



Post-Disaster Recovery Guidelines

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I. 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 outline 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 broader risk reduction, disaster preparedness and contingency planning process.

The document describes the context in which recovery normally occurs, provides a conceptual framework, guiding principles and steps to follow to facilitate recovery planning in the aftermath of a disaster.

II. Context

The number of people affected by disasters grows annually. In the last two decades, more than 1.5 million people have been killed by natural disasters. In 2003 alone, some 75,000 people died in more than 700 disasters, which affected 254 million people and resulted in economic losses of over US\$60 billion.

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 disaster risk continues to accumulate. Increasing disaster loss will seriously compromise and undermine the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals unless decisive action is taken to reduce disaster risk. This is especially true in Small Island Developing Countries (SID's) where one single event can wipe out hard-earned development progress.

At the same time, disasters offer unique, though transient, opportunities for change. When appropriate technical support is provided early to recovery efforts, risk management and reduction considerations can be factored into all recovery initiatives from the beginning, avoiding the reconstruction of risk and addressing the underlying causes.

Conventional approaches to recovery often fail to grasp these opportunities:

- Response to disasters 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 causes that resulted in the disaster, nor does it automatically stimulate rapid recovery. In a number of situations response may even exacerbate the underlying causes of vulnerability.
- The long time spans required for the necessary impact studies, the design of programmes and projects, 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 frequently conceptualised and designed to return a country to the conditions of the *normal* development it enjoyed before a disaster occurred. This too often

leads to *rebuilding* the conditions of risk which existed before the disaster, thus preparing the ground for future disasters and possibly contributing to increase the country's debt levels with large reconstruction loans.

- Similarly, during the *gap*, people begin to recover spontaneously, rebuilding and reproducing conditions even more risk prone than those that existed before the disaster occurred.
- In some cases, the longer-term reconstruction never gets off the ground, or is considerably delayed because of the lack of execution capacity in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, political obstacles to loan agreements, a lack of donor interest in funding longer-term recovery and reconstruction, or the outbreak of new crises. This prolongs the *gap* until the next disaster occurs.
- Support to recovery by government organisations, international agencies, NGO's and others is often done through isolated and uncoordinated interventions, leading to a duplication of efforts in some areas, gaps in others and again a failure to factor in risk reduction considerations.
- Too often, societies affected by a major disaster tend to seek rapid and visible solutions to restore normalcy, frequently at the cost of more sustainable and durable solutions that truly address the root causes of the disaster. There is a high risk that in the haste usually associated with the return to normalcy, the "tyranny of rush" works against grasping the opportunities for change, risk reduction and sustainable development.

III. 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 is therefore about shifting focus from saving lives to restoring livelihoods, effectively preventing the recurrence of disasters and harnessing conditions for future development. The ensuing transition process will require restoring trust and confidence as much as regaining human and physical developing capital. Managing recovery will require building national capacities, restoring coping mechanisms, empowering communities and determining root causes and vulnerabilities which make societies disaster-prone.

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

Recovery should be conceived as an integral part of ongoing developmental process at all levels: national, regional, and local. The context in which it will take place will be necessarily shaped by the prevailing social and economic conditions and the vulnerability levels of the affected states and communities before, during and after the disaster. Recovery thus 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 be seized to reduce development deficits of the affected areas and not to simply replace the damaged infrastructure.

The recovery process can also improve the institutional and legislative systems in place to manage and reduce disaster risk, including the broader management functions such as leadership, planning, organising, developing and controlling disaster preparedness and response, risk management and reduction. Lessons-learnt from a recent disaster experience can help identify major institutional and systemic shortcomings and introduce new approaches that will help reduce the risk of future disasters.

IV. Guiding Principles

The UNDP approach to sustainable recovery is guided by the recognition that capacities, activities and approaches designed on the ground as early as possible can mould recovery as an opportunity to initiate a process that transforms as it repairs. Disaster risk reduction and the promotion of development that is participatory and equitable are at the heart of the sustainability sought in any sound recovery programme. Considering the recurrent nature of many natural hazards, capacity building should always guide recovery actions, even in ad-hoc interventions.

The following principles attempt to guide the process so that, while addressing the most pressing needs of the affected population, all opportunities for change are seized to achieve the desired sustainability of the recovery effort.

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

The integration of risk reduction concerns into all aspects and proposals of the redevelopment process is essential to achieve the overarching goal of sustainable recovery. A small window of opportunity usually exists for this integration to take place in the aftermath of a major disaster, in several fronts. Although all of the actions and principles indicated in this paper eventually contribute to the mainstreaming of risk reduction in the recovery process, there are a few basic pre-requisites for this mainstreaming to occur successfully. Firstly the recovery process must be backed by an approved government policy, an enabling national system, the appropriate tools and the advocacy among all the actors including civil society.

The establishment of an integrated institutional framework for recovery can exercise a positive influence on the country's organisational setting for disaster risk reduction by demonstrating the effectiveness of inter-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder approaches. In setting the stage for effective mainstreaming this opportunity must be seized to :

- Strengthen national systems for disaster risk reduction, by undertaking a review of the system of organisational structures, mechanisms and processes, strategies, laws and regulations, resources and procedures at all levels of administration, in the light of their performance during the recent disaster.
- Review existing policy, or develop new policy as necessary. Promoting the establishment of a national recovery policy that is firmly entrenched in the existing national policy for disaster risk reduction. In the absence of an overarching risk reduction policy framework, strongly advocating for the endorsement of one that becomes part of the country's national sustainable development plans for all sectors and at all levels of government, i.e. local, regional and national.
- Ensure that appropriate information about disaster risk is available and is taken into consideration in all aspects of the decision making process and that appropriate measures to manage and reduce risks are included in recovery programming.

- Establish broad-based advocacy for risk management and disaster reduction as integral components of the country's future national and sectoral development planning.
- Develop specific projects to build capacities in the government and civil society to manage and reduce disaster risk.

2. Improving/maintaining coordination

The aftermath of a major disaster is frequently characterised by a multiplicity of actors, national and international, promoting and initiating recovery activities. Coordination and information sharing thus become even more essential to avoid duplications and gaps and to optimise the resources available for sustainable recovery.

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, donors and lending institutions, where priorities are defined and an adequate picture of who-is-doing-what-where is drawn and systematically updated.

Ideally, this should constitute a platform for the strong, inter-sectoral coordination required to facilitate the coordination of a large number of initiatives at the local, regional and national scales, allowing multiple stakeholders to work together with synergy.

National consultation mechanisms and priority determination activities such as a national workshop, contribute to building consensus around recovery priorities, roles, responsibilities and resources.

3. Promoting participatory approaches and decentralised planning and programming for recovery

Recovery programming must be made on the basis of a sound, participatory assessment of needs and capacities of the affected population, so that the local initiative, resources and capacities are fully understood and utilised. It must be demand driven and designed to reach the most vulnerable population.

The risk assessment exercise described in (4) below becomes crucial for determining the level and causes of vulnerability that should be addressed with the recovery endeavours.

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 of national level long-term reconstruction planning, enabling recovery activities to begin as early as possible after the disaster.

4. Enhancing safety standards and integrating risk reduction in reconstruction and development

All recovery programmes and proposals must aim at improving safety standards and reducing risk, avoiding the danger of rebuilding previous vulnerabilities or creating new risks. This brings the need for risk assessment to the forefront of recovery planning requirements. As a minimum, the following should be ensured:

- All recovery proposals are supported by multi-hazard risk assessment information, to the maximum extent possible. 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.

- Damage assessment includes diagnostics of underlying causes of damage and failure
- Establish consensual criteria on acceptable levels of risk

5. Improving the living conditions of the affected communities and sectors

Recovery activities should contribute to improving the living conditions of the affected communities and sectors through the revival of production (agriculture, industry), trade and services, and the creation of income-generation/employment opportunities. The goal should go beyond the simple restoration of pre-disaster levels, but aim towards the creation of more sustainable livelihoods for the population.

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

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.

In the aftermath of a major disaster, the following areas may be considered for targeted capacity building activities:

- Strengthening local level capacities for disaster risk management, including the formulation/revision of national disaster preparedness plans which include recovery planning arrangements, hazard and risk mapping, training and simulation exercises.
- The development of early warning capacities, particularly at the local level, integrated with national and regional monitoring and weather forecasting systems
- Risk, vulnerability and capacity assessment tools for incorporation into the decision making process.
- General training and human resource development activities for risk reduction.

7. Taking advantage of ongoing initiatives

The recovery process represents an opportunity to review on-going development initiatives and re-orient as necessary and feasible in order 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.

8. Gender sensitivity

Gender inequality indirectly affects entire communities. The recovery process is an opportunity to reduce the vulnerability of social groups and increase gender equality. Particular attention should be paid in the assessment, planning and programming stages for recovery, to the vital role that women play as community members and leaders, their

contribution to the livelihoods sector especially through the informal channels 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 process facilitating the contribution of this group to the economic recuperation and social reconstruction process.

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 development 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.

V. Planning for Recovery

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

The overall objectives of a recovery framework are:

- To organise the country's response and approach
- To review and stock-take regarding the recovery needs to get the community/country back on track towards sustainable development;
- To secure wide support, including financial and technical resources;
- To develop a partnership strategy for implementation 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. It must combine long-term approaches with strategic, short- and medium-term interventions

Basic steps to launch the recovery planning process are:

- Defining the institutional framework and mechanisms to design, coordinate, implement and monitor the recovery programmes, ideally based on existing institutions and mechanisms (*See desirable characteristics in IV-1, 2 and 3 above and VI below*)
- Defining and endorsing a national recovery policy which clearly outlines the principles and desires of the country to guide all recovery activities. (*See IV-1 above*)

- Formulating the recovery framework, identifying needs, priorities and capacities
- Developing a recovery plan, detailing general and sectoral programmatic requirements
- Defining a partnership strategy for implementation
- Determining implementation capacity and identifying surge capacity needs and potential sources.

Some sectors typically addressed in a recovery framework are:

1. Rehabilitation/recovery of built environment and local infrastructure

Rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure should be seen as an opportunity to reduce the development deficit, to fulfil unmet needs and development objectives and to reduce disaster risk. Recovery activities may include focus on:

2. Employment and livelihoods

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

- Agriculture and livestock production, through the provision of seeds, tools, micro-credits, and other means
- Small business through the provision of credits or other means
- Recovery of and improvement of productive social infrastructure such as roads, markets, etc. which will support the economic activities
- 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.
- Consideration of short-term gender sensitive alternative employment generation to compensate lost livelihoods in the immediate post-disaster period.

3. Primary infrastructure and lifeline facilities

The rapid rehabilitation of primary infrastructure such as primary roads, bridges, water supply and sanitation systems, primary power generation and distribution facilities, irrigation and agricultural facilities, health, education and other social 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.

4. 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. Several environmental restoration activities are, by their nature, significant contributors to reducing disaster risk and must be seriously taken into consideration in recovery planning. Some of these include cleaning of watersheds and reforestation programmes.

5. Housing

Housing rehabilitation/reconstruction is a key element in closing the gap between emergency relief and sustainable recovery. It restores people's sense of normalcy and is a first step towards reactivating the productive economy. 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:

- Land and property issues
- Financing
- Regulatory framework and institutional capacity building
- Labour and implementation
- Technology
- Architectural design
- Construction materials
- Building codes and practices
- Improving safety standards by locating in low risk areas.

6. 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 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
- 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
- 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.

- Appropriate mechanisms should be put in place to ensure secure land and housing tenure.

VI. Setting-up appropriate institutional arrangements

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:

- Definition of recovery/development policies, priorities and strategic guidelines
- Formulation/implementation/oversight of recovery proposals
- Monitoring of progress
- Establishing a permanent dialogue and consensus space with civil society, opposition parties, private sector, international cooperation agencies, donors and lending agencies
- 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:

- 1) Any new structure should be very small, with clear roles and responsibilities shared politically and socially
- 2) It should be inserted in the current government structure and using existing capacities
- 3) An exit or assimilation strategy should be defined from the start, to allow the smooth transition between recovery, reconstruction and development
- 4) 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
- 5) Ad-hoc recovery bodies should be focused on developing coordination, monitoring and evaluation functions. Recovery programmes should be implemented through line ministries and public agencies, although with faster mechanisms.
- 6) The governing body should include cabinet members, line ministries and representatives of political stakeholders
- 7) 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.

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.

In the aftermath of a major disaster, implementation capacity is an issue to be considered when planning for recovery. The actual capacity levels, the needs for surge capacity and the potential sources, must be defined very early in the process. The government of the affected countries may wish to consider arrangements for the provision of surge capacity from regional political mechanisms.