, environmentally friendly temporary shelters for residents of a small community called Namo village that was severely damaged in the earthquake and tsunami that destroyed large areas of northern Sulawesi Island on September 28, 2018.



THE PARTNERSHIP

The partnership draws on the extensive knowledge of two experienced non-government humanitarian relief organizations.

International Medical Corps is a leading global first responder that has provided emergency relief to those affected by conflict, disease or natural disaster in more than 80 countries on five continents over the past 35 years. Its previous experience in Indonesia extends back nearly 20 years and includes responses to North Maluku in 2000, to Bali in 2002, to Aceh in 2004–2008 and to Padang in 2009. It has also partnered with the Indonesia NGO, YAGD 118 and in Palu, it is partnering with IBU Foundation and Yayasan Kemanusiaan Muslim Indonesia.

KUN Humanity System+ is a successful Indonesian non-government organization that combines local empowerment and conservation with its emergency response work. The word KUN means “me” in Indonesia’s traditional Javanese language.

THE PROJECT

The partnership arose after the two organizations realized that KUN’s bamboo house design, developed with local input and supported by International Medical Corps’ logistics and project management strengths, could quickly provide safe, comfortable and affordable shelter to earthquake survivors who had lost their homes.

The two NGOs are working in the remote village of Namo, a farming community of about 1,500 people located in hilly terrain about 40 miles south of Sulawesi’s provincial capital of Palu. Before the disaster, houses in the village were built mainly

of concrete, wood or corrugated metal, but the earthquake damaged nearly 100 of those homes—either destroying them completely or causing damage severe enough to make them unsafe to live in.

In the disaster’s aftermath, major demands for replacement construction materials quickly created shortages and drove up costs. With Namo’s residents facing the additional challenge of trucking those materials into their remote community over poor roads often subject to landslides during heavy rains, KUN proposed a novel solution: consider an alternative—yet familiar—building material: bamboo.

Often used to build homes on the island in times past, well before the modern era made metal and concrete structures possible, bamboo has several qualities that make it intriguing, especially to village residents. For them, it is a familiar, known material—available locally in abundance, culturally appropriate and more affordable than most alternatives. The estimated cost to build one bamboo shelter is only about \$1,100.

THE BENEFITS

Though KUN developed the concept, the actual detailed designs of the new bamboo shelters in Namo were created by the local Kaili people, who saw other advantages to using the material. For example, additions to bamboo homes are easy to build. And rising popularity of bamboo homes could ease demand for local wood—demand that drives a thriving illegal logging trade in a nearby national park.

Bamboo’s high strength-to-weight ratio and flexibility also give it a quality especially important for those building in Indonesia: compared with its metal and concrete counterparts, it is more likely to survive a significant earthquake unscathed. There also are economic advantages for village residents: it is largely an investment in the community itself, with nearly two-thirds of the

money spent to build a house remaining in the community.

The Namo project calls for 52 housing units, enough to shelter about 540 individuals—roughly one-third of all village residents—as well as 11 family and two community latrines, and 208 waste containers, also made of bamboo.

The bamboo used to build the homes comes from surrounding areas. Villagers, who make up much of the work force, learn how to treat and protect the bamboo so it resists weather, insects and other forces of nature that could shorten its life. (Though an unprotected bamboo structure would begin to lose its strength after just a few years, once washed, boiled, dried and stored, it can retain its strength for up to 20 years, according to those familiar with the preservation process.)

Although only temporary structures are currently being authorized by authorities in the disaster-affected areas, many believe the structures could be permanent. And in Namo, residents who have undergone training on building the bamboo structures also are learning how to clear the land, prepare the ground, preserve the bamboo, then build the frame, floors, walls, roofing and detailed finishing.

THE LONGER-TERM POTENTIAL

Both KUN and International Medical Corps hope to build a longer-term sustainability into the Namo village project that could have a far greater impact across the region. The NGOs plan to donate all tools and equipment provided during the construction process, and hope that—once the community and other outside observers learn of bamboo’s importance as a buffer plant that can provide economic benefits without damaging the ecosystem—other villages will want to adopt Namo’s solution.

If that happens, the new skills learned by workers in Namo could become the basis for new livelihoods, there and elsewhere. The organizations expect that some trained workers will perform maintenance and repairs on homes in the village, once the building project is completed. And there are already signs of possible work elsewhere. The administrator of Lore Lindu National Park has expressed interest in providing bamboo homes for residents in some of the park’s 76 villages, as an incentive to address a major environmental worry: the illegal deforestation in the country’s majestic hardwood forests.



We deliver emergency healthcare and related services to those affected by conflict, natural disaster and disease, no matter where they are, no matter what the conditions. We then train people in their communities, providing them with the skills they need to recover, chart their own path to self-reliance and become effective first responders themselves.

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