

Post-Disaster Recovery: Guidelines and Good Practices

Objective

The present document aims at providing guiding principles and approaches for the immediate post-disaster recovery phase, based on experiences and lessons learnt by UNDP in recovery operations over the past five years. It also attempts to provide an institutional framework for recovery, in the hope that countries with frequent or recurrent disasters will be encouraged to consider more permanent arrangements, with clear institutional roles and responsibilities for recovery as part of their disaster preparedness and contingency plans.

Context

Disaster occurrence and loss have increased rapidly over recent decades. According to global databases, over 3 million people have lost their lives in large-scale natural disasters in the last two decades. Natural disasters reportedly affected on average 211 million people per year from 1991-2000. This is seven times more than the average of 31 million people annually affected by conflict. Associated economic losses currently exceed US \$90 billion a year.

Recurrent natural disasters disrupt economic political and social systems and are contributing to a steady and increasing erosion of development gains in a growing number of countries. Successive natural disasters are pushing many countries into a downward spiral, where losses outweigh limited development gains and the risk of future disasters continue to accumulate.

At the same time, disasters offer unique, though transient, opportunities for change. If support can be provided to local level recovery processes immediately after an emergency and if risk reduction considerations can be factored into all recovery activities, then recovery can catalyse a transition to more sustainable development. If opportunities are grasped effectively, crisis can provide an opportunity to reverse the downward development spiral and rebuild sustainability.

Conventional approaches to disaster and crisis often fail to grasp these opportunities:

- Response to crisis is still dominated by humanitarian assistance and emergency management. While vital to mitigate loss of life and suffering, emergency relief does not address the underlying risks that provoked the crisis in the first place, nor does it stimulate rapid recovery. In a number of situations it exacerbates and strengthens these underlying risks.
- The long time spans required for the necessary impact studies, the design of programmes and projects and the negotiation of multilateral loans for reconstruction and the timeframe for the approval of development funding generates a *gap*

between the ending of humanitarian assistance and the initiation of reconstruction programming in which affected people are usually left without support for recovery

- Reconstruction is often conceptualised and designed to return a country to the conditions of the *normal* development it enjoyed before a crisis occurred, which too often means *rebuilding* the conditions of risk which existed before the crisis, thus preparing the ground for future disaster and crisis, while increasing the debts of the countries concerned.
- Similarly, during the *gap*, people begin to recover spontaneously, rebuilding and reproducing conditions even more risk prone than those that existed before the crisis occurred. The opportunity to reduce vulnerabilities and risks and reorient development is usually lost.
- The lack of execution capacity in a crisis country, corruption, political obstacles to loan agreements, a lack of donor interest in funding longer term recovery and reconstruction, and the outbreak of new crisis may mean that longer term reconstruction never gets off the ground at all, prolonging the *gap* until the next crisis occurs.
- Support to recovery by government organisations, international agencies, NGO's and others is often through isolated and uncoordinated interventions, leading to a duplication of efforts in some areas, a waste of resources in others and again a failure to factor in risk reduction considerations.

Sustainable Recovery: towards a conceptual framework

The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) defines recovery as the *"decisions and actions taken after a disaster with a view to restoring or improving the pre-disaster living conditions of the stricken community, while encouraging and facilitating necessary adjustments to reduce disaster risk"*. Recovery from a disaster is thus primarily about:

- Shifting focus from saving lives to restoring livelihoods
- Effectively preventing the recurrence of crisis situations
- Harnessing conditions for future development
- Building on national capacities
- Empowering communities
- Determining/addressing root causes and vulnerabilities

Experiences show that if efforts are made to support local and national recovery process at an early stage, if risk and vulnerability reduction considerations are factored into all recovery activities, if the synergies between development, humanitarian and other actors involved in the response phase are properly captured, then it is possible to close the gap between relief and development and transform crisis into opportunities for development

Recovery should be considered as an integral part of ongoing developmental process at all levels: national, regional, and local. Recovery is inextricably intertwined with poverty and the vulnerability of the affected states, communities before, during and after disasters. Recovery focuses on how best to restore the capacity of the government and communities to rebuild and recover from disasters and to prevent relapses.

The opportunity should also be seized to reduce development deficits of the affected areas and recovery should not be conceived as simple replacement of damaged infrastructure.

Guiding Principles

The guiding principles of the sustainable recovery approach are the following:

1. Mainstreaming disaster risk reduction in the recovery/development process

The recovery process should be used as an opportunity to enhance safety standards and integrate risk reduction in reconstruction and development, so as to avoid rebuilding risk. Measures to ensure this include:

- Ensuring that all recovery proposals are supported by multi-hazard risk assessments and that appropriate measures to manage and reduce risks are included.
- Ensuring that appropriate information about disaster risk is available and is taken into consideration in the decision making process.
- Establish criteria on acceptable levels of risk.
- Reinforcing disaster management capacities at local provincial and national level in areas such as:
 - a) local level capacity building and training for disaster risk management, including the formulation of disaster preparedness plans and strengthening capacities at the municipal level
 - b) the development of early warning capacities, particularly at local level integrated with national and regional level flood monitoring.
 - c) training and human resource development in disaster risk management at local level
 - d) building capacities for the formulation of risk maps

2. Proper assessment is a pre-requisite to successful recovery programming

Recovery programming must be made on the basis of a sound, participatory assessment of:

- Needs
- Capacities
- Vulnerability, not only physical but social and cultural
- Root causes

so that level and causes of vulnerability are fully understood and the local initiative, resources and capacities of the affected people fully utilised in the recovery, reconstruction and development endeavours.

3. Favouring participatory approaches and decentralised planning and programming

The planning, programming and execution of local level recovery initiatives does not require the complex and time consuming impact and feasibility studies and planning processes required for national level long-term reconstruction planning, enabling recovery activities to begin as early as possible after the disaster.

Decentralized planning and programming ideally follow the participatory assessment (#2 above) and may include the following areas:

- Community development and enhancing community/government relations
- Local economic development
- Creating an enabling environment for housing reconstruction
- Vocational Training

4. Contributing to the economic revitalisation of the affected communities

Recovery activities should contribute to revitalising the economy of the affected communities through the revival of production (agriculture, industry), trade and services, and the creation of income-generation/employment opportunities. The goals should go beyond the simple restoration of pre-disaster level of economic activities, but aim towards the creation of more sustainable livelihoods for the population.

5. Building local and national capacities for increased resilience, risk management and sustainable development

The recovery process should become an opportunity to strengthen the governance structures, particularly at the local level. It harnesses the enormous social and human potential available for rapid recovery from disasters, facilitating the recovery of livelihoods and local infrastructure immediately after the disaster. Through supporting and building local and national capacities, recovery is resource efficient, allowing relatively small external and international inputs to have a major impact.

Achieving the goal of building local and national capacities implies that external technical assistance must complement existing capacities, be conceived as supportive and not directive, and must entail transfer of technology, know-how and capacities for increased resilience, risk management and sustainable development.

6. Taking advantage of ongoing initiatives

The recovery process represents an opportunity to review on-going development initiatives and re-orient as necessary and feasible to contribute to building resilience and capacities in the affected communities. As a minimum, ongoing initiatives should be reviewed to ensure that they do not contribute to the further accumulation of risk.

7. Gender sensitivity

Particular attention should be paid, in the assessment, planning and programming stages for recovery, of the vital role that women play as community members and leaders, and the special problems they face, such as property rights and being heads of households in particularly difficult circumstances. This will lead to the identification of adequate, gender sensitive programming in the recovery, reconstruction and ensuing development.

8. Improving/maintaining coordination: development of a clear interface with existing humanitarian coordination mechanisms

Information exchange and coordination mechanisms established during the emergency must be maintained and enhanced to constitute a permanent dialogue and consensus building mechanism with government agencies, civil society, cooperation agencies and donors and lending institutions. A strategic recovery framework and partnership strategy should be designed as early as possible to ensure coherence and facilitate the coordination of a large number of initiatives at the local, regional and national scales, allowing multiple stakeholders to work together with synergy

9. Demonstrative Effects

Local recovery initiatives may have important demonstration effects, building local and national capacities and piloting approaches that can then be factored into national level reconstruction programmes.

10. Monitoring, evaluating and learning

Recovery programmes and plans must include appropriate, participatory monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that allow timely implementation of corrective measures, capturing the experience and the voices of the target population, building on the demonstrative effects, increasing effectiveness and learning.

Planning for Recovery

The practice of designing a recovery framework as early as possible following the disaster has proved successful in major recovery operations. The recovery framework is a strategic tool that identifies and prioritises programming needs based on a thorough assessment of damages, needs and capacities. It provides strategic guidance and facilitates the coordination of a large number of initiatives and the participation of multiple stakeholders.

The overall objectives of a recovery framework are:

- i) to organise the country's response and approach
- ii) to review and stock-take regarding the recovery needs to get the community/country back on track towards sustainable development;

- iii) to secure wide support, including financial and technical resources;
- iv) to develop a partnership strategy with participation of multiple stakeholders, including the affected communities

The recovery strategy must be framed in a concrete period of time and contain strategic and precise actions in the larger framework of sustainable human development. Recovery criteria should be developed on the basis of the general hazard profile of the affected communities and not only on extreme events, climatic or otherwise.

Sectors typically addressed in a recovery framework are:

- **Rehabilitation/recovery of built environment and local infrastructure**

In most disasters, the built environment is the main target of the destructive processes at work. The destruction of the built environment will hinder the regular functioning of any social and economic context. At the same time, due to its linkages with other sectors, the housing and infrastructure sector presents a good potential in any post disaster recovery process.

It is a key element in closing the gap between emergency relief and sustainable recovery towards long term development by virtue of its potential of playing a catalytic role in any integrated and multi sector approach to development process.

Rehabilitation of damaged elements should be seen as an opportunity to reduce the development deficit and to fulfil unmet needs. This approach goes beyond the simple replacement of damaged units, to meet the development objectives and reduce vulnerabilities. Recovery activities may include:

1. Local water and sanitation systems
2. Secondary and tertiary road systems
3. Local health and education facilities
4. Irrigation and agriculture facilities
5. Human settlement and housing

- **Employment and livelihoods**

Recovery programmes should contribute to improve the living conditions of the affected population. Specific issues that may need addressing:

1. Agriculture and livestock production, through the provision of seeds, tools, micro-credits, and other means
2. Small business through the provision of credits or other means
3. Recovery of and improvement of productive social infrastructure such as roads, markets, etc. which will support the economic activities
4. The reconstruction of the housing sector using local technologies, construction materials, local know-how, to ensure that construction activities will have a direct positive impact upon the local economy.

- **Primary infrastructure and lifeline facilities**

The rapid rehabilitation of primary infrastructure such as primary roads, bridges, water supply, primary power generation and distribution facilities can contribute to a swift restoration and development of the affected region. The key for an effective rehabilitation programme is an accurate and thorough damage assessment, which will provide the necessary information on why this infrastructure was damaged or destroyed and will determine the modality of including risk reduction in their rehabilitation and reconstruction.

- **Environmental and water resources management**

The cause-effect relationship between environmental degradation, poverty and disasters is complex and has been the subject of many studies. The continuous degradation of highly sensitive ecosystems leads to the increased occurrence and magnitude of landslides and floods with major physical, economic and social consequences. Thus, recovery should be used as an opportunity to enhance the management of water and environmental resources in order to reduce one of the major causes of future disasters. Typical activities include cleaning of watersheds, reforestation programmes and other environmental type of interventions that are necessary to reduce future risk.

- **Housing**

Building the capacity of local authorities to promote, supervise and guide planning and construction processes is key for a successful and sustainable reconstruction process. Local authorities should be enabled to set up legislative and regulatory frameworks to promote local initiatives and local involvement in planning and construction issues.

In defining the strategy for the housing sector, the following issues may arise:

- a) Land and property issues
- b) Financing
- c) Regulatory framework and institutional capacity building
- d) Labour and implementation
- e) Technology
- f) Architectural design
- g) Construction materials

- **Resettlement of families**

Often, in the aftermath of a disaster, there is a growing concern among experts and government officials to promote a safer location for settlement of people at risk. Experience shows, however, that resettlement of population on new sites is a complex issue and presents major challenges.

If resettlement is being considered as an option, the following issues must be analysed:

- a) A resettlement programme should go beyond the provision of housing and should address other needs of the population such as social infrastructure, livelihoods and economic activities
- b) The programme needs to take into consideration the fundamental issues of disaster management and risk reduction. This requires more in-depth analysis of the new site with regard to hazards and risks. Risk mapping should be prepared prior to development of new site to avoid rebuilding risks
- c) Since people have often strong economic, social and cultural reasons that influence their choice of settlement, it is important that the relocation decisions and selection of resettlement sites are made in a consultative manner with full participation of the affected communities. Communities need to be prepared and informed before they agree to accept voluntary relocation.
- d) Appropriate mechanisms should be put in place to ensure secure land and housing tenure.

Setting-up appropriate institutional arrangements

The main challenge in devising an institutional arrangement for recovery and reconstruction is to combine a rapid implementation mechanism that does not undermine the existing institutional framework or affect on-going good governance mechanisms.

While experience shows that it is best to mount the recovery and reconstruction effort on existing institutional frameworks, if a new structure is to be put in place, it should have the major objective of achieving a strong level of cohesion, coordination and consensus amongst different stakeholders, around:

- a) Definition of recovery/development policies and strategic guidelines
- b) Formulation/implementation/oversight of recovery proposals
- c) Monitoring of progress
- e) Establishing a permanent dialogue and consensus space with civil society, opposition parties, private sector, international cooperation agencies, donors and lending agencies
- f) Maintain transparency, accountability and good governance in the process as well as a strategic communications and information campaign.

Specific recommendations on institutional arrangements of recovery and reconstruction, based on prior experience, include:

- Any new structure should be very small, with clear roles and responsibilities shared politically and socially
- It should be inserted in the current government structure and using existing capacities
- An exit or assimilation strategy should be defined from the start, to allow the smooth transition between recovery, reconstruction and development

- A coordination mechanism should not substitute stakeholder participation. Recovery stakeholders are *development* stakeholders and it is important to keep the development mentality with a fast-track implementation mechanism
- Recovery programmes should be implemented through line ministries and public agencies, although with faster mechanisms
- The governing body should include cabinet members, line ministries and representatives of political stakeholders
- A technical body should also be established, acting as a secretariat of the recovery and reconstruction structure. Line ministries and national implementing institutions should be represented in the secretariat, whose functions will be the technical oversight of the recovery/reconstruction activities.

Challenges

- Ensuring that the recovery response is demand driven.
- Framing rehabilitation and reconstruction in a sustainable development approach, thus avoiding the **tyranny of rush**.
- Avoiding the danger of rebuilding previous vulnerabilities or creating new risks.
- Placing the recovery and reconstruction process in the development framework, combining long-term approaches with strategic, short- and medium-term interventions
- Avoiding *ad-hoc* recovery institutions turning into parallel government structures that overlap functions and mandates and bypass accountability and control mechanisms.
- Building national capacities as an intrinsic part of the recovery and reconstruction process
- Formulating recovery and reconstruction programmes based on consensus and stakeholder participation
- Reaching the most vulnerable population, which can be best ensured by a long-term, participatory approach