

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Disaster Prone Asia-Pacific Region



Asia and the Pacific Region, Prone to Disasters

A large number of countries in Asia and the Pacific region are prone to disasters of various kinds. The impact of disasters on people in terms of loss of life, assets and impediment to development is colossal. Common forms of disasters are earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, floods, land/mud slides, and cyclones. In the recent past, the scale of destruction of disasters had been massive due to the intensity and to lack of preparedness. During the last decade, UN-HABITAT, ROAP has responded to the calls by Governments and Donors to assist people in reconstruction following conflicts and disasters. This has, on the one hand given UN-HABITAT an opportunity to assist the affected people rebuild their lives rapidly, whilst on the other hand, a position to advocate for progressive policies on reconstruction and recovery.

### 1.2 ROAP's Response

During the last decade ROAP has been involved in post conflict and post-disaster recovery projects in several countries in Asia. In the implementation of these projects, the underline principle has been to place the affected people at the center of the process. This means mobilizing the affected to take decisions on their recovery and supporting them. UN-HABITAT, ROAP strongly believes that unleashing the potential of the people is the only way in which all the affected people can recover in a short time. People have been able to cope with extreme difficulties and have demonstrated a relentless ability to improve their lives in the face of extreme circumstances. In the post conflict and post-disaster scenario, their ingenuity and creativity need to be directed for the rebuilding of their lives and

their physical assets.

What are the keys to unlocking this huge potential? Firstly, organise the people to gain confidence to cross the psychological threshold, secondly, empowerment through mobilization, thirdly security; a place to call their own, fourthly some form of financial assistance to get them started, lastly, technical advice to build better housing. These will complete a cycle of support to the people to rebuild their lives and their homes. The feeling of achievement, pride, dignity and security will elevate the families to a level higher than their pre-conflict or pre-disaster existence.

### 1.3 Principles

The following key principles form the basis of the recovery strategy:

- **Respect** the primacy of the needs of the families
- **Recognise** people's organizations; their capacities, strengthen mutual respect and dialogue
- **Ensure** security, protection, right to a "place to live"
- **Responsibility** for recovery rests with the Families and Communities
- **Cultivate** a spirit of peace-building and community cohesiveness
- **Devolve** decision-making to the point

of action

- **Support** of the authorities is essential for people to take recovery into their own hands
- **Generate** a process that would allow every family in need to build a basic secure home, which can be improved incrementally over time
- **Design** the recovery investment to remain with the community as far as possible

### 1.4 Seamless Recovery

Recovery literally means getting people back on their feet and enabling them to rebuild their lives. Rebuilding lives involves overcoming trauma, rebuilding their shelter, securing income-earning opportunities, getting back to jobs, getting children back to school and a host of other essential things.

Seamless recovery has NO transition. Relief and recovery start at the same time on DAY ONE. It is NOT about transition from one static phase to another. It is recovery starting from the very beginning along with supply of relief. Relief in the form of food, clothing, blankets, lamps, heating material and water has to be supplied while at the same time organizing people to rebuild their lives. Seamlessness is generated by collapsing the two processes into one.

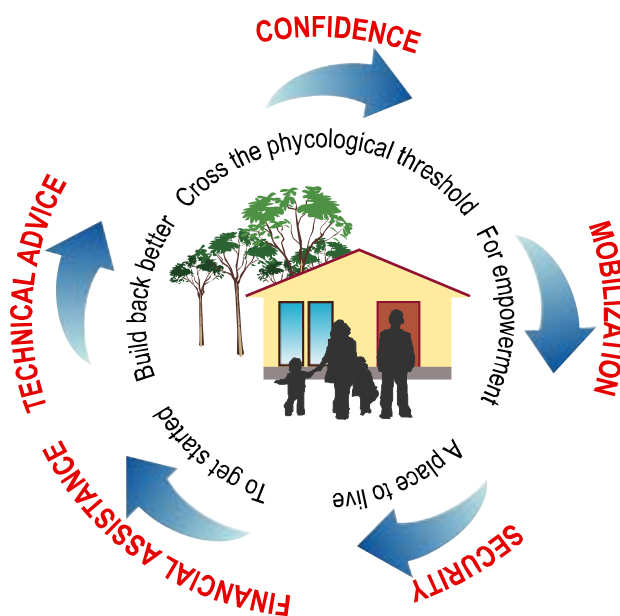


Fig. 1.1 Support Cycle

**Box 1.1 Emergency Shelter (Pakistan)**

UN-HABITAT advocated for culturally and environmentally friendly earthquake transitional shelters made from materials that are portable and reusable for permanent structures. The timber used in the shelter is salvaged from destroyed houses. UN-HABITAT provided the polypropylene sacks, the roof materials and toolkits.

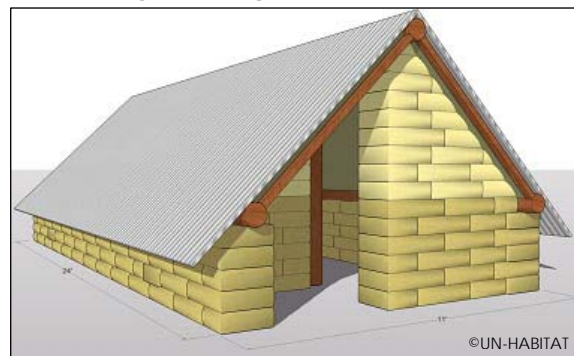
The shelter design, not only has proven to be popular but durable in the harsh mountain conditions. The shelters have easily withstood the winter and severe monsoon rains and remain habitable for at least a few more years, if necessary. When no longer needed for human habitation, it can easily be converted into animal shelter or storage for fodder, crops or other commodities. The design can be easily adapted for use in similar geographical settings in post-disaster or post conflict situations. The average floor dimensions of the shelter are 15 ft in length and 11ft in width, and take 15 person days to construct.

Providing building assistance is not only important in providing durable shelters for people but is has proven to be an effective way to disseminate information on earthquake resistant building techniques and explain why damage in the earthquake affected area was so severe.

The most important characteristic of seamlessness is placing the affected people at the centre of the process starting with relief management in the camps or in their own settlements.

Housing reconstruction in seamless recovery starts with erecting a room on the land that the family owns or a new land that has been allocated as the case may be. Materials package for emergency shelter is generally provided by humanitarian agencies. In the seamless process it is important that the materials package should consist of materials that can be reused in the permanent house. Families will build the shelter or a room of the old house with the materials provided and whatever material they can salvage from the destroyed house. In determining the materials package it is important to discuss with the families what would be most appropriate. As far as possible prefabricated temporary shelters have to be avoided. Engagement of the family in the reconstruction process, immediately after a disaster will help the family, get over the trauma of the disaster.

In most countries of the region, corrugated galvanized iron sheets are a common form of roofing although it is not suitable for



Emergency Shelter in Earthquake Affected Areas in Pakistan

climates. However, it is quick and easy to erect and can be reused for different purposes. Timber sawn in standard sizes can always be reused. The logistics of supplying large quantities of CGI sheets and timber on the first few days of a disaster may become a challenge. In such a situation the local market should be tapped and the entrepreneurs are likely to respond to the demand quickly. This was apparent in the earthquake-affected area of Pakistan. Transition tented camps which become permanent is a common site in conflict and disaster affected countries. Creating transit camps should be considered as a last resort.

Seamless recovery is an incremental process where families can go on adding to the room that they started with. A cash grant to build a basic house as soon as possible has proved to be an effective mechanism in the recovery process. The grant can come from the Government or donors. It should be sufficient to build a basic permanent house and it should be standardized depending on the degree of damages to the house. A critical factor at this stage is the technical assistance to build back better. The issues in providing this technical assistance are how to build an earthquake resistant house with local materials? What precautions are built into withstand a tsunami or a typhoon? What measures to be taken to mitigate damage from floods?

In addition to ensuring building back better, technical advice is necessary for families to build a basic house to an acceptable standard with the resources they have. At the time of a massive reconstruction programme, the Government agencies may not be able to provide intensive technical assistance to families with the human resources available. This is an area where external agencies can contribute to implement the recovery programme rapidly.

Local authorities therefore have to be guided with the right approaches and consistent policies in recovery.

### **1.5 Institutional Arrangements**

Many countries in the region have established some form of Government entity for disaster management and response. They are usually in the form of dedicated Ministries, Government Departments or dedicated authorities. As the mandated United Nations agency for reconstruction, it is incumbent upon UN-HABITAT to assist the Government entity at a time of disaster. The assistance has to come in the form of helping the Government in carrying out the immediate damage assessment, coordination of external assistance and advocating the right policies for recovery.

While assisting the Government at the national level, UN-HABITAT has the responsibility to assist the affected families in recovery. Families have to be mobilized on a path to recover from day one. Community Development Councils (CDCs) will be the central body at the community level where recovery action will take place. Support to the communities in their efforts to recover has to come from the local authorities and humanitarian organizations. In each country the central and local government structure at the local level differs. UN-HABITAT has to work with the local government structure that closest to the community. Past experiences show that Governments have a tendency to establish powerful centralized authority under the President or the Prime Minister when confronted with a major disaster. Centralising decision making at the highest level, tends to strangle the responsiveness of peripheral and local governments. One of the most important principles to follow in a disaster situation is to devolve the decision making to the point of action.