

ON THE COVER
Ofunato, in Japan's northern Iwate Prefecture, suffered massive damage from the tsunami that followed a March 2011 earthquake. Habitat for Humanity volunteers have partnered with All Hands volunteers to remove rubble and clean up the damaged areas.
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Many houses collapsed on this hillside in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, after the January 2010 earthquake. Habitat for Humanity launched a multiphase response to the earthquake, beginning with emergency shelter kits for some of the hardest-hit residents. The second phase included building transitional shelters, and now the third phase involves constructing permanent core houses that can be expanded over time.



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SHELTERREPORT 2012

Build Hope: Housing cities after a disaster

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Principles and policies for urban disasters

DISASTERS ARE A FACT OF LIFE.

In recent years, earthquakes have shaken Japan, China, Indonesia and Haiti; flooding has swamped Pakistan and the Mississippi Delta; hurricanes have tested New Orleans and the Gulf Coast; and tornadoes have ripped through Alabama and Arkansas. Over the past five years, more than 14.1 million people have lost their homes to disaster.

Although the aftermath is devastating, the effects of disasters can be reduced through careful planning, early preparation and attention to long-term reconstruction. Urban areas need special consideration given their scale. Their concentrated population; infrastructure; mix of renters, homeowners and squatters; complex land and tenure issues; and economic concerns are just several factors to consider. The presence of infrastructure, government institutions and resources should enable cities to recover more quickly, but few cities have been able to adapt and plan for rapid urban growth, especially in the developing world.

More than half of the world's population now lives in urban centers, and the vast majority of the world's growth over the next 20 years will be in cities in the developing world. One need only look to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and the 2010 earthquake to see the devastating effects a disaster can have on an unprepared city.

Adequate housing plays a pivotal role after a disaster and is a family's most important asset. Not only does it provide shelter from hazards, but it also is a place to maintain social networks, access city services such as water and sanitation, raise children, make memories and often conduct business. A home also provides security and safety and can confer a sense of citizenship. When a disaster destroys a shelter, it destroys the center of lives and often livelihoods.

Decisions on how best to provide shelter after a disaster are often made

quickly against a backdrop of other pressing issues. Although it is important to quickly house as many people as possible after a disaster, it is equally important to consider the long-term effects on the way people live. Poor decisions early in the recovery process — such as where to locate temporary housing or a resettlement community — can disconnect people from jobs, divide communities, increase infrastructure costs and lead to increased vulnerability to future disasters.

Providing adequate shelter, however, depends on several key factors, including rubble removal and secure land tenure. Disasters in urban areas produce much more rubble and debris than those in rural areas. Clearing land and removing debris before rebuilding is an enormous challenge, particularly when access roads for construction equipment are blocked.

Equally important are the complex legal issues that face cities after a disaster. Land titles are often nebulous or unknown, and many developing countries have a high percentage of property that lacks clear, documented ownership. Records can easily be lost or destroyed, and building shelter is risky when ownership is unknown and residents are vulnerable to evictions. Any successful resettlement depends on the work of the government and the humanitarian community to help local communities and citizens work together to solve land disputes and ensure residents' right to live on the land.

As the humanitarian community seeks to meet critical shelter needs, reconstruction should occur within the framework of a comprehensive urban strategy and development plan supported by the local government and its citizens.

Policymakers should also focus on enabling families to return to those homes that are structurally sound; on developing programs to help families fix homes that can be repaired; and on planning for the reintegration of many families whose homes have been destroyed and who inevitably will want to return to be near family, community and work.

The following are some of the principles that should guide disaster response work in urban settings in the international context.

Principles:

- Reaffirming The Humanitarian Charter in The Sphere Project, it must be recognized that affected governments or controlling pow-

ers hold primary responsibility for addressing the needs of affected populations. Agencies define their role in disaster response based on what those with primary responsibility can or cannot do, or choose not to do. Whenever possible, program design by agencies should support the plans as articulated by affected governments or controlling powers.

- Urban density makes it inefficient to focus on one household at a time; infrastructure and services are inextricably linked to houses in urban areas. Therefore, whenever possible, reconstruction should be based on a neighborhood or settlement approach.
- Disaster risk reduction should always be incorporated in reconstruction program design.
- Responders should choose repairing what already exists over new construction to avoid duplication of resources and to make better use of existing urban infrastructure.
- Self-help programs should be designed to provide households with resources they need to rebuild. Whenever possible, demand-driven forms of assistance, such as cash grants, technical assistance, materials or tools should be preferred. Housing Resource Centers set up by assisting agencies and NGOs are a good vehicle to identify and provide these tools.
- Secured land tenure should be reinforced. Short of a viable government plan for quickly resolving land tenure issues, community-led mapping should be used to identify land ownership, resolve land disputes and provide a more secure form of ownership to protect residents from eviction and allow them to receive assistance.
- Transitional housing should be built on or near the displaced resident's original plot. If it is possible, it is preferable to house displaced residents with host families rather than constructing transitional housing.



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Several organizations are building houses on this site for tsunami victims. Habitat has 25 houses under construction in partnership with MAS Holdings, the largest garment manufacturer in Sri Lanka. The houses are about 500 square feet, as prescribed by the government.

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- Relocation should be avoided. If it is necessary, the location must include access to utilities, transportation, jobs, markets and social services, and the relocation should attempt to preserve community cohesion.
- Community input should always be incorporated into the design of disaster response programs.
- The needs of renters must not be overlooked. Cities have a higher percentage of renters than rural areas, and the renters are dependent on their landlords' ability to rebuild.
- The rights of women should be given special consideration in the design of housing assistance programs. Unmarried or widowed women are often overlooked in disaster assistance because they are not included on land titles.

Recommendations:

Look beyond the emergency stage. Too often, humanitarian assistance for shelter stops at relief. The design of emergency solutions should be tied to that of permanent solutions. Organizations involved in humanitarian shelter

assistance should incorporate efforts into long-term strategies, and donors that provide funding should keep long-term recovery in mind.

Promote communications across sectors. Responding to disasters is more complex in cities than in rural areas because of population density. As a result, greater coordination is required among sectors. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Cluster System coordinates NGO activity within specific sectors, but coordination between sectors needs improvement. A system needs to be developed to coordinate both within and among different sectors providing disaster response.

Tackle land tenure issues. A lack of land ownership records or an unclear legal framework for land transfers can delay or prevent assistance to the poorest displaced residents. Solutions to unclear land tenure should be identified and implemented at the beginning of the reconstruction process. If land tenure problems exist before a disaster, flexible approaches such as community enumeration should be used to establish ownership before rebuilding.

Address these funding priorities:

- Increase professional capacity. Funding should seek to improve a government's ability to develop a reconstruction strategy.
- Include housing expertise. Urban planners and housing experts should have a larger role in the design of international development agencies' response to disaster in urban areas.
- Prioritize funding for large-scale rubble and debris removal. Disasters in urban areas cause an enormous amount of debris that needs to be removed before rebuilding. Debris removal is often overlooked by international donors, and humanitarian actors lack capacity to implement debris-removal programs. In addition, debris removal is not incorporated in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Cluster System. Debris removal needs to be prioritized for funding and needs to be addressed in the IASC Cluster System.



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