

# No need for bricks and mortar

*Diaa' escaped the violence in Syria three years ago. He now lives in Jordan's Za'atari camp. Although he is now safer, life is still hard given the lack of job opportunities. But that hasn't stopped him; using soil, plastic bags and barbed wire, Diaa' is working with Oxfam to build a new community centre.*



Diaa' a Syrian refugee, working on the SuperAdobe construction project with Oxfam in Za'atari Camp. Photo: Nesma Nsour/Oxfam

Before the war, Diaa' was studying economics in Syria's Daraa' University. Shortly after the war broke out, it became impossible for him to finish. The escalating violence meant that he would be forced to flee to the safety of Jordan, but not without a lot of frustration: "I only had to pass two courses to graduate, but I couldn't reach my university because the area I lived in had a lot of military checkpoints."

Two long years without work would pass at the camp, before opportunity would come his way. Although he had no construction experience, Diaa' applied for a cash for work opportunity with Oxfam on a SuperAdobe project, and that's when things started to turn around for him.

The SuperAdobe technique is an innovative temporary building approach that Oxfam piloted in District 8 of Za'atari refugee camp. It is a form of "sandbag architecture" that requires plastic bags, wire, and sand gathered on site in addition to a little know-how.

"I've never seen anything like this, the cost of this project is very low, a family of five can build it on their own. The soil is available everywhere in the camp, and the limestone is cheaper than cement. A bag of

limestone is almost 2 JDs (USD\$2.8), and every meter of the plastic bags is almost 10 piastres (USD\$0.14)”, Daa’ says when speaking about the project.

Daa’ now works as a team supervisor in the SuperAdobe construction project. For him and many other camp residents, building a home away from home is no longer an impossible dream. Rather, it’s a dream that can be realized through easily accessible, inexpensive supplies and little know-how.

“I believe the project has a future in the camp. The floors of the caravans we’re currently living in always needs maintenance. The caravans leak water, they’re flammable and prone to mold.

“In the summer the temperature outside reaches 40 degrees, inside the caravan it’s 60, but this one [SuperAdobe] is cold in summer and very warm in winter,” Daa’ says.



The SuperAdobe structure under construction from the inside. Photo: Nesma Nsour/Oxfam

Daa’s enthusiasm for the SuperAdobe approach is infectious: “I started watching videos on YouTube of people working with soil and building houses from scratch. I created a video for the project and I want to share it with everyone to see how we’re creating something from nothing here in the camp, how we’re creating houses just from soil.”

As the conflict continues in Syria, refugees still hope for a peace that will allow them to eventually return. Much of the country’s civilian infrastructure – schools, hospitals and water supplies – has been damaged and reduced to rubble.

“When I get back to Syria, I will work on a project like this, since I don’t have a house in Syria. I used to live in the country and there’s a lot of space there - I want to build houses there.”