

Rebuilding the city after natural disasters; Support to municipal Govt for Coordination and planning

1.0 Problem statement;

Where natural disasters devastate cities municipal authorities are overwhelmed with demands to address emergency needs. Their capacity to coordinate and plan for rebuilding is stretched as they deal with crisis response, which is invariably further complicated given the arrival of multiple international actors/staff to help with relief work. At the relief phase, humanitarian coordination is often enhanced through the process of coordination support, e.g. the cluster system, though this primarily focuses on the role played by international actors during the relief and early recovery phase. These mechanisms sit “alongside” and may work closely with national Govt, but often not at the municipal level or through secondments into Govt. They operate in sectoral silos and are ill-suited to the interdisciplinary nature of the urban environment, and the clusters do not naturally align with municipal departments. Core humanitarian capacity and coordination mechanisms also do not deal with infrastructure i.e. reinstatement of electric power, clearance of rubble, solid waste management etc.

The need to provide emergency solutions to a disaster will probably set in motion decisions which will impact, sometimes negatively the long term planning of cities. In particular emergency decision making processes made by actors from international organisations are invariably not grounded in longer term understanding or perspectives. Essentially longer term city planning is compromised by the immediate and necessary short term priorities. The ability to steer such emergency/early recovery capacity to take account of longer term planning is very limited as there are no mechanisms which focus specifically upon;

- Concentrating on the reconstruction of the built environment, i.e. houses, infrastructure, public buildings etc.
- Developing integrated strategies for reinstating infrastructure in order to facilitate rapid rebuilding and reduce long term vulnerability and improve living standards.
- And bringing extra capacity into the municipal Govt level to address these points.

This further compounds the problems with short term decision making which often occurs in a vacuum of coordination and longer term planning for the built environment.

2.0 How could this be addressed?

Fundamentally orthodox humanitarian coordination mechanisms, whether based upon the cluster approach or not, the skills and programmatic focus of humanitarian agencies is not equipped to deal with coordinating, planning and implementing large scale work in rebuilding cities after disaster. They have a role to play and their often modest, but sometimes significant early recovery contributions can definitely assist. Therefore it is proposed that longer term rebuilding efforts are not “situated” within or designed to complement humanitarian mechanisms, but instead need to be established or rapidly expanded outside humanitarian mechanisms as soon as possible after a disaster strikes. Early recovery programmes undertaken by international and national actors would then be retrospectively coordinated through a city wide strategic planning process owned and driven by the municipality. This is essentially what happened when the Indonesian Government formed the BRR in Aceh post the 2004 Tsunami.

The challenge of course comes in how to (re)establish an expanded coordination and planning capacity quickly enough to direct as much of the early recovery work as possible before it has progressed too far in a direction at odds with a retrospective strategic rebuilding plan. In essence what is required are predictable surge mechanisms for quickly

expanding planning/coordination capacity to rebuild the city situated within the municipal Government. What would extra coordination and planning capacity deployed within municipal Government of a disaster affected area look like?

The mechanisms which have previously been used to support are outlined below;

1. Government's deployment of their own planners/architects/engineers from other regions into the municipality of damaged city to coordinate the rebuilding work, e.g. in Bam, Iran after the 2003 earthquake, in China.
2. The World bank/regional development banks have seconded staff into national level Govt, (it is not known whether they have done so into municipal Govts).
3. Through UN organisations¹; UN-Habitat with their urban focus have occasionally seconded staff into municipal Govt e.g. Pakistan post 2005 earthquake. Also in BRR (Aech Indonesia) and ERRA (Pakistan).
4. Partnership with private sector e.g. China, UN-Habitat-Arup efforts.

However all of these appear to have been rather ad hoc and therefore it is quite unpredictable as to whether these would be used in a timely fashion post the next big urban disaster. Furthermore the type of mechanisms and their effectiveness have not been looked at comparatively in a way that might help guide policy choices about which option or combination of options might suit different environments.

3.0 Some idea of a way forward.

These ideas are set down as a way of prompting further discussion which it is hoped can lead to action.

- A brief literature review into how municipalities in cities have coordinated and planned the rebuilding process, with a focus on whether this has been compromised by short term relief decision making and a lack of coordination of agencies recovery work. This can be supported by development of a few case studies of cities affected by disasters that did use surge mechanisms for quickly expanding planning/coordination capacity to rebuild the city compared to those that did not.
- An outlines study of the different modalities of surge mechanisms for quickly expanding planning/coordination capacity to rebuild the city (as outlined above, along with other perhaps not identified) with some tentative comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of each.
- Make recommendations about how the international community through private sector working in conjunction with municipalities, could introduce mechanisms for providing such surge capacity. Note; World Bank/regional development banks are outside the scope and influence of this thinking and it is also presumed that these organisations may anyway be considering how to address this. It is also suggested that a private sector based initiative could complement other mechanisms e.g. World Bank that may exist give the sheer scale and complexity of the problem.

¹ UNDP is not considered a suitable to support this work as; the UNDP cluster led early recovery mechanism/ programme does not specialise in the built environment, or specialise in coordination of city rebuilding work. UNOPs is a contracting organisation and does not maintain longer term specialist relationships with municipalities