



Recovery takes diverse forms, is multi-layered and takes time.
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Transitioning to recovery

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Humanitarian agencies are increasingly involved in supporting housing recovery after crises beyond emergency shelter, including rehabilitation and reconstruction of housing and settlements. Such involvement brings questions about how agencies understand recovery, why they are involved, what they expect to achieve, what they should do (or not do) – and how. Failure to raise and answer some of these questions brings a risk of agencies becoming lost and directionless in the wide field of recovery, dissipating considerable energy and resources and losing sight of humanitarian principles. Exploring those questions may help us reframe the scope of humanitarian work, and bring better results for those we are trying to help.

The conceptualization of disaster recovery in discrete, linear phases from emergency response to reconstruction strongly influenced humanitarian thinking and activities, but has been largely superseded by a disaster cycle model, conceiving recovery as a seamless continuum.¹ But in reality, for government, humanitarian and development actors, there is still a noted absence of continuity or coherence between shelter and housing recovery policies, programmes and institutional mechanisms.

Many humanitarian organizations aim for a continuous and consistent approach, supporting the same communities from emergency to recovery. However, they are often part of a fundamental change from a programmatic approach to shelter informed by principles

of coverage, coordination and consensus, to project-based methods of housing recovery, characterized by huge gaps, and fragmented and bespoke methods with widely varying levels and types of assistance.

Despite considerable investment of resources and commitment, the benefits of humanitarian activities for housing recovery are falling frustratingly short of expectations. Humanitarian agencies need to reflect on how they understand and define recovery, as this affects the objectives they set, the design of their programmes and their evaluation of results.

There is little if any consensus on a definition of 'recovery', how it is measured, or what constitutes success.² Definitions might describe a return to pre-disaster conditions, often termed 'return to normal',³ or focus on replacement of assets.⁴ Simple return definitions are contested as inadequate by many, who argue that recovery must not be a reinstatement of vulnerability to disasters but must aim for improvements or 'building back better'.⁵ However, there is rarely consensus on what 'better' means, or how it will be defined or achieved.⁶ The recent emphasis on improvements may overshadow other principles that could underpin recovery efforts, such as that results be equitable.

Among humanitarian shelter agencies there is a growing consensus on recovery strategies, including owner-driven reconstruction, building back better, cash-based programming (see

Chapter 16) and settlements and area-based approaches (see Chapter 13 and Box 13.1 respectively), each more progressive than earlier tactics. There has been progress on defining 'what' to do, but there is still a way to go to define 'how', 'who' and 'why'. Work remains to be done to modify these approaches and develop new ones, to overcome stubborn difficulties such as the sustainability of risk reduction measures, weak engagement with governments, and problematic transitions between emergency and recovery which then fail to close gaps such as access to credit, or to capitalize on new opportunities.

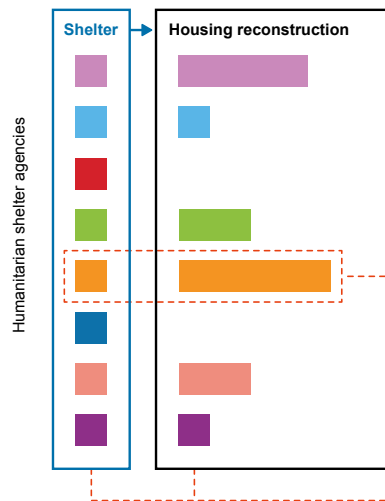
Humanitarian response and recovery involve increasingly diverse and numerous actors: multiple levels of government and civil society, commercial and professional interests, and local and global stakeholders (further discussed in Chapter 11 on coordination). In a crowded and complex field, humanitarian organizations need

to reflect on their mandates, capacities and constraints. Roles and relationships cannot be defined with regard only to households or target communities, but must also consider the wider affected population, governments and other local and long-term stakeholders. Development agencies are defining goals, strategies and institutional mechanisms for housing and settlement recovery. Humanitarian agencies need to join those discussions, and reflect on their own recovery experiences and proposals.

This chapter explores ways of thinking about recovery, to review the scope of humanitarian activities and consider how humanitarian organizations might work together and with others. It begins with obstacles and then shifts to opportunities. The focus is limited to disaster contexts where building destruction or damage are extensive and housing rehabilitation and reconstruction are needed. The meaning and

CHARACTERISTICS

- Full coverage to all affected
- Coordinated strategy
- Consistent scope
- Even levels of assistance
- Agencies report collectively



CHARACTERISTICS

- Selected coverage, extensive gaps
- Diverging strategies
- Inconsistent scope
- Uneven levels of assistance
- Agencies report individually

AGENCY CONTINUITY

- Individual agency continues from emergency shelter to housing reconstruction activities, usually in the same community/area

SECTOR CONTINUITY

- Humanitarian shelter agencies continues in some areas but not in others
- Fundamental change in characteristics or guiding principles

Figure 2 **Shelter to housing reconstruction: from coordination to fragmentation**

implications of recovery in contexts of conflict crises, or displacement within or to undamaged areas, requires separate consideration.⁷

Obstacles

Factors preventing the best possible results from recovery and reconstruction efforts include:

1. Shortcomings in owner-driven reconstruction

'People-centred' approaches are now the norm. 'Owner-driven' or 'user-driven' ones are widely promoted, directly through financing and programming and indirectly through guidelines reflecting agreed 'proven solutions' and a risk that assumptions neglect issues that require continued attention.⁸ User-driven housing reconstruction programmes may be characterized as primarily market-driven, and criticized as likely to reinstate or exacerbate pre-disaster inequities or vulnerabilities.⁹ Understanding pre-crisis socio-economic structures can help identify who is already ill-served and likely to have difficulties in recovery. Understanding post-disaster market dynamics can help identify risks such as inflation, as well as new opportunities.

Experience shows that some households and groups struggle or fail to reconstruct, falling into repeat cycles of disaster losses. Humanitarian agencies have responded by targeting assistance to individual households, but the scale and nature of need also mean that recovery policies and systems require adjusting to make them work better for the vulnerable.

2. Urban reconstruction

Cities affected by crises experience differential rates of recovery. Historic city centres, neighbourhoods with low-income or transient populations, high levels of renters or multi-use/multi-owner buildings, or areas of fragile environments may be contested or require targeted strategies.¹⁰ Area-based rehabilitation programmes mark a step forward in supporting

neighbourhood recovery, but have been more successful in rebuilding infrastructure than private housing. Urban difficulties are discussed further in Chapter 6.

3. Building back better – high expectations and low coverage

Disasters are frequently referred to as windows of opportunity for change, particularly to reshape the built environment. Calls to 'Build Back Better' (BBB) are found in all recovery policies and programme documents, representing a convergence of terminology if not a meaningful consensus on scope. Often, the greater the development deficit, the greater the ambitions of external parties to make improvements through recovery, with scant reference to the levels of resources or political and economic transformation required. Questions remain as to whether humanitarian agencies are well placed or equipped to define or promote such structural changes.¹¹ While ambitions in emergency response are usually limited to alleviation of conditions, ambitions and expectations in recovery are increasingly high, leading to frustration and disappointment, or to the concentration of efforts and resources into project islands of excellence.

4. Timing and transitions

Housing reconstruction commonly takes several years; urban reconstruction may take more than a decade.¹² Governments and humanitarian organizations frequently underestimate the time needed, or are constrained by short funding terms. Assistance expires before many households have finished – or in some cases even begun – reconstruction. Speed is lauded, while taking time is criticized by many commentators, even though time is needed to develop capacity, facilitate consultation and accommodate adjustments, all of which may result in better recovery processes and results.¹³ For humanitarian agencies, delays incur costs and raise donor concerns about a perceived lack of progress. Organizations supporting recovery as an extension of shelter programmes in many cases run out of money

and scale down activities just when the reconstruction is accelerating; for example, in Nepal the 2018–19 (re)building season is expected to be the busiest since the 2015 earthquake, but with the least technical support available from partner organizations.¹⁴

5. Collaboration with recovery and development actors

The last decade has seen increasing emphasis on planning recovery: establishing pre-crisis protocols, developing common methodologies and ensuring planning starts early with dedicated capacity. Humanitarian agencies often regard recovery planning as a separate process and don't become involved, thereby missing vital opportunities to build greater coherence with development activities, form relationships with national and long-term stakeholders, and contribute to recovery policies and programming. Many humanitarian shelter and settlement personnel are unfamiliar with the numerous post-disaster assessment and recovery approaches and tools.¹⁵ They are also largely unfamiliar with government budgetary systems, development banks and insurance mechanisms, all of which influence recovery policies. And recovery institutions are frequently unfamiliar with humanitarian bodies' modus operandi (see Chapter 11 for a discussion on collaboration and coordination).

Opportunities for the future

Each crisis presents new combinations of difficulties and opportunities. Instead of prescriptive methodologies and toolkits, humanitarian work in recovery may be better served by ways of thinking about recovery, to inform programming and to guide how humanitarian agencies see themselves and others. Two important opportunities for better recovery in the future are discussed below.

1. Recovery as a process rather than an end point

Guidance for planning for recovery advises moving away from an idea of recovery as an end point, to understanding and planning recovery as a live and continuous process. For housing and settlement recovery, a process approach means moving away from focusing on the number of houses to be rebuilt, to diagnosing housing sector vulnerabilities and promoting measures to redress them. Understanding recovery as a dynamic process can be particularly useful for humanitarian organizations, avoiding counterproductive pressure to provide houses in a very short timeframe, and instead encouraging early and strategic efforts to support communities and help the many participants in the housing sector to better produce and manage housing and residential development.

Support for communities and the housing sector is described as a flexible 'open approach', in contrast to a prescribed 'closed approach' such as constructing camps or houses.¹⁶ 'Open approaches' do not mean starting with no plans; rather, they enable necessary adaptation of principles and methodologies to suit local contexts. Understanding recovery as a process takes into account the absence of clarity on resources at early stages, the risks of making early promises, and the advantages of flexibility. A responsive and incremental approach fosters greater local ownership through co-diagnosis of problems and co-production of solutions over time.

Humanitarian groups may be involved only during emergency response, may have been present before the disaster, or may continue into reconstruction or longer-term risk reduction and development. They can contribute to establishing appropriate first steps in supporting recovery, but the state and other development bodies are primarily responsible for the evolution and sustaining of assistance over the full course, often at least a decade. Humanitarian groups need to anticipate the longer recovery timeframe, avoid pre-emptive or irreversible decisions, and

anticipate later modifications in policies and in the allocation and use of resources.

Post-disaster situations are frequently described as 'chaos', or as periods of collective uncertainty. Uncertainty can be reduced by formalizing agreement on objectives to guide continuous programme development, and on ways for parties to work together – including mechanisms for reviewing progress. 'Along with money, information is the fuel of the recovery process.'¹⁷ The success of an open approach relies on relationships and sharing information, between authorities and communities, and among actors operating in the same sectors or geographical areas. Regular formal and informal discussions can build trust and exchange of ideas. Public information through mass media can build transparency and accountability.

After disasters, governments and assistance agencies find themselves under pressure to provide assistance for housing recovery and to show results quickly, but planning for assistance rarely includes measures to relieve bottlenecks or accelerate recovery. Experience after the Kobe and Kashmir earthquakes has demonstrated that policies and programmes to improve standards and supply chains provided greater certainty and resulted in faster rates of reconstruction. Planning needs to be continuous, and clearly communicated, so that people can make informed decisions. Planning and implementation need to happen at the same time, and must include feedback processes.

2. Recovery for everyone, and rights to assistance

Humanitarian organizations do not hold lead responsibility or resources to ensure housing recovery for all affected by a crisis, but they can add value to the resources and actions of others and can influence the end result, particularly if they act collectively and strategically. Instead of focusing on a small number of household interventions, work at the community and sector levels can reduce recovery costs and delays for the wider population.

Managing debris, restoring access and rehabilitating infrastructure can reduce displacement and enable communities to stay at, or return to, their original locations. Re-establishing building material production and markets, and transport and communications systems, can restore or expand construction sector capacity. Training can increase and improve labour supply and equip communities to better manage construction. Settlement-level rehabilitation or upgrading, such as watershed management, may best mitigate recurring flood risks to housing. Technical advice can potentially accelerate and improve policies and programming for risk mitigation, land and property rights, community engagement and other factors. Humanitarian organizations already mobilize technical expertise, but such contributions are usually confined to individual projects, with limited replication or institutionalization. Getting the most benefit from such investment requires deploying experts differently, including changes to the ways they interact with authorities and how their expertise is applied.

The quest for multiplier effects and greater benefit from humanitarian action in recovery is based not only on getting best value from limited resources, but also on principles of coverage, equity and the affected population's right to support, all of which inform the shelter response. To follow the principle of protecting the most vulnerable, we must expand recovery efforts, for example to support mobile populations and strengthen systems with safeguards to help those who may be left out or left behind, not just in recovery but in future crises.

Conclusion: recovery as an ecosystem

Recovery is a process rather than an outcome, and success depends on the empowerment of recovery actors, rather than on the prescription of recovery actions. The interaction between recovery actors and resources (such as funds and infrastructure) has been described as the recovery ecosystem.¹⁸ Roles and relationships

are not only defined after the crisis. Recovery takes place in historical contexts, subject to power dynamics that affect how decisions are made. Humanitarian groups might consider how they enter and influence this context, and the short- and longer-term repercussions of their actions, including the implications of drawing staff from local organizations, or consuming resources that might be more efficiently used by others. The idea of an ecosystem can frame understanding of balance, shocks and adaptation.

Guidance for humanitarian agencies during recovery focuses on communication with communities, but rarely mentions communication and relationships with authorities or local technical counterparts. Relationships with, and the roles of, local actors is of particular importance in recovery, affecting the sustainability or otherwise of capacities and change processes. External organizations must be task-oriented, but also need strategies to avoid competing with, undermining or bypassing local people and groups. Rather, they should specifically aim to reinforce local capacity. This requires flexibility to respond to different demands in different situations.

The World Humanitarian Summit and Grand Bargain 2016 call for greater coherence and collaboration between humanitarian and development organizations (see Chapter 7). Major development agencies need to formalize ways for housing recovery and shelter actors to

coordinate institutionally, to facilitate dialogue on sectoral issues and to mobilize predictable and appropriate support for housing recovery where required. Collaboration at both the global and field levels can strengthen mutual understanding and working relationships, and help define more strategic roles for humanitarian contributions to recovery.

A pooled, collaborative or programmatic approach is significantly different from a project-based approach. It may describe only humanitarian organizations working together, or a broad coalition led by government. A programmatic approach sets aside agency (and donor) visibility agendas, requires appropriate financing mechanisms, and must be flexible enough to evolve in dynamic recovery situations. Efforts to promote programmatic approaches include the UN Delivering as One¹⁹ and New Deal for Fragile States²⁰ at country and operational level. Such policy initiatives do represent progress, but greater collective transformation may be required to meet objectives such as 'leave no one behind'.

An important area of potential for a collaborative approach is in technical assistance for reconstruction, where a joint programme can enable wider and sustained coverage of affected communities. A range of activities can be developed and shared, multiplying capacity and improving the quality of implementation.

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Pathways to permanence

Different ways to reach a common goal

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The 2010 Haiti earthquake response led the humanitarian sector to question and review many aspects of international disaster response policies and interventions. There were numerous after-action reviews, strategy and project evaluations, workshops, media discussions, agency policy reviews, and national and local governance response reviews. Much of this dialogue critically evaluated matters such as the roles of different agencies, different timescales of evaluation, national versus international sector integration, and various agendas and positions that promoted the mandates of a range of agencies. This included Habitat for Humanity's own review of its response strategies.

During the Haiti response, the term 'transitional shelter' was strategically and operationally hijacked by agencies to mean a product, rather than a process of sheltering and housing. After nearly every disaster there is much discussion about the number of houses built, but in reality there are not the resources in the first stages of response to rebuild whole communities and cities. Thus incremental, step-by-step processes are needed to support families and communities on their way to recovery and reconstruction.

This led Habitat for Humanity – both locally in Haiti and internationally – to re-evaluate how it designs and communicates its post-disaster programmes. The unavoidable question arose: transitional shelter ... transition to what? This led to the term 'Pathways to Permanence', now used throughout the Habitat network, which reaches more than 70 countries:

Pathways to Permanence is the process of reducing vulnerability as well as supporting disaster-affected families and communities using holistic program interventions that enable incremental progress towards the achievement of permanent, durable shelter and settlements.¹

Pathways to Permanence has shaped Habitat for Humanity's operational responses, its positioning, policy and advocacy work during national responses, and its role in the Global Shelter Cluster and global forums such as the World Urban Forum. Habitat for

Humanity's advocacy and promotion of Pathways to Permanence contributed to the creation of the Early Recovery Working Group of the Global Shelter Cluster, which is jointly led by Habitat for Humanity and UN-Habitat.

Habitat for Humanity believes that safe, decent shelter provides the basis upon which much of post-disaster recovery is built: health, water, sanitation, livelihoods, protection and education. Pathways to Permanence sets disaster-affected families on a path to securing durable, permanent shelter, taking incremental steps (such as erecting an emergency shelter, obtaining or confirming land rights, improving a transitional shelter, defining next steps for a disaster-damaged house, or expanding a new core house).

The focus is as much on the processes of sheltering and reducing risk as it is on the products that may support these processes. Depending on the situation, shelter products may be differently designed, and shelter components will often be used in different ways. Pathways to Permanence also questions the role of the operational intervening agency: should it be primarily a provider of assistance or an enabler at a systemic level?

An example of putting Pathways to Permanence into action was the response to the 2015 Nepal earthquakes, which killed nearly 9000 people and injured nearly 22,000. After the earthquakes, Habitat for Humanity teams conducted joint assessments of the situation, then offered a number of pathways to permanent shelter. People in different situations had different needs and followed different paths. For example:

- Some people's houses were damaged but still repairable. They needed an emergency shelter kit of essential tools and materials to make their repairs.
- A family without any land needed a temporary shelter while the most appropriate permanent arrangement was being identified.
- Another group needed cash or material vouchers, which they could redeem at their local building centre, then start rebuilding their houses by themselves, perhaps supplemented by their own resources.

By focusing on the needs of families, their own decisions and the resources they have available to them, we can design humanitarian and development assistance that supports local efforts. This needs-based, value-for-money approach stretches funds further, supporting many more people. In Haiti, our efforts included basic construction training for individuals embarking on their own housing repairs or upgrades, supporting private sector involvement in reconstruction through systemic market interventions supporting access to materials, skills and products, in addition to increasing local knowledge and discourse on security of tenure issues, to help families feel more confident in their housing investments.

The Pathways to Permanence strategy is supported by a set of guiding principles for designing shelter programmes:

- Programmes should follow the pathways of the affected people, and should give highest priority to supporting the most vulnerable families and individuals, wherever they are along their path.
- Programmes should aim for a permanent, durable shelter as their ultimate goal.

- Programmes will evolve, just like the process of sheltering people evolves. The role of Habitat for Humanity will also evolve, and will include elements of being both a provider and an enabler of shelter and support services.
- Shelter interventions in a humanitarian setting should be guided by development principles, allowing for humanitarian assistance and funding to bridge divides between different sectors.

But the strategy and guiding principles are not easy to put into practice. Difficulties include the slow pace at which humanitarian strategies evolve in response to the context changing and being ready for development interventions; the need for implementing and donor agencies to support the shelter sector during early recovery; and the continued advocacy required to highlight the importance of decent shelter and its contribution to the efforts of other sectors such as health and education.

Recovery after a disaster begins on day one. In shelters, one size does not fit all; nor does one intervention type. Comprehensive disaster management demands that consideration be given to both the vulnerabilities and the capacities of affected families, and to creating opportunities to place the ownership of the recovery process into their hands.

This is the guiding consideration of Habitat for Humanity's Pathways to Permanence strategy, in the pursuit of Habitat's vision: a world where everyone has a decent place to live.

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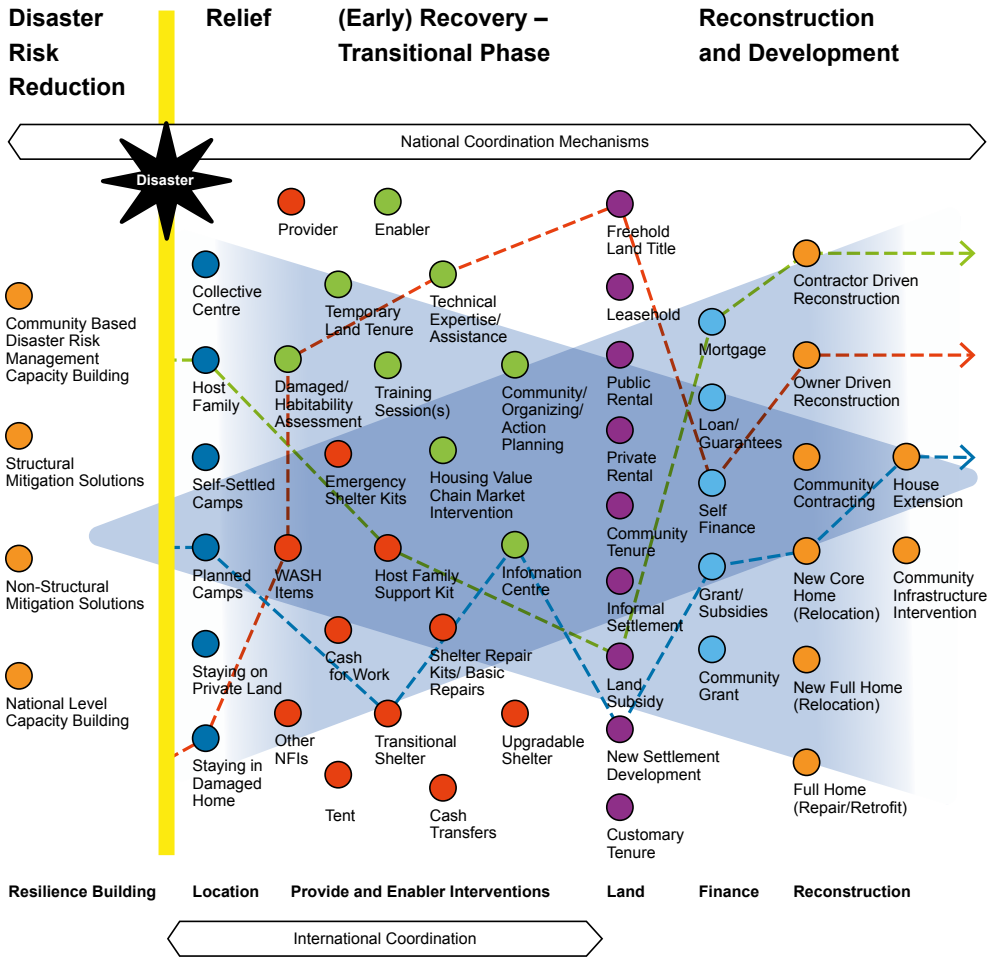


Figure 3 **Pathways to Permanence: Programmatic strategy**