

**RETHINKING  
EMERGENCIES**

**SUSTAINABLE RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION -  
SYNOPSIS FROM WORLD URBAN FORUM II & III**

**FROM CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK  
TO OPERATIONAL REALITY**



**UN-HABITAT**

## FROM CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO OPERATIONAL REALITY

### Introduction

1. For more than 10 years, UN-HABITAT has been operating in humanitarian and crisis situations, supporting efforts by national governments, local authorities and civil society to strengthen their capacities to manage and recover from human-made and natural disasters and mitigate future disasters. Having acknowledged the discontinuity within the international aid community between the short-term humanitarian imperative and longer-term reconstruction and development priorities, UN-HABITAT has offered its own specific perspectives on bridging this divide.

2. Conceptually, disaster management and reconstruction encompass many dimensions: exploring the roles of various institutions at civic, municipal, national and international levels, reducing the impacts of natural and human-caused disasters, and assisting in the sustainable reconstruction of settlements following disaster. The UN-HABITAT Disaster Management Programme focuses on the agency's normative responsibilities, based on its experiences in the field, alliances with key partners and dialogue, with a view to refining and better defining the agency's contribution to humanitarian response and vulnerability reduction.

3. When hazards turn into disasters, or a struggle for political and economic control turns into an armed conflict, it is always human settlements, people and property that are worst hit. The cornerstone of UN-HABITAT's strategy is to leverage investment in the emergency and recovery phases into the longer term development of human settlements. Through UN-HABITAT participation at the earliest stages, we ensure that human settlements interventions, either in the immediate emergency or the transition/recovery phases, are linked to longer-term development strategies in disaster-hit countries.

4. Paradoxically, disaster can also be an opportunity. Recovery phases offer a unique chance to revisit past practices and rewrite those policies affecting future development in disaster-prone areas. A range of mitigation measures can be laid out during recovery to promote vulnerability reduction. Beyond the physical aspects of rehabilitation, the recovery period also offers an opportunity for society at large to strengthen local organizational capacities and to promote networks, awareness and political mechanisms that will facilitate economic, social and physical development long after a disaster – that is, an opportunity for a community to build its own sustainability.

5. UN-HABITAT is indeed in a strong position to act in a technical advisory function in two major areas: (1) the development of local capacities for disaster management and mitigation, and (2) supporting the capacities of external bodies to provide operational responses in a sustainable development perspective. In recognition of this contribution, in April 2004 UN-HABITAT

was invited to outline before the UN Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) its own perspectives on, and support to, international interventions in the area of shelter and human settlements.

6. UN-HABITAT will use its operational experience to generate normative schemes to be recycled into future disaster response, including vulnerability reduction, preparedness and mitigation in general. UN-HABITAT will also continue to draw on practical experiences and any relevant lessons with a view to continuous learning, both internally as well as in support of sister agencies and humanitarian bodies. These normative schemes will be integrated in future response strategies for human settlements in crisis.

7. Through its involvement from the outset of a crisis as a supporting institutional partner in reconstruction, shelter, infrastructure and governance, UN-HABITAT is in a crucial position to assist humanitarian agencies, local and national governments and, most importantly, the affected and most vulnerable communities. Thanks to this approach, the agency's recent emergency response activities have made their mark on the affected countries, and UN-HABITAT has amply demonstrated that short-term humanitarian support to human settlements in crisis can and should promote and facilitate longer-term benefits while reducing future risks.

### The process

8. In response to the deliberations of the 19<sup>th</sup> session of its Governing Council in 2003, and its recommendation for a report on the theme '*Post-conflict, natural and human-made disasters assessment and reconstruction*' UN-HABITAT has devised a conceptual framework entitled '*Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction*' (SRR). This concept, as introduced in a pre-session document (HSP/GC/20/5), is derived from key elements of the Habitat Agenda as well as from the Agency's experience, methodologies and principles of involvement in support of human settlements in crisis.

9. The concept has been developed through a consultative process, including a critical review and discussion of the basic elements with UN-HABITAT's partners and colleagues during the second (2004) and third (2006) sessions of the World Urban Forum.

10. The Networking Event entitled '*Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction – Turning discussions into operational reality*' during World Urban Forum III explored a range of issues, including land administration in post-conflict environments, the importance of integrating communities and women in particular, as well as global issues pertaining to the mitigation of risk and vulnerability. The networking event maintained the momentum built up at WUF II in 2004 and at the April 2005 UN-

HABITAT Governing Council (GC), where the focus shifted to the practicalities of the conceptual framework and the guiding principle of Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction. The event highlighted good practices and lessons learned from the field, as part of a wider effort to test and refine the relevance of the conceptual SRR framework. This process also supports the formal commitment to develop a strategic UN-HABITAT Policy on human settlements in crisis, as requested by the 20<sup>th</sup> session of the GC (Res. HSP/GC/20/17).

11. For the way forward, our hope is to obtain a commitment from partners and colleagues to work collectively with UN-HABITAT and ensure the implementation of sustainable recovery both in the prevention of, and in response to, crises in human settlements.

### The approach

12. The changing nature of conflict and natural disasters calls for a fresh vision of traditional approaches to recovery assistance. Natural and human-caused emergencies are increasing in regularity, and perhaps more importantly, their impacts on populations and human settlements are rising alarmingly. Coupled with cycles of dependency and shortage of resources, this evolution points to a need to develop innovative approaches and re-examine traditional policies on relief, recovery and mitigation assistance.

13. The international community is performing an ever-widening range of recovery and rehabilitation functions. This exacerbates the three fundamental challenges of crisis management and recovery, namely, (1) how to bridge the gaps that have repeatedly emerged between emergency recovery and sustainable development efforts, (2) how to provide national and local government, civil society and business organizations with practical strategies to mitigate and recover from crises, and (3) preventing any relapse into crisis. It is equally critical to build the capacity of national and international aid agencies to deliver rapid response services that integrate a longer term developmental strategy. Based on these changing dynamics in international assistance, it is clear that a new approach is required. Through analysis of these needs, the concept of sustainable relief and reconstruction (SRR) has emerged.

### Disaster mitigation - building a culture of prevention

14. Mitigation is the first step in any comprehensive approach to disaster management. Communities are often unaware of the hazards they face; they do not put much trust in mitigation strategies, and rely heavily upon emergency responses from others when disaster strikes. Sustainable relief and reconstruction encompass all the phases in disaster management, from risk reduction to response, with a view to improving communities' and governments' capacities to prevent and mitigate such events and reduce their needs in the response phase. The concepts of sustainability and sustainable development provide the framework where vulnerability reduction plans can be integrated in disaster recovery in the most effective way. Sustainable development of human settlements does not necessarily prevent

disasters, but it should mitigate their impact. Disaster mitigation and management must look beyond the hazards alone to consider the prevailing conditions of vulnerability. It is the social, cultural, economic and political settings of a country that define the degree of vulnerability or resilience of its people and communities.

15. A better understanding of, and emphasis on, capacity development during mitigation will improve the ability of local bodies – civil society, local and national government – to respond effectively to disasters. The cornerstone of the implementation strategy is to build a “culture of prevention” among society at large. Such a culture will not only save lives, but will also enhance the economic and social fabric, as efforts are made with cities and civil society to reduce vulnerability to natural and human-caused disasters, as well as to provide sustainable solutions for the re-construction of war-torn and post-crisis societies. Disaster management and mitigation, therefore, must become an integral part of any on-going plans for development and poverty reduction.

16. It is essential that a community as a whole be involved in developing and implementing mitigation and sustainable development programmes. Civil empowerment is a fundamental complement to any mitigation exercise undertaken within cities or by civil society. Short of a common understanding of the need for mitigation measures, short of active civil society involvement in execution, and of a community's sense of ownership, such measures stand a slim chance of mitigating disasters or resolving conflicts.

### Crisis response - meeting the long-term needs of the many, while supporting the emergency needs of the few

17. When conflicts occur or hazards turn into disasters, human settlements – both the people and property – are the most affected. Therefore, any recovery process, irrespective of its short- or long-term planning horizon, and beyond meeting urgent human needs, must consider the physical infrastructure and human settlements problems that arise, including adequate shelter for all and the sustainable development of human settlements. In many post-crisis situations, experience has shown that interventions are most effective when they are designed to begin simultaneously; consideration of the long-term impacts of short-term interventions can add value to the latter, and depth to the former. A process of long-term reconstruction and economic recovery should, therefore, begin alongside post-emergency actions aimed at restoring normality for those affected populations returning home or settling in new locations. In this manner, strategic investment during the emergency and relief stages can contribute significantly to building the foundations for development.

18. Post-crisis responses by national governments, bilateral aid agencies, NGOs and UN agencies have been characterized by rapid rehabilitation projects including water and sanitation, housing, irrigation, food-security and health. These tend to be *ad hoc*, palliative and separate from the overall development objectives of disaster-hit countries. Piecemeal efforts that are not

connected with a long-term development strategy can not only worsen precarious social conditions as they create dependency on aid, but are also a waste of financial and human resources for the sake of short-sighted emergency relief plans. *Humanitarian* agencies can no longer operate in isolation; instead, they require active participation from *development* agencies. The real challenge lies in broadening the respective purviews of humanitarian and developmental bodies and in bringing them together in a shared awareness of the practical requirements of sustainable recovery

19. The recovery phase can also offer a unique opportunity to revisit past practices and rewrite policies affecting future development in disaster-prone areas. A range of mitigation measures, for example, can be introduced during recovery to promote vulnerability reduction, such as land-use, environmental and community planning, improving building codes and construction regulations. Beyond the physical aspects of rehabilitation, the recovery period also offers an opportunity for society at large to strengthen local organizational capacities, and to promote networks, awareness and those political mechanisms that will facilitate economic, social and physical development long after a disaster – that is, for a community to build its own sustainability.

#### The aim

*‘Ensuring the development, in line with the principles of sustainable human settlements, of a disaster-resistant environment for residents of cities, towns and villages to live, work and invest in’.*

20. Together with the guiding principles developed as part of the broader framework, UN-HABITAT’s conceptual framework, *Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction*, provides a robust framework for action. The concept and principles represent a substantive and achievable set of objectives, culminating in the twin goals of (1) ensuring that investments in the emergency and recovery phases are leveraged for longer term impacts, and (2) integrating the essential elements of disaster risk reduction in the process. The development of guiding principles makes it possible to articulate the basic philosophy which the bodies involved must adopt if relief and reconstruction assistance is to have a positive effect on the sustainable and equal development of human settlements in post-conflict and disaster environments. The principles establish important baselines and the priority areas of focus considered necessary for truly sustainable relief and reconstruction functions.

21. For sustainable recovery to be achieved, a shift is in order in the way we think about relief, reconstruction and development at all levels. These guiding principles offer a realistic, forward thinking approach to crisis recovery. Developing these guidelines on sustainable relief and reconstruction is the first step in turning recent discussions and debates into operational realities. However, for this to be truly effective, commitment must be sought from international agencies, governments (local and national) and civil society on these guidelines and the direction of change that they represent.

22. It has been our objective to establish a set of principles for humanitarian action in a human settlements context. The next vital step is that these guidelines are translated into action at all levels.

23. The 16 Guiding Principles for Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction (SRR) are the following:

- a. Permanent links between emergency relief and reconstruction and the transitional phase of development are established
- b. Local government capacities must be developed as necessary if these authorities are to operate as active partners in the process.
- c. Building and mobilising capacities across all levels and stakeholders must be a priority from the earliest stages and throughout the process, from relief and reconstruction to recovery and development.
- d. Participatory planning and inclusive decision-making ensure involvement of all stakeholders, and women in particular, in all planning and implementation functions.
- e. Developing productive economic activities in the earliest stages of recovery, to assist consolidation of peace and security.
- f. Facilitation of safety and security for affected populations, as a critical pre-condition for any humanitarian or development action.
- g. Developing broad-based and long-term reconstruction and shelter strategies from the earliest stages, ensuring more effective use of emergency resources.
- h. Ensuring the protection of the land and property rights of affected populations, and developing longer-term solutions for land and property dispute resolution, in order to reduce the potential for (further) conflict.
- i. Entrenching vulnerability reduction and disaster management into existing national and local development and poverty reduction plans.
- j. Re-directing the focus on disaster risk reduction and mitigation, rather than preparedness and response - related strategies in the human settlements context.
- k. Operating within a human rights framework, particularly in terms of land rights and security of tenure, and women’s equal rights.
- l. The creation of strategic partnerships and alliances at all levels, as part of a ‘relief- reconstruction–development’ continuum.
- m. Decentralisation of responsibilities for the prevention of, and recovery from, crises in human settlements is essential to ensure appropriate, balanced and sustainable reductions in vulnerability and risk.

- n. Building a culture of prevention entails a cross-sector, multi-dimensional approach integrating participatory risk analysis, programme implementation and development of policy and legal frameworks with all stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, local and national government and international bodies, all in a gendered and comprehensive process.
  - o. Effective peace-building requires the following five elements: (1) clear and understandable legal and regulatory frameworks, (2) effective and impartial land and property administration, (3) a functional interface between local government and the citizenry, in a dialogue that builds trust and commitment (with capacity building where essential), (4) a common vision, and (5) coordination of international institutions and bodies.
  - p. Since crises, and in particular conflicts, virtually always cause population displacements, the very early stages of recovery must include sustainable strategies that integrate rights-based approaches to shelter, tenure, and protection of the most vulnerable segments of a community.
- b. Integration of mitigation and vulnerability reduction in sustainable development and recovery.
  - c. Creating appropriate conditions in human settlements conditions to facilitate the transition from emergency to sustainable development
  - d. From the earliest stages and throughout the process, building and mobilising capacities at all levels, across all sectors and stakeholders must be a priority.

### Consultations with partners

27. The concept and principles have been the subject of scrutiny, assessment, and subsequent shaping with our partners; capitalizing on their advice, the following sections introduce some elaborated elements and practical recommendations to guide us as we devise our future programming and implementation.

28. The objective of the consultative Networking Events in both sessions of the World Urban Forum has been to draw together UN-HABITAT's partners in informal, provocative sessions concentrating on both the conceptual framework and the guiding principles while exploring fresh operational approaches for implementation and sustainable support. Consultations with partners have brought best practice and lessons learned from the field, as part of wider efforts to define and refine the conceptual SRR framework to make it more amenable to sustainable implementation.

29. The seven major functions of Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction (SRR) are the following:

- a. Disaster mitigation and vulnerability reduction
- b. Land and property administration
- c. Longer-term shelter strategies
- d. Economic recovery
- e. Participation and good governance
- f. Partnerships
- g. Capacity building

### The action

*'Preventing man-made disasters... and reducing the impacts of natural disasters and other emergencies on human settlements, inter alia, through appropriate planning mechanisms and resources for rapid, people-centred responses that promote a smooth transition from relief, through rehabilitation, to reconstruction to development...'*<sup>21</sup>

24. Further discussion and debate is necessary to review the proposed concept, the principles and their implementation. How can guiding principles become an operational reality? Is this the right starting place? Who becomes the custodian of the principles and how does one apply them? Are the issues of vulnerability reduction and sustainable disaster management well integrated in human settlements development as well as in national and local policies and actions?

25. The 16 SRR principles will enable the bodies and institutions involved to ensure the sustainable nature of any assistance and intervention they provide. Serious consideration of these aspects during planning and decision-making can help communities, authorities and support agencies to realize that the decisions they make during this earliest stage of recovery will have long-term impacts on the success and sustainability of their joint efforts.

26. This conceptual shift must be backed up by fresh practical approaches from international agencies, governments, and communities. Sustainable recovery in human settlements is a process that combines the following four elements;

- a. Bridging the gap between emergency relief and sustainable development.

### Disaster mitigation and vulnerability reduction

30. Deficient urban management, inadequate planning and construction, unregulated population densities, exploitation of the environment, dependency on inadequate infrastructure and services, 'absent' or incompetent local governments and institutions: all contribute to increased vulnerability. Disaster results from a combination of natural hazards with an accumulation of the above-mentioned factors. Sadly, it is only *after* the occurrence of a disaster that awareness is raised of the importance of reducing vulnerability.

31. The irony is that when disaster strikes, it provides an opportunity to assess the extent of an area's vulnerability and to take a fresh look at potential defences during the recovery and reconstruction stages, addressing prior shortfalls both within and around human settlements. In any case recovery efforts, as supported by the international community, must integrate risk reduction to ensure that reconstruction takes place wherever possible in safer locations, according to robust building codes and safety standards. Particular attention must be paid to schools, hospitals and other critical infrastructure needs, as well as environmental vulnerabilities. Agencies, companies and those professionals involved in reconstruction work must be trained/ advised to understand how recovery efforts can help reduce vulnerabilities and make communities more resilient to disasters.

32. Building a 'culture of prevention' at all levels of society is a challenge that often is not met until a disaster has wreaked devastation. However, international aid bodies, governments, the media, and communities, together in partnership can and should use every opportunity, including post-disaster recovery programmes, to launch awareness campaigns to create a culture of prevention, and ensure that those most vulnerable do not remain that way indefinitely.

#### 33. *Challenges*

- a. Increasing investment in disaster risk reduction -- redirecting priorities from visible and short-term development projects to more abstract, long-term potential threats and risks. Finance and planning authorities must also be made aware of the importance of investing in disaster-resilient interventions as a cost-effective alternative to post-crisis reconstruction.
- b. Addressing the root causes of disasters – inadequate development practices increase the vulnerability of communities, and pre-disaster risk reduction must be integrated in all development planning.
- c. Translating technical knowledge into action -- despite extensive knowledge on hazards and risks, efforts to prepare cities and people for their worst impacts remain inadequate.

- d. Coordination – professionals are often fragmented, working inside institutional boundaries. Risk reduction and mitigation are a cross-cutting issue, requiring coordination mechanisms that bring a sufficiently wide group of stakeholders together.

#### 34. *SRR Guiding Principles*

- a. Include vulnerability reduction and disaster management in existing national and local development and poverty reduction plans.
- b. Re-direct the focus on disaster risk reduction and mitigation, rather than on preparedness and response-related strategies in the human settlements context.
- c. Building a culture of prevention entails a cross-sector, multi-dimensional approach integrating participatory analysis of risk, implementation of programmes, and development of policy and legal frameworks with all stakeholders (including civil society, the private sector, local and national government and international institutions) in a gendered and comprehensive process.

#### 35. *Additional recommendations for the Guiding Principles*

- a. Disaster risk reduction is everybody's business, being an integral part of everyday life. Mitigation is not only a responsibility for experts and disaster managers, as all segments of society must be involved. Emphasis on public awareness is required to create proper behaviour with long-term goals in mind, specifically with regard to children as future decision-makers.
- b. The SRR Guiding Principles should place more emphasis on the pre-disaster phase and support inclusion of risk reduction considerations into development planning.
- c. The recommendations in the Hyogo Framework for Action are acknowledged as part the Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction (SRR) framework.

### Land and property administration

36. One of the major threats to stability in a post-disaster context has to do with housing, land and property rights as part of the reconciliation and reconstruction process. Access to land and water resources can be a fresh cause of conflict following disaster- or war-related displacement. With high potential for destruction and looting of property, and against a background of secondary occupation of both residential and agricultural land and housing, combined with disintegration of the institutions governing and protecting land and property rights, then further conflict, or the undermining of the peace process, is likely, as displaced populations return to re-occupy their homes, farms and properties.

37. Of the numerous housing, land and property (HLP) challenges arising in the aftermath of disaster and conflict, demands for restitution and compensation are on the increase. The number of restitution mechanisms addressing the rights of displaced persons to return to their original homes and lands has increased considerably in recent years, and these developments have slowly been matched by practical action in the field.

38. Protecting housing, land and property rights is always a challenging enterprise, as recent attempts have clearly shown. In the past two years alone, structural restitution problems requiring resolution arose following the 2004 Asian tsunami in several countries (most notably Sri Lanka and Indonesia), the 2005 floods in New Orleans (USA), the 2005 Asian earthquake (Pakistan) and a number of other disasters. With regard to conflict situations, efforts to solve housing, land and property issues arose during the same period in Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda, while contingency planning work continues in a number of other countries where conflict has yet to come to an end, but where restitution issues loom large over any eventual peace arrangements.

39. Whilst UN-HABITAT, through its Global Campaign for Secure Tenure, has gained considerable expertise, the number of experts available worldwide is alarmingly low, leaving ample scope for capacity-building and coordination. Furthermore, the issue remains relatively low on the humanitarian and donor agendas, in spite of repeated threats to sustainable peace, as well as of displacement away from disaster areas for indeterminate periods and looming conflicts over land and property rights,.

#### 40. *Challenges*

- a. Inadequate financial and human resources in field operations to match the capacity required for operational credibility and delivery.
- b. Lack of political commitment at both local and international levels remains a fundamental challenge to any attempts to secure housing, land and property rights.
- c. The scale and scope of HLP issues may dampen any enthusiasm for resource allocation, together with the occasionally long delays required if lost rights are to be addressed adequately.

#### 41. *SRR guiding principles*

- a. Ensuring protection of the land and property rights of affected populations, and developing longer-term solutions for land and property dispute resolution in order to reduce potential for (further) conflict.
- b. Operating within a human rights framework, particularly with regard to land rights and security of tenure, and equal rights for women.

- c. Since crises, and in particular conflicts, virtually always cause displacements, the earliest stages of any recovery plan must include the deployment of sustainable strategies that feature rights-based approaches to shelter, tenure, and protection of the more vulnerable.

#### 42. *Additional recommendations for the Guiding Principles*

- a. A comprehensive global Housing, Land and Property Rights Policy must be adopted for implementation in post-conflict and post-disaster settings. Such a policy – which would take in *all* HLP issues, and not only restitution – would help prevent the largely *ad hoc* responses of the international community in both post-disaster and post-conflict field operations, as they address the wide range of HLP crises that invariably come about in such circumstances.
- b. Policy-makers must be given access to information on successful examples of past restitution programmes and how these worked in practice, in a bid to alleviate apprehensions concerning restitution.

#### **Longer-term shelter strategies**

43. Shelter is one of the more visible and immediate needs in post-crisis settings. However, providing shelter and infrastructure after a disaster or conflict is not as simple as counting the houses lost and building replacements. There are many other issues to consider in shelter reconstruction. Relief efforts are often focused on providing shelter quickly, without taking into account the impact of short-term shelter strategies. The format for rebuilding houses has often been cheap, easily transportable prefabricated housing, which can be quickly erected in complete disregard of local traditional styles. In the planning of projects dealing with shelter and infrastructure provision, it is vital to consider the long-term effects of shelter programmes.

44. Long-term shelter strategies do not just focus on development and implementation of realistic and permanent reconstruction for affected communities; they help rebuild community confidence and support structures for civic responsibility and urban governance through participatory planning and reconstruction.

45. Shelter issues are closely linked to mitigation aspects as well, particularly in disaster-prone areas. Development of disaster-resistant housing has a major role to play in any efforts to reduce vulnerability to natural catastrophes. Shelter issues in mitigation go beyond the structural aspect, though. Rights to ownership and security of tenure make an enormous difference to the development, management and maintenance of shelter, particularly in urban areas. When people have security where they live, they are better able to manage space, invest in safety and engage in activities that will reduce rather than increase their vulnerability.

46. *Challenges*

- a. Demand for speedy response continues to prevail over proper planning, detailed consultations, reviews of safety and environmental requirements, quality controls and opportunities for participatory work – i.e., over sustainable reconstruction.
- b. Permanent reconstruction often remains poorly co-ordinated, poorly managed and slow to get off the ground, particularly as local government capacity to plan and participate in recovery strategies is usually limited as a result of a disaster.
- c. Unmet demands for professional and impartial support to establish and restore property rights.
- d. Disaster recovery should be seen as an opportunity to make things better than before: ‘Build Back Better’, incorporating risk reduction elements in the process.
- e. Inflexible and short-term focused funding resources hinder any smooth and rapid transition to longer-term reconstruction and recovery.
- f. Regarding disaster survivors as passive victims awaiting the arrival of assistance can create a long-term legacy of dependency.

47. *SRR guiding principles*

- a. Permanent links between emergency relief-reconstruction and the transitional phase of development are established.
- b. Developing broad-based and long-term reconstruction and shelter strategies from the earliest stages, ensuring more effective use of emergency resources.
- c. Since crises, and in particular conflicts, virtually always cause population displacements, the earliest stages of any recovery plan must see the deployment of sustainable strategies integrating rights-based approaches to shelter, tenure and protection of those more vulnerable.

48. *Additional recommendations for the Guiding Principles*

- a. Raise awareness, among all those involved, of their respective roles, inter-dependence within the overall recovery system, and the long-term consequences of their actions
- b. Facilitate double accountability: upwards to international financial institutions, donors and the government, and downwards to the beneficiaries of assistance.
- c. Adopt demand-driven approaches with continual assessment and monitoring of changing needs and capacities, rather than a supply-driven, donor-oriented approach
- d. Adopt a development approach while supporting capacity improvement in all sectors and at all levels.

- e. Create a single point of overall responsibility in government, assigning a dedicated organization at the apex of political power and decision-making, with a clear mandate supported by appropriate legislation, adequate resources, direct links to all line ministries and knowledge of the dynamics of the disaster recovery process

**Economic recovery**

49. Natural and human-caused disasters destroy assets, infrastructure and livelihoods. Poverty and lack of resources increases vulnerability, weakens coping strategies and delays the recovery process. A vibrant local economy is one of the key elements in sustainable recovery and development, yet economic recovery is also recognized as one of the most difficult aspects of the process. Despite disasters, many communities have resources that can be tapped such as the availability of local building materials, the existence of a labour force, and most importantly the eagerness of local communities and the private sector to participate in the recovery process.

50. It is necessary to identify and exploit the potential within a community in order to use any skills or resources that are at hand. This not only makes the best use of limited external assistance, but also reduces the risk of external dependency.

51. This is also an important consideration for local organisations and governments, as redevelopment of economic potential must be a key priority. Re-establishing small-scale production in the stricken areas, creating employment opportunities for local entrepreneurs and the community — i.e., both affected and host communities — and reinforcing the local building sector can have a huge impact on the rebuilding of the economy from a very early stage in the programming. Encouragement of economic activities in a post-crisis situation is a crucial objective in the long-term context of development and rehabilitation.

52. *Challenges*

- a. Destruction of infrastructure, facilities and services hampers revitalization of economic activity.
- b. Decreased production and purchasing power, weakened institutional frameworks (legal and regulatory) for local economic development, such as judicial systems, business licensing, land allocations, etc.
- c. Lack of organizations and institutions specialized in local economy and labour skills development, i.e., micro-finance and credit services, vocational training and public employment programmes, etc.
- d. Lack of social capital and stable social structures and dynamics in post-crisis environments, i.e., mistrust, lack of confidence and resources.



53. *SRR guiding principles*

- a. Developing productive economic activities at the earliest stages of recovery to assist consolidation of peace and security.

54. *Additional recommendations for the Guiding Principles*

- a. Use local resources – both material and human – for recovery and reconstruction purposes.
- b. Strengthen local capacities to deliver responsive business and technical services to those production and other business sectors with growth potential (technical and business skills training and upgrading, institution/association capacity strengthening, transfer of appropriate technology, etc.), and support creative interim delivery of credit to the production sector, pending availability of micro-finance services.
- c. Strengthen the capacity of local institutions and a broad-based representation of economic stakeholders to establish, manage and develop a local economic development process.
- d. Assist local economic stakeholders to identify new and improved market opportunities.
- e. Rehabilitation of basic services and infrastructure is essential for revitalization of economic activity at any level.

**Public participation and good governance**

55. Cities are managed and communities interact at the local level. At no time is the opportunity for public involvement in planning and decision-making greater than when a community is faced with post-crisis recovery. Civil society plays a major role in disaster management, conflict prevention, reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction. The citizenry are much more than recipients of relief assistance, and must be viewed as such if development-focused relief and recovery programmes are to be successful. Civil society acts as an important channel for awareness raising and education, for the promotion of peace and reconciliation, and for the prevention and mitigation of conflicts and crises.

56. Empowerment of essential stakeholders in governance such as community-based organisations, volunteer groups and NGOs is important – empowered civil society can play an active role not only in planning and developing policies for risk reduction and sustainable recovery strategies, but also and particularly during implementation at the local level. It is crucial to address the issues at their root causes. In order to do so, assessing the vulnerability of communities to hazards and disasters is a major first step. Effective disaster risk assessment will identify what needs to be done to reduce the likelihood of a threat and to mitigate its impact.

57. Inclusive decision-making, and with particular regard to women, is a major element in any strategy looking to build consensus among different participants in the emergency (and

subsequent recovery) phase, ensuring active participation by affected populations, community groups, and local authorities. Ownership at the local level in response and recovery is important if these are to contribute to longer term development and to reduced vulnerability for the population. However, truly participatory involvement of all segments of a community is not simple. It is a process that requires substantive support to local governments, to strengthen technical and institutional capacities and in understanding the main principles of people's participation and good governance.

58. *Challenges*

- a. Most of the capacities created and resources invested in disaster management are lodged with professionals, who leave the area once their project is completed. Sustainable relief and reconstruction requires substantial investments in capacity building of local communities and processes that look beyond the project framework.
- b. Women's participation does not necessarily follow when there is a mandate for community participation. Women's contribution to disaster management is usually informal and invisible, and therefore goes unrecognized and under-resourced (if at all) in policies and programmes.
- c. Authorities lack the capacities required to facilitate consultative dialogue between private and public interests.

59. *SRR guiding principles*

- a. The capacities of local governments must be developed as necessary, if they are to operate as active partners in post-crisis recovery and reconstruction.
- b. Resort to participatory planning and inclusive decision-making, ensuring involvement of all stakeholders, and women in particular, in all planning and implementation functions.

60. *Additional recommendations for the Guiding Principles*

- a. Mobilize a critical mass of affected people to take on multiple roles and active leadership in rebuilding their communities and play active roles at all stages of disaster management.
- b. Gain greater understanding of communities as the key, multiple-role drivers: as planners, problem-solvers, information providers and in implementing and monitoring risk reduction and recovery initiatives.
- c. Strengthen the mandate for women's participation in disaster recovery and reconstruction, by making women's contributions visible, allocating them clear roles and responsibilities, and strengthening women's capacities at grassroots level to advance their specific priorities in risk reduction and recovery.

- d. Building mechanisms for dialogue with government, local authorities and civil society, strengthen accountability and build partnerships.

### Partnerships

61. The human settlements component is integral to post-crisis solutions, from refugee settlements planning to development of strengthened municipal and national institutional capacities, good governance and local economic revival.

62. However, in order to develop an integrated approach to sustainable rehabilitation of human settlements, limited resources must be better co-ordinated to achieve the maximum possible effect. The multi-sector and interdisciplinary nature of disaster reduction and response requires continuous interaction, co-operation and partnerships among related institutions and stakeholders to achieve the overall objectives of disaster mitigation and sustainable post-crisis recovery. Solutions to insure sustainable recovery are interwoven in such a manner that activities cannot be implemented in isolation.

63. Building strategic partnerships among all stakeholders; civil society, national/local governments, the private sector, the media and national/international support agencies is, therefore, a shared challenge and responsibility. In combination, this contributes to the development of a coherent framework for the sustainable recovery of human settlements in post-crisis situations.

### Capacity-building

64. Post-crisis activities provide unique opportunities for capacity-building among all the national and local stakeholders involved in the recovery process.

65. At the national level, this may include strengthening policy-making capacities and devising legal instruments for implementation of national vulnerability reduction plans that promote sustainable development. Municipal authorities can be introduced to the sustainable rehabilitation and recovery process, re-directing the focus from technical and conventional response actions towards inclusion of mitigation measures in disaster management plans, introducing proper land use planning and building regulations, protection of land and property rights, effective project management and improved governance, among others, all within the framework of a longer-term reconstruction strategy. In the course of this process, four major benefits accrue to local communities: (1) domestic professionals at various levels improve their technical and managerial skills and know-how; (2) civil society and communities are empowered through active participation in recovery efforts and the development of a self-sustaining process; (3) local small businesses, building contractors and organizations have an opportunity to grow and gain experience; and (4) individuals, and women in particular, can be trained in income-generating activities in the housing and infrastructure sector.

### Conclusion

66. Together with the UN-HABITAT Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction (SRR) principles, the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative, the Hyogo Framework for Action as well as the International Recovery Platform all confirm the importance for governments of joining forces with both humanitarian and development bodies in order to bring forward sound and sustainable post-crisis recovery. Unfortunately, such good practice all-too often ends up overlooked when supporting institutions are faced with pressure to deliver short-term, visible, quick-fix recovery solutions, by contrast with sustainable recovery which takes at least several months.

67. Consultations with partners, including during the two above-mentioned sessions of the World Urban Forum, are a cause for optimism, however, as they brought evidence that a clear shift in thinking is beginning to take shape among some of the major international bodies concerned. For instance, the earthquakes in Pakistan and Yogyakarta (Indonesia) have clearly demonstrated that serious efforts have been made to improve our collective track record.

68. Moreover, the recent Humanitarian Reform and its new 'cluster approach' framework represents a major effort to make post-crisis response more predictable, effective and accountable. The approach involves nine distinct 'clusters' where significant gaps in the humanitarian response have been identified, including early recovery and improved disaster preparedness. In the new humanitarian cluster system, it is envisaged that UN-HABITAT will add value through its comprehensive and specialized knowledge, expertise and experience in shelter, land and property. UN-HABITAT is in a principal position to propose coherent response frameworks, which can help close the persistent gap between emergency and recovery shelter on the one hand, and longer-term development on the other, as the unique capacities of the agency as both a humanitarian and a development institution are combined.

69. Resilient communities may bend but do not break when crisis strikes – provided, that is, policies are there to make livelihoods more secure, vulnerability reduction has become part of everyday life, institutions are more responsive, public-private partnerships more effective, communities more sustainable and poverty less prevalent, all of which dramatically enhances the resiliency of human settlements. Beyond the physical aspects of rehabilitation, the recovery period also offers an opportunity for society at large to strengthen local organizational capacities and to promote networks, awareness and any political mechanisms that will facilitate economic, social and physical development long after a disaster – that is, for society to build its own sustainability.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Habitat Agenda, Chapter III, Commitments / B. Sustainable Human Settlements





Photo © 2007 UN-HABITAT, Tsunami reconstruction in Sri Lanka.

UN-HABITAT

United Nations Human Settlements Programme

P.O. Box 30030, GPO Nairobi 00100, Kenya

Tel: +254 (20) 762 1234, Fax: +254 (20) 762 3477

Contact us:

E-mail: [dmp@unhabitat.org](mailto:dmp@unhabitat.org)

Website: [www.unhabitat.org](http://www.unhabitat.org)



UN-HABITAT