



LIZZIE BABISTER

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Lizzie Babister

is an architect now working as a Humanitarian Advisor with the Department for International Development in the United Kingdom. In a previous position with CARE UK, Lizzie led the emergency shelter and reconstruction programme for CARE International, which responded to a wide range of emergencies, including Cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh in 2007, Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, the Padang earthquake in Indonesia in 2009, the Haiti earthquake in 2010 and the Pakistan floods in 2010.



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Note: Due to the nature of Lizzie Babister's current reconstruction policy work, no project is featured with this interview

Lizzie, tell me about your original studies in architecture and then what you did afterwards. Were you always interested in the humanitarian field? ▶ I originally thought about going to art school but I chose to study architecture, instead, because I wanted to do something practical. Then, along with a lot of other architects who were interested in this field, I realized that architecture was not just something practical but a profession that could also allow me to have a positive effect on society, to do something meaningful.

Was there something about your experiences at school or through your parents that encouraged you to think this way? ▶ My mother's side of the family was very influential because there are missionaries on that side. My mother and father also travelled around the world before they decided to have a family. My father is from India and my mother worked in quite a few countries, not in disasters or international development, but there was that link. They were role models for

a career that seeks to have a positive effect on the world. I have a religious family so there is an element of faith in that choice as well.

Where did you study architecture and, then, did you work in commercial architecture? Or what was your career journey? ▶ I completed my whole architecture course at Cambridge University, including my professional qualification. I worked in my year out in London in a small architecture practice and, after my diploma, I worked in London again, and then in the small town of Leamington Spa. No one was really building very much in London at that time. So lots of young architects, like me, went to work outside of London where things were being built, in order to complete our qualifications and get experience.

What was your journey from there to working in the development field? ▶ It started when I was still at university. I did my undergraduate dissertation on homelessness in the UK, and when I came back to do

my diploma, I was involved with the Shelter Centre in Geneva. My dissertation there was on emergency shelter.

What was the first project you worked on as a professional architect, in the field or moving out of traditional architecture practice? ▶ I had the opportunity at university to do voluntary work in Chile and also some research in the field in Macedonia, but the first time I was hired specifically in the development field was when Oxfam asked me to be their national shelter coordinator in Sri Lanka. I was actually working in a commercial practice just after my final qualifications and I was 'borrowed' by Oxfam on a secondment. My role in Sri Lanka was to visit all the Oxfam field offices to assist with planning the move from emergency shelter to the transitional phase. Oxfam had already started this but wanted me to provide support in thinking through the details.

Does it mean anything to you to be called a 'humanitarian architect' or is this term misleading? ▶ I guess the more projects I experience the less I am looking specifically for architects. Ten years ago I might have been more professionally 'chauvinistic' ... is that the word? ... and believed that architects have something unique to offer. However, I have found that a structural engineer is more useful to me. There are definitely some strong skills that architects have, but they don't always have all the skills that are required because there are lots of different roles in humanitarian shelter work.

If I was advising a young architect today, I would say, 'Make sure you've also got some really good, strong structural engineering skills. That will make you a lot more attractive to a humanitarian organization.' I would also tell her or him not to use the label 'architect' because

humanitarian organizations don't usually use that term. They are seeking comprehensive 'shelter professionals'.

The education of architects in the UK is very narrow. It is almost entirely focused on working in the UK and the developed world. I went through a process of being trained [as an architect] and all these skills were pointing to one thing, one identity, one role. I had to unpick all those skills again, have a look at the skills I had and add a few new ones and let a few lapse to create a new identity that would allow me to be useful in humanitarian work.

So what was it about being an architect that you had to drop? ▶ As a British-trained architect, I was taught that I was the generator of ideas. I was the designer. I was the leader of the design process. In humanitarian work you have to switch from being a lead designer to a lead facilitator because the best ideas will come from the communities where you are working.

Until recently, maybe it's been a decade, you rarely heard of architects working in the field after disasters. I met some architects when I was working in Bosnia in the early 1990s, but it was mostly lawyers, engineers, logisticians and so on. Why are we now hearing so much more of architects like you working in post-disaster and other development projects? ▶ If you look at the mission statement of most engineering institutes, you will see an emphasis on 'using engineering skills for the good of humanity'. The mission statement of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), like most others



△ Reconstruction post-tsunami in Sri Lanka.

in the Global North, has no similar focus. There is no official ethical leadership in the profession and so a humanitarian ethos is not filtering down through architectural education.

This is not stopping people being interested in this field, but it is stopping RIBA from recognizing the field as a valid calling for built-environment professionals. It stops them from providing the necessity for humanitarian design within the qualification process.

I also believe that the humanitarian sector does not have the capacity to recognize the benefits of employing more people with built-environment skills in the shelter sector, especially in their own agency headquarters. One of the goals I had when I moved into the humanitarian field was to address this weakness and help create more opportunities. We need more people from engineering, from architecture and from construction management.

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How do you get a project actually going in a hugely traumatic environment, like after the Pakistan floods? How do you deal with that personally?
▶ Better than I used to.

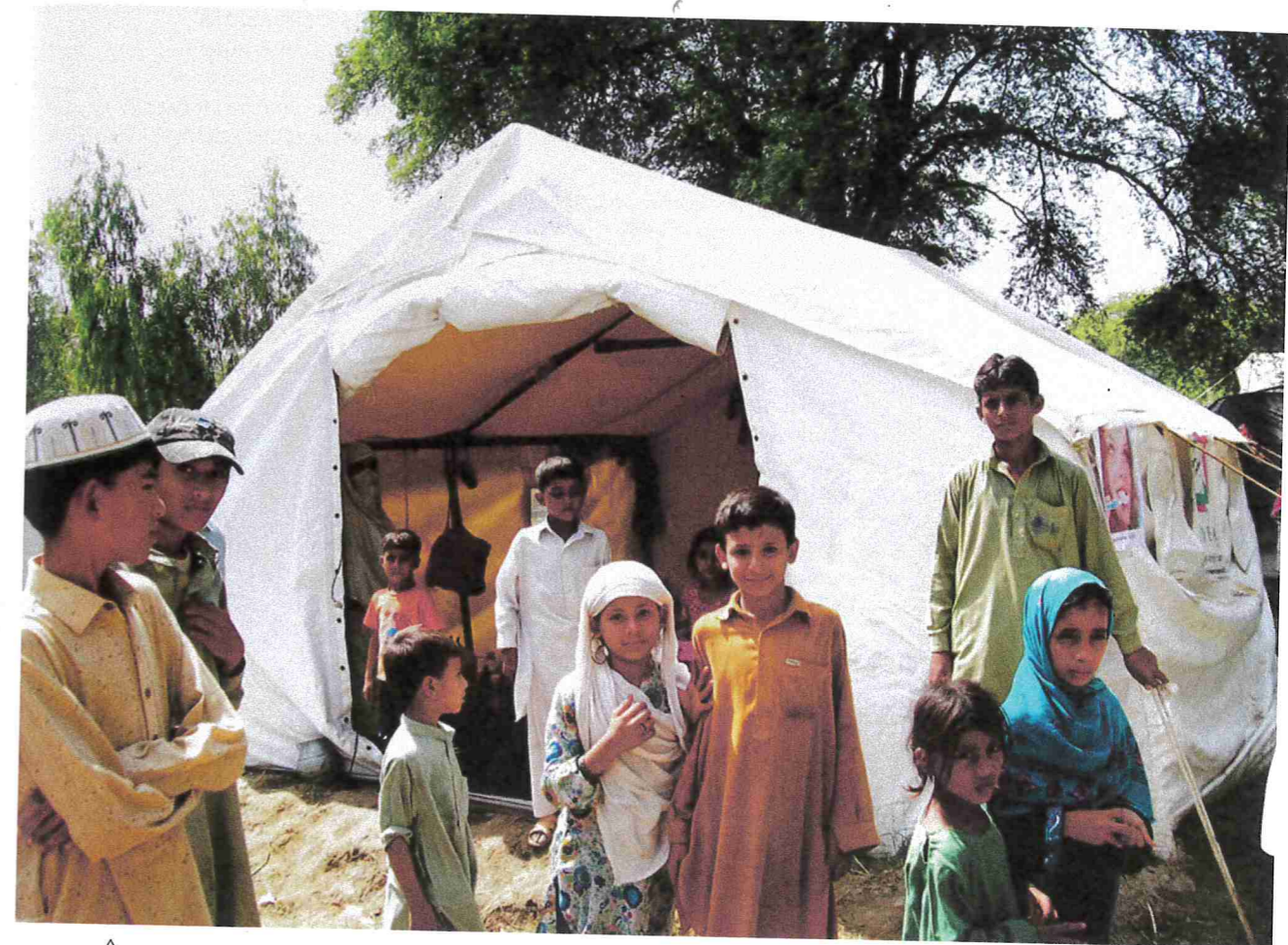
In what way? ▶ I think technical people are protected, at least to a certain extent, because they can use the process of technical analysis to remain slightly removed from the traumatic aspects of it all. I once did a joint assessment with a health advisor who was so much closer to the details of the horrendous things people were going through.

With shelter I can go in and 50 per cent of my assessment can be done without talking to anyone because I am looking at the damage, looking at the materials and possible access problems, and then thinking about the scope of work that might be needed. I'm not saying you can do a whole assessment like that; but you are not engaging with people on the same emotional level and that can be a personal shield. I used to use that unconsciously until I realized

that I was being emotionally affected anyway, and I was not prepared for it. Generally, people can do about five missions before it all builds up and they have to deal with it. Unfortunately, there is still a huge lack of understanding of the need for staff counselling in the humanitarian sector where 'macho' attitudes are often still common.

So what is the range of tasks you have undertaken in the humanitarian field? ▶ I cover all aspects of emergencies. So the work I am doing can be anything from immediate emergency response in a sudden onset disaster to initiating a response in the middle of a chronic phase of a natural disaster or a conflict zone. I could be there at the beginning to facilitate response planning, supporting international fundraising once we know the reconstruction needs, or working with a design team. I could be helping the team recruit the right people, for example by writing the right job descriptions. I might be responding to requests for straight technical advice such as where to get equipment of the right standard. Many times I have been called on to assist with troubleshooting during implementation phases when problems arise. So, it could be at the beginning, middle or end of a project, such as doing some kind of assessment or evaluation. It really is the full range.

One area in which we are trying to do more work is enhancing the capacities of a country before an emergency happens. Every country needs a preparedness plan that says what it will do in an emergency. We are helping to facilitate this process and



△ International Development Programme (UK) camp following Pakistan floods.

reviewing plans with them. You know, asking questions such as who have you got in the country who can deal with this or are you going to be contacting us? Do you need us to help you to find people? Can you partner with parts of government or local NGOs or different international NGOs? What are the shelter issues in your country? More and more, we are trying to focus on capacity development so that when an emergency happens countries have the confidence and

skills to respond, especially in the initial emergency stages when lives are at risk.

Are you often in the position where you put on your typical architect's hat and develop a shelter response in terms of an architectural design for a specific housing project? ▶ I wouldn't say I have done that very often. Every country has its own design and housing traditions and processes. So country offices tend to use me for design checks

after they have a draft design and we can have a discussion back and forth, either remotely or in-country.

Graham Saunders from IFRC said in his interview for this book that in the shelter sector if it's not scalable then it's not relevant. Are there any examples you can give of this importance of scale? ▶ Oh, yes. For example, when I was working for CARE in Haiti, we built around 3,000 transitional shelters,

Elegy: to his mistress going to bed

Group 1 (Daphne, Poppy, Lu)

- What is the definition of an elegy?
- What are elegiac couplets?
- What are heroic couplets?
- What are the Petrarchan poetic conventions of unattainable love?
- What devices did Ovid use in his Elegies about love and the male pursuit of the female?
- What is a blazon in poetic terms?
- What is poetic allusion and how is it used?

- What could you say about the form and structure of this poem in relation to these older conventions?
- How is the poem divided in terms of argument and form? Does this relate to anything in its structure (or 'story' of what is happening)? Ie lines 24/25?

Group 2 (Dylan, Kieran, Becky)

Identify the following devices in this poem by picking out different quotations to best illustrate the devices.

Pun, parallisms, discourse markers, paradoxes, allusion, vocative voice, possessive pronouns, sexual explicitness, bawdy wit, first and second person voices, blazon, abrupt changes of argument, justification of argument, abrupt beginnings and endings.

Can you find any more?
For each device, comment on its effect.

Group 3 (Helen, Siena, Mib)

Look up all the words that you don't know, including words related to clothing, allusions to literary figures of the past or any other lexis that is unfamiliar to you. List these in groups, with their definitions.

For each one (both the words and their groups) comment (ie write down) what Donne is doing by using these and what the effect is. Include poetic devices in your feedback (ie assonance, alliteration, metaphor)

Group 4 (Isobel, Elise, Emma)

Make a list of all the different semantic fields used in this poem. For each one list all the words used. (Probably best to divide up the poem into two or four, look on your own, then return to the group to discuss findings.)
Now comment (write down) what Donne is doing with these semantic fields in terms of the poem's meaning.

All info to be presented on a ppt with quotations from text.

but we also provided 17,000 reconstruction kits - all the tools and materials that families needed to strengthen the transitional shelters that they built themselves. However, it is not necessarily numbers that are important. What I think Graham meant was this: we need to be able to demonstrate an approach that is replicable by others, and especially replicable by the affected population themselves. If you can do that, then that's a really good thing.

How has your role shifted since the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami? How have you seen the built-environment profession changing? I think the tsunami acted as a catalyst for design and shelter practices and organizations to emerge. It was an even bigger wake-up call for NGOs. For example, there were many agencies working in housing construction in Aceh. There was a lot of money involved too. But it was such a phenomenally complex environment to work in that there were major challenges we were unable to meet. The humanitarian community had to take a hard look at itself. Some of the organizations said they would never do construction again because they saw it as too much of a risk. Other organizations, such as CARE, decided to create new positions within the organization to handle construction better.

Are you still interested in mainstream architectural magazines? Yes. My husband is a commercial architect. I can't escape from it!

Do you read architectural magazines? Yes. My husband does so that built-environment professionals can know what skills to offer. There are certainly initiatives now that didn't exist before the tsunami, and there is definitely an improvement in how the private sector engages in this work.

New courses designed to educate built-environment professionals in post-disaster work are emerging in some countries. Are they equipping professionals in the design field? Every new course is a step in the right direction. We need more of them. However, universities tend not to understand the real need. So there is a gap in the training that's available because Masters courses tend to be very reflective rather than vocational. But you need the vocational skills and to have practised them before you have anything to reflect on! I'd rather have someone with a diploma from a vocational college. Then they can get experience in the field and, perhaps, after four or five missions, go and do an academic or other postgraduate course. We need courses that have compulsory elements of practice, not all desk study, reflection and theory too early in someone's career.