



**Lessons from Typhoon Haiyan: Briefing**  
A review of shelter self-recovery projects in the Philippines, and their lessons for the shelter sector.



## Acknowledgements

With thanks to the agencies and their staff who contributed to this research, and to the people of the Philippines, who really did lead their own recovery.



On 8 November 2013 super typhoon Haiyan (known locally as Yolanda) devastated the central regions of the Philippines. More than 6,000 people lost their lives, 14 million were affected and approximately four million displaced. A total of 1,012,790 houses were damaged or destroyed by the super typhoon. The humanitarian response to super typhoon Haiyan was significant, and represents the first deliberate and large-scale prioritisation of ‘support to self-recovery’ in a major shelter response, with the Shelter Cluster’s Strategic Operational Framework identifying ‘support for household self-recovery’ as one of its three strategic objectives.

Over four years after super typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines, this briefing summarises the findings from a study of the shelter recovery programmes of six agencies, and goes on to make recommendations, summarised below, for the shelter sector and its agencies about how they can build on these lessons from typhoon Haiyan. Collectively the six programmes included in this study supported 76,407 households or around one-third of the 240,000 households assisted by agencies reporting to the Shelter Cluster during the response to super typhoon Haiyan.

## What the shelter sector needs to do next

If the shelter sector is to build on the Lessons from Typhoon Haiyan and improve its ability to offer high quality support to people’s own choices in recovery, at scale, it needs to do the following:

- **Develop a more holistic and participative framework for measuring success, which balances construction quality with affected people’s other priorities.**
- **Learn how to measure, and acknowledge much more, the contribution that disaster-affected people make to its work, and provide complementary support.**
- **Assess and analyse more broadly. From needs to intentions to markets – expand the understanding upon which we design our projects.**
- **Consider how multi-purpose cash (MPC) can support shelter sector objectives and engage in making use of the momentum behind this approach to help link response to recovery.**
- **Learn how to communicate more effectively with affected people and embrace new skills and technologies to transmit high quality information to communities.**
- **Develop better approaches to supporting and enabling affected communities to make free but informed decisions, so that they have the knowledge and resources to build back safer.**
- **Accept that a role of facilitation will have greater impact in supporting recovery at scale than control and direction. Our role should be to fill gaps rather than make people do what we think is best.**

See section 2 of this briefing for more detail on these recommendations.

This briefing is structured as follows:

*1. Research findings*

The main findings and recommendations from the research are presented by the researchers.

*2. What does this mean for the shelter sector?*

The shelter leads from the agencies which commissioned the research present their interpretation of the lessons from typhoon Haiyan, and what they could mean for the shelter sector.



# 1. RESEARCH FINDINGS

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## Background, context and methodology

On 8 November 2013 super typhoon Haiyan (known locally as Yolanda) devastated the central regions of the Philippines. More than 6,000 people lost their lives, 14 million were affected and approximately four million displaced.<sup>1</sup> A total of 1,012,790 houses were damaged or destroyed by the super typhoon – 493,912 partially damaged and 518,878 totally damaged.<sup>2</sup> Within a month of the typhoon almost 80% of households had already started rebuilding their homes but around 50% said they would be unable to complete repairs without assistance.<sup>3</sup>

In March 2014 the Shelter Cluster's Strategic Operational Framework identified 'support for household self-recovery' as one of its three strategic objectives (see box for a definition of Support for Shelter Self-Recovery or SSSR). The Shelter Cluster aimed to provide shelter materials, tools, cash and technical assistance<sup>4</sup> to 500,000 households within the first year of the response.<sup>5</sup> By October 2014 approximately 160,000 households had received support for 'repairs and retrofit' (or SSSR)<sup>6</sup> while organisations had confirmed funding to support a further 80,000 households.<sup>7</sup> The majority of these programmes were completed within the first 18-36 months of the response. Collectively the six programmes included in this study supported 76,407 households or around one-third of the 240,000 households assisted by agencies reporting to the Shelter Cluster during the response to super typhoon Haiyan.

The number and diversity of SSSR programmes implemented following super typhoon Haiyan provides a unique opportunity to capture lessons, challenges and best practice. This research aimed to synthesise learning from several SSSR programmes in order to improve policy and practice in future humanitarian responses. Drawing on lessons from previous research by the authors into SSSR<sup>8</sup> this study adopted a simplified evidence synthesis approach. This involved: searching for and screening potential documents for inclusion; extracting and synthesising data; reporting and review. The research was completed between November 2016 and February 2018.

Specific research questions included:

### Interventions, outputs and outcomes

- What combinations of assistance were provided?
- How did the programmes balance coverage, speed and cost?<sup>9</sup>
- What were the outputs and outcomes?

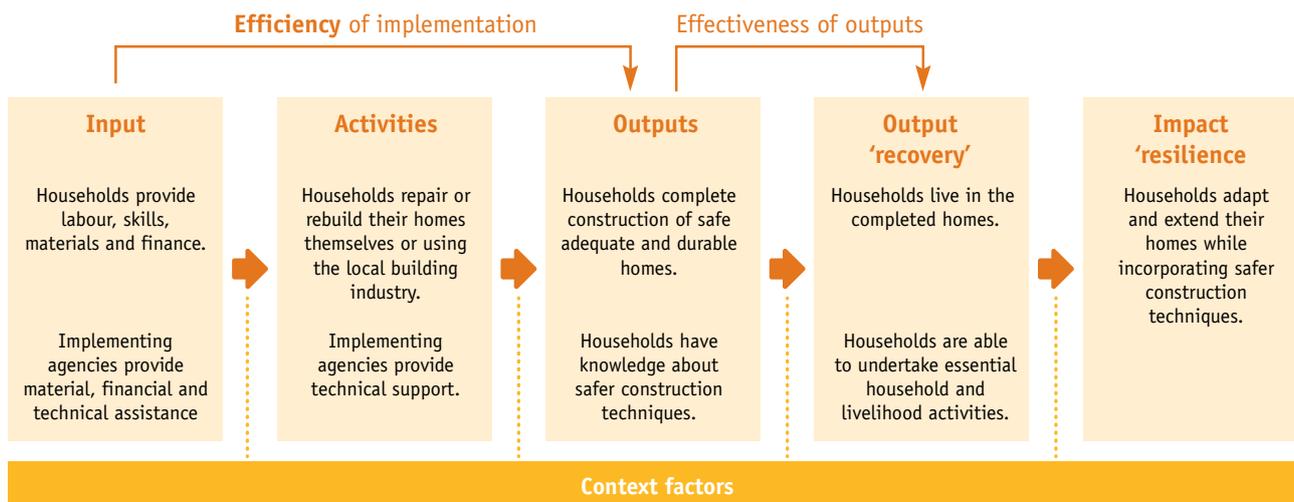
### Process of implementation

- What were the primary contributions of households?
- Programming: what worked well and what was not as effective?
- Context: what factors helped or hindered implementation?

## Definition and theory of change for Support for Shelter Self-Recovery

Support for shelter self-recovery (SSSR) interventions have previously been defined by the authors as ‘providing one or a combination of material, financial and technical assistance, during the relief and/or recovery phase, to enable affected households to repair, build or rebuild their own shelters themselves or through using the local building industry.’<sup>10</sup> In addition CENDEP highlight that ‘to be accurately described as ‘self-recovery’, the post-disaster shelter reconstruction process must be driven by the householder’<sup>11</sup> – with beneficiaries responsible for making key decisions such as the location, design and materials used to construct their homes.

Figure 1: Theory of change for SSSR programmes<sup>12</sup>



## Conclusions from the study

### *What combinations of assistance were provided?*

All six of the interventions in this study provided material and technical assistance to households while four also provided financial support. The material assistance provided ranged from just corrugated galvanised iron (CGI) sheets to shelter kits including a combination of construction materials, fixings and tools. Financial assistance took the form of conditional cash grants and ranged from one-off grants of 3,000-10,000 Php up to phased payments of sums up to 49,500 Php depending on the level of housing damage. The technical assistance provided included: displaying or distributing build back safer materials to households; providing training of up to a day to ‘shelter champions’, households, communities, carpenters and the *barangay* (village or ward) Disaster Management Committee; house-to-house technical support provided by agency staff members or carpenters.

Organisations which provided financial support found that some of the cash was diverted to meet other urgent needs (such as food or healthcare). But programmes which did not provide financial support experienced delays and reduced construction quality as households

still needed both to finance these other urgent needs (sometimes by selling construction materials which had been provided) and find additional funds to invest in construction. In programmes which provided fewer materials and more cash, households did not necessarily prioritise spending money on hard to purchase or expensive materials such as high quality CGI sheeting, hurricane strapping or fixings. Providing technical assistance improved the knowledge of households and communities about build back safer techniques, and the safety and durability of the shelters constructed. This was most effective when it included specific training for households and carpenters, followed up by house-to-house monitoring and technical support.

Four agencies implemented SSSR programmes in conjunction with direct-build transitional shelter or core home programmes for the most vulnerable households. The remaining two agencies provided ‘top-up’ assistance (in the form of additional financial or material and technical support) to households who were unable to complete their homes. Only one organisation focused just on shelter – three implemented water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), livelihoods or Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programmes in parallel to the shelter programme, one ran an ‘integrated’ shelter and

WASH programme with parallel livelihoods and DRR programmes, while one implemented 'an integrated programme with shelter as the entry point'. Both organisations with integrated WASH and shelter programmes initially adopted 'self-recovery' approaches to the construction of toilets – but one changed to direct-build in areas with high water tables to ensure technical quality.

### *How did the programmes balance coverage, speed and cost?*

The six programmes included in this study ranged in:

- coverage – from around 3,500 to over 22,500 households;
- speed – from beginning implementation within two months and concluding within 12-18, to beginning implementation 12-18 months after the typhoon and completing within 24-36 months;
- cost – from 7,500 to 38,000 Php per household. They ranged in cost per household from between 10 and 25 times the cost of emergency shelter kits, 25-65 per cent of a transitional shelter programme, and 13-33 per cent of the core home programmes.

Both agencies which implemented 'stand-alone' SSSR programmes (without transitional shelters or core homes for the most vulnerable households) relatively rapidly provided low value support to a large number of households and later introduced 'top-up' programmes for families in need of additional support. Two agencies implemented programmes which combined SSSR with transitional shelter or core homes for the most vulnerable households and integrated interventions in other sectors. These programmes assisted a similar number of households to the stand-alone programmes but at a higher cost per household and with a slower start to construction and longer duration. Two agencies implemented programmes which combined SSSR with transitional shelter or core homes for the most vulnerable households and parallel interventions in other sectors. These programmes assisted a smaller number of households, at similar cost per household to the integrated programmes, but with a slower start to construction.

### *What were the outputs and outcomes?*

Household-level outputs measured in the studies included: the completion rates of shelters; the size, safety and durability of shelters; and household knowledge about safer construction techniques. Typically more than 90 per cent of households had used the assistance provided to repair or rebuild their shelters at the time the programmes were evaluated. However, three agencies reported that households had tried to use the

assistance to build a new larger or more robust house but this had affected their ability to complete their homes. Beneficiaries were typically positive about the size, safety and durability of the shelters constructed. Three of the programmes reported significant positive effects on households' knowledge about build back safer techniques.

Household-level outcomes measured in the studies included households': perception of safety and security; income, expenditure, assets or debts; physical and mental health; and dignity, empowerment and self-reliance. All six programmes reported positive effects on households' perception of safety and security. Five of the programmes reported reduced expenditure and/or increased disposable income and assets. Three of the programmes reported positive effects on household physical and mental health. Two of the programmes reported positive effects on household pride, dignity and self-reliance – particularly for women when they had been included in training on Build Back Safer (BBS) techniques.

The outputs and outcomes of SSSR programmes were often perceived differently by the implementing agency (often based on technical assessments) and households. For example, one agency noted that while technical specialists viewed the shelters as 'complete', the households viewed them as 'incomplete' as there were still many more improvements they wanted to make. The perception of households also varied depending on their needs and priorities, location (in rural or peri-urban areas), the length of time which had elapsed since the typhoon, and the support other households were receiving.

Community-level outcomes reported in the studies included: knowledge of BBS techniques being spread to the whole community; increased resilience to future shocks; positive economic impacts as households spent the financial assistance on purchasing materials and hiring local labour; and improved social relations, organisation and empowerment.

### *What were the primary contributions of households?*

Households made material and financial contributions such as: paying for transportation of materials; paying for skilled or unskilled labour; buying additional materials; salvaging materials from destroyed or damaged homes; and providing a storage place for materials during distribution and construction. Household contributions also included time spent: attending meetings and training; transporting materials home from the distribution point; building their own shelters; and supervising construction and monitoring progress. All of these activities required the time of

one or more family members and therefore resulted in a potential loss of income.

Very few of the documents attempted to quantify the contribution of households. However, based on data provided in those which did, the financial contribution of an average household can be estimated at up to 10,000 Php for additional materials plus skilled and unskilled labour and transportation. In addition, all households spent 1-2 days attending training and collecting their materials, while up to 40 per cent self-built their own shelters, and some will have provided help to other households via *bayanihan* (communal unity, work and cooperation to achieve a particular goal). This also has a financial cost in potential loss of income of 250-500 Php per day. These are significant contributions in comparison to the external support provided – which ranged from 7,500 to 38,000 Php per household.

### ***Programming: what worked well and what was not as effective?***

Programme design was most effective when it was informed by feedback from communities, local partners and governments and included rapid assessment of markets and supply chains for construction materials, environmental conditions, and potential health and safety risks. Programme implementation was most effective when it was guided by a clear strategy (including an exit strategy) and included continuous monitoring to validate earlier assumptions, and working closely with communities, local partners and governments.

Flexible programming was necessary to respond to the changing context and needs of households. This included proactive measures such as allowing households to choose between direct-build or SSSR approaches, or providing households with different needs with different packages of assistance at the beginning of the programme. It also included reactive measures such as making programme adjustments based on monitoring or feedback. To adopt a flexible approach to programming, agencies needed both adequate monitoring and feedback mechanisms to identify needs and the support of their colleagues in head office and donors in order to make changes.

Beneficiary selection was challenging for many agencies and the majority reported a degree of community dissatisfaction with the process. Challenges experienced included: misunderstanding whether the role of a community committee was to establish criteria or select beneficiaries; misapplication of beneficiary selection criteria; having to implement a second round of assessment to identify beneficiaries for 'top-up' assistance; and some degree of miss-targeting (providing assistance to families who were less in need of support).

Some agencies questioned whether their SSSR programmes had provided adequate assistance to the most vulnerable households, and lack of materials or finance were the key reasons given by beneficiaries for not undertaking repairs or reconstruction. Higher levels of understanding and application of BBS techniques were achieved in programmes which provided more in depth training and/or house-to-house monitoring and technical support than those which relied on distributing or displaying BBS leaflets or posters and community-level briefings.

### ***Context: what factors helped or hindered implementation?***

The main factors which hindered implementation of the programmes were: the experience and capacity of the implementing agency and its partners; disrupted supply chains and slow recovery of local businesses in some areas; and damaged infrastructure and bad weather hampering access to remote communities. Other factors which hindered implementation of the programmes were: a shortage of skilled and unskilled labour; confusion over the government's 'No Dwelling Zone' policy; the availability of suitable land with adequate tenure security; corruption or fraud; a lack of pre-positioned goods and contracts; and security concerns.

## **Recommendations for policy and practice**

**SSSR programmes have the potential to cost-effectively and rapidly assist a large number of households.** Depending on the households and context, as well as the mandate, capacity and funding of the assisting organisation, SSSR programmes can either: rapidly provide a relatively low value package of shelter assistance during the relief/early recovery phase, followed by monitoring and additional support depending on the level of need (in shelter or other sectors); or undertake more detailed assessment and programme design, prior to implementation of the SSSR programme in the recovery phase alongside integrated interventions in multiple sectors.

### **'Self-recovery' does not have to mean 'self-building' – instead, supporting shelter self-recovery involves helping households to make and implement key decisions about their housing recovery process.**

Decisions made by households include: whether or not to prioritise shelter recovery (for example over re-establishing livelihoods); whether to repair, re-build in-situ or relocate; what type of shelter assistance to receive (for example direct-build, rental support or SSSR); whether to rebuild quickly (using immediately available resources) or slowly (when time and money allow); whether or not to incorporate build back safer

techniques; whether to self-build or hire labour; and which materials to salvage or buy.

**Providing a combination of material, financial and technical assistance is critical to the success of SSSR programmes.** If one of these elements is not provided then programmes are more likely to experience problems with delays or lower quality construction as households have to make up the shortfall themselves.

Material, financial and technical assistance should include:

- the provision of key materials which are expensive or difficult to source (such as hurricane strapping or high quality CGI sheets);
- cash or vouchers to both purchase construction materials and meet urgent needs;
- pre-construction training for the whole community (plus carpenters and local government) and ongoing technical support at household-level provided by agency staff members or carpenters.

**SSSR programmes should be integrated with livelihoods and WASH programmes (where it is culturally appropriate).** Households contribute significant time and resources to SSSR programmes (both depleting their assets and reducing time spent on livelihoods) while lack of materials or finance is a key reason for construction delays. Where culturally appropriate, the support provided for shelter recovery can also include support for repair and reconstruction of toilets – except for the most vulnerable families or areas with specific technical requirements (such as high water tables) where direct-build approaches might be more appropriate.

**Assessment of the needs, priorities and capacities of households and communities, as well the availability of labour, materials and land is necessary so that the most appropriate combination of assistance is provided.** This should include assessment of households' urgent needs and priorities for recovery, as well as their ability to contribute time, skills and financial or material resources to the construction process. It should also include assessment of the local, national and international markets and supply chains for skilled and unskilled labour, construction materials and land.

**Analysis of potential risks to the programme is necessary so that these can be monitored and managed by the implementing agency while minimising potential negative impacts on households or communities.** This includes analysis of the likelihood and impact of political, economic, sociological, technological, legal and environmental factors such as inflation, conflict, corruption, policy change, housing,

land and property rights, environmental degradation, natural hazards, health and safety, and lack of key resources such as labour, materials and land.

**Monitoring and flexibility during programme implementation is critical to validate earlier assumptions and identify and respond to changes in the context or outstanding needs.** Monitoring should be carried out in collaboration with households, communities, local partners and governments while flexibility requires the support of colleagues and donors in order to make the changes required.

**SSSR programmes could be part of a tiered system of support (such as training, SSSR and 'SSSR Plus' or direct-construction) to households with different levels of need.** For example, all households in a community (plus carpenters and local government) could be provided with training on: build back safer techniques; safety during construction; and housing, land and property rights. Households in need could then receive support for shelter self-recovery (SSSR), while the most vulnerable could receive an additional package of material, financial and technical assistance ('SSSR Plus') or the direct construction of a transitional shelter or core home.



## 2. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE SHELTER SECTOR?

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### **Moving to a role of facilitation – could ‘softer’ skills change post-crisis shelter delivery?**

Between the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and super typhoon Haiyan in 2013, significant changes have occurred in the ways that many humanitarian shelter actors engage in post-crisis recovery and reconstruction. Approaches of direct build, whereby responding agencies take responsibility for the construction of housing for a defined caseload, has broadly fallen out of favour due to myriad challenges that, in many instances, have provided lessons hard learnt.<sup>17,18</sup> The risk levels and complexities of constructing at scale along with high costs and direct accountability for any resulting issues, combined with low coverage rates, poor adaptability and a lack of choice for beneficiaries (designs/size/materials) have proved too much for the majority of agencies and donors.

With experience, agencies have gradually become more aware of their limitations and capacities and as such many are making a move from a provider of ‘product’ to a role of process facilitation whereby affected people are assisted in their own (self-)recovery.<sup>19</sup> Similar to ‘self-help’ or owner-built reconstruction approaches, particularly in rural programmes this often involves agencies providing key inputs directly to beneficiaries such as finance, construction materials, and technical

support, but could extend to advocacy or other interventions to improve the enabling environment. These then build on, support and harness local capacities, markets and energies to not only help communities take ownership of their own recovery, but to also achieve greater scale than the small percentage of affected people it is estimated are currently assisted by the formal humanitarian system.

This idea of Support for Shelter Self-Recovery (SSSR) is gaining traction in situations of mass shelter need and also fits well with increased moves towards using cash- and markets-based programme approaches and the broader theme of empowering beneficiaries as promoted within the ‘participation revolution’.<sup>20</sup>

For this approach of SSSR to be a meaningful change to how the shelter sector operates, and not just a re-hashing of old ideas, the idea of placing the agency of disaster-affected people at the centre of what it does needs particular focus. The sector as a whole is embracing some aspects of this approach as a more impactful means of assisting more families to recover and rebuild post crisis. As this research shows however, as a sector we are not yet in a position to either listen to what people want and need, or be able to systematically and accurately decide upon, let alone deliver, the ideal ‘recipe’ for a successful SSSR programme in any given setting.

As stated in the research findings:

*'Self-recovery' does not have to mean 'self-building' – instead, supporting shelter self-recovery involves helping households to make and implement key decisions about their housing recovery process.*

Drawing on the findings of this research into the SSSR programmes of six agencies after super typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, the authors suggest that the shelter sector needs to build on the lessons from that response – amongst others – and start to transform the way in which support to recovery is approached through shelter programming after disasters. The change from product-focused shelter projects to process-focused approaches must be accelerated, and with this there is a need for broader and more diverse skills among shelter practitioners, different models of programming, and a fundamental re-examination of both what the shelter and settlements sector wants to achieve and what should constitute success.

## Different measures of success

A telling failing from years of shelter programming is that the sector itself does not have a common understanding of, and even worse we don't tend to agree with our project beneficiaries on, what constitutes success. Too often our only measures of success are numbers of shelters built, and sometimes the occupancy rate should we have the opportunity to go back and look at a later date. Given that this research shows that affected people usually contribute more resources and more value than the external shelter actors do, the lack of control they have over what assistance projects are trying to achieve is particularly shocking, and places the power imbalances we perpetuate into stark contrast. If we don't agree with affected people on what we are trying to achieve, we can never support a process which can meaningfully be called self-recovery. It will never be a process with the agency of disaster-affected people at its centre.

The argument for supporting self-recovery – as with the increased use of unrestricted cash<sup>21</sup> – is that whilst there is less control over what people will do, outcomes will on the whole actually be better, and at larger scale. This research suggests that this is indeed the case, but perhaps only from the beneficiaries' point of view. Construction quality was clearly extremely variable, and measured and reported differently by each agency. As a sector we lack the ability to gauge the impact of any technical assistance or the means by which it was (or was not) provided, and to measure the structural safety of large numbers of diverse, non-engineered buildings. Notable in the research is the significant variation in the importance attached to different indicators of

the success of programmes, and the great difficulty in judging the quality of people's shelters, and agreeing on the benchmarks for success.

Shelter practitioners, often architects or engineers, tend to place the quality of design and construction at the top of their list of objectives. Disaster-affected people often do so in the immediate aftermath of a disaster as well, but their needs and aspirations are much more complex, and will change over time. To them, the size, the appearance, the layout, the location of a shelter, or the way in which it will be used are likely to matter just as much, and usually with more urgency, than structural robustness.<sup>22</sup>

If supporting self-recovery means surrendering control to affected people, and if affected people have different, more complex objectives to shelter practitioners, then can the sector have the difficult conversations that follow about our approaches and what, ultimately, we are trying to achieve? Should we accept lower design and construction quality in return for higher satisfaction from those we seek to help? Do we sacrifice the objectively measurable for the subjectively important? Do we need to, or can we, achieve both if we meaningfully change the way we approach projects? For the sector and its practitioners to be held accountable by both donors and project participants, we need collective agreement on what constitutes success wherever we work.

## Different approaches, and the skills that go with them

Each crisis or disaster presents different challenges, and deciding on what interventions will best reach sectoral objectives remains an inexact science, be they combinations of materials, finance or technical support, or indeed advocacy, legal assistance, livelihoods support, governance projects or otherwise. Such decisions are made more complex when also considering the relative merits of prioritising quality, speed or scale in a response. Ultimately, for sector actors to be in a position to better make these decisions and facilitate communities through the recovery process and adapt to their needs and wishes will require a change and broadening of the range of skills acknowledged and utilised by practitioners.

The humanitarian community and shelter actors need to be **better at assessing the broad needs, intentions and priorities** of affected families and how to meet these alongside the provision of shelter support. Cash played a significant part in some of the projects examined in this study and sometimes it was used for non-shelter needs. People are naturally unable to focus on shelter objectives if their immediate priorities for

health/food etc are not being met and they may use cash or sell off materials provided for shelter to meet these needs. Likewise those projects that did not provide cash experienced delays related to people's inability to prioritise shelter over their other needs and associated inability to contribute resources. By agencies not acknowledging and addressing these basic realities, the most vulnerable families can find themselves removed from beneficiary lists or having to make sacrifices around the safety of their shelters at a later date. These points alone mean unrestricted cash is an appropriate and indeed essential modality of intervention in post-disaster shelter programmes. It should be used much more alongside targeted shelter support, and will help place the agency of disaster-affected people at the centre of shelter interventions. It cannot – and, as this and other studies have found, should not – replace all in-kind assistance. Cash cannot replace provision of difficult-to-source materials critical to safer houses, and definitely cannot replace technical assistance and training. But cash can be an engine that drives a safe, dignified recovery under the control of affected people.

However in order to use cash to its full potential there is a desperate need to **generate better analysis around local markets**. We are currently poorly equipped to understand how housing market systems<sup>23</sup> operated pre-crisis or how they have been impacted by the crisis itself. Without such knowledge it is difficult to interpret where supply will be able to meet demand across a range of commodities and services vital for recovery, or acknowledge that markets respond to demand and not need. Beyond this, the current commonly used market assessment tools and guidance tend to focus on volume capacity whilst within the shelter and construction sphere our lens of analysis requires more focus on quality consistency across a huge range of skills, services and materials in poorly regulated markets. By further developing skills around housing market analysis the sector would be better equipped to know which markets can support sector objectives and in which areas the supply of skills or commodities will struggle to meet demands of either volume or quality, and interventions can be made to either support or supplement these markets to ensure recovery is not impeded.

In addition more intimate knowledge of the diverse range of markets involved in the whole housing system provides opportunities to identify where programming can positively engage with issues such as gender and women's participation in housing or construction-related markets, or promoting aspects of environmental sustainability.

Often the areas where agencies can add most value is through the **provision of skills or knowledge** that can't be accessed locally or that recovering households are

unable to prioritise paying for. This might predominantly be around technical support, monitoring and quality control that can support the principles of 'Build Back Safer/Better' and reduce risks and also maximise the investments being made in their shelter by families and the support provided by agencies or governments. Such technical knowledge is not just limited to construction issues but should also include information on, or how to access support and services around, HLP/tenure rights and all relevant and complementary government or agency support to recovery.

It is then in these knowledge gaps that agencies can target investment and thereby better support the speed and scale of recovery. If there are skills shortages, we should be focusing on more training, whilst if material availability is low then perhaps shelter actors should work with producers to increase outputs. At a project level it might simply be acknowledging that the majority of materials and skills are available so cash alongside technical support and guidance are the most effective tools to get things moving – or the opposite.

Related to the provision of technical support **we need to get better at communicating**. As with the humanitarian system as a whole, there is a need to get better at listening to what people and communities actually need and what they themselves can contribute towards recovery. But beyond this, and when considering specific technical and sectoral outcomes, shelter actors urgently need to find rapid and effective means of generating and sharing information around safer construction techniques, DRR/CCA and other relevant messaging to non-technical audiences. We are learning that giving people leaflets or posters isn't enough to ensure that families 'Build Back Safer' and agencies rarely have the staffing resources required to properly support construction best practice across hundreds or thousands of houses.

As a sector we must acknowledge that construction specialists aren't always the best placed to design or share easily understandable Information, Education & Communication (IEC) messages that will support the informed decision-making essential if we are to meet sectoral outcomes with less 'hands on' approaches. The sector must utilise new technology and embrace mass communication techniques as well as learning from marketing, pedagogy, and behavioural economics. Engaging in such approaches to facilitate the access to information by crisis-affected communities offers a whole range of new opportunities that needs to be resourced, tested and embraced – but requires skills we do not yet have.

## Different business models

If the humanitarian shelter sector wishes to engage in systematically supporting shelter self-recovery at scale then we need to acknowledge that our business model and ways of working will need to adapt and change. Moving towards a facilitation model means that we not only need to be able to provide some of the required cash and materials needed to build, but that much of our focus needs to shift towards helping affected communities and families making the informed decisions that will allow them to recover and be better prepared for future shocks.

Along with using cash and local markets wherever we can, relinquishing control over shelter programming to affected people will require more adaptive programming so we can collectively pursue the outcomes agreed upon. Where the most vulnerable cannot effectively use the support given, more comprehensive assistance must be provided. Where the assistance given is insufficient, additional support should be provided (as it was in some of the projects studied). Where construction quality is too low, additional technical assistance might be needed. Where the enabling environment frustrates the recovery, advocacy may be required. To do all this the sector must have better market analysis, better assessment, better monitoring of agreed indicators, and better two-way communication with affected people.

Of course this does not just entail a change in the skills and expertise that inform programme design, but also how these programmes are funded. Where staffing and other operational costs have often relied on the overheads from large volumes of in-kind materials there may be a need to move to budgets and delivery models focused on the provision and sharing of expertise from a wide range of social, economic and communications skill sets as well as those from the built environment profession. In simple terms this change in approach would see shelter actors focusing on the provision of a wide range of support across a range of technical, social and economic disciplines. Such change could see significant increases in the scale and impact of shelter response and presents myriad opportunities – but will need acceptance and understanding, not just from the donors who would need to fund such systematic change, but also from within our own way of viewing the world and our role in addressing the issues of providing shelter post-crisis.

## What is meant by self-recovery?

The term self-recovery has developed from the hypothesis that the majority of disaster-affected people have to arrange, or rebuild, their own post-disaster housing, without any significant support from the formal humanitarian system.<sup>13</sup> This system is complicated, and is made up of myriad governmental and non-governmental agencies and donors. It is itself poorly defined, and it is very difficult to say where formal assistance ends and informal assistance starts. It's clear however that remittances and governmental support play a major part in many people's post-disaster recovery, and are not part of the formal humanitarian system. It is likely many do in fact receive some form of external support. Debt, migration, unpaid labour, changes to gender roles and many other sources of money and capacity contribute to people's recovery and rebuilding efforts.

After a disaster large portions of the affected population may receive emergency items, such as plastic sheeting, blankets, etc. In most disasters, few will receive a completed house from the responding agencies or other institutions. While it's extremely hard to measure the amount of assistance people get from what sources, it's reasonable to draw the conclusion that the provision of post-disaster housing by the humanitarian system is patchy, of inconsistent quality, and insufficient scale. In too many cases the number of houses built by responders number in the 100s and 1,000s while the numbers destroyed number in the 10,000s and 100,000s.

Even when agencies do build complete houses for affected people, the outcomes have often been less than hoped for, with houses left unoccupied, or sold, because they don't meet people's needs.<sup>14</sup> It's long been understood that owner-driven approaches lead to better outcomes.<sup>15</sup> But in practice these approaches have remained focused on achieving high quality products, and have not relinquished much control to affected people. They have rarely, if ever, actually been *driven* by affected people. Affected people may be required to build to an agency-produced design, with careful control of construction standards. There are cases of this approach being extremely successful,<sup>16</sup> but they do require high levels of oversight and organisational capacity, and sufficient resources to allow people to build to the required standards. Where this is not in place, the most vulnerable affected people may be unable to complete the buildings to the required standards, and may become trapped in limbo, unable to complete a liveable home, and unable to access additional resources.

A key difference between owner-driven approaches as they have been applied in practice, and self-recovery approaches, is about the level of control exerted by external responders, and the level of agency affected people have to take decisions about their own recovery. Whether support to self-recovery is just re-branding what agencies already do, or actually something different, remains to be seen. For it to be different, self-recovery must mean recovery which is in accordance with the choices and decisions of the individuals and groups who are recovering. *Self-recovery is recovery with agency.*

The role of shelter actors is then to support that self-recovery, so that it is not just recovery with agency, but recovery with agency, with resources, and ideally with a better enabling environment.

## Notes

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- 19 'Self-recovery' = when populations affected by natural disasters 'rebuild or repair damaged or destroyed homes using their own assets' through self-building or using the local informal building sector. (Parrack et al., 2014) *Getting the message across for safer self-recovery in post-disaster shelter*
- 20 Grand Bargain Participation Revolution work stream [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/participation\\_revolution\\_-\\_definition\\_of\\_participation.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/participation_revolution_-_definition_of_participation.pdf)
- 21 CalP. Voices and views of beneficiaries on unconditional cash transfers <http://www.cashlearning.org/downloads/calp-beneficiaries-voice.pdf>
- 22 Kennedy et al (2009) "Disaster Mitigation Lessons from 'Build Back Better' Following the 26 December 2004 Tsunami" <http://www.ilankelman.org/articles1/kennedyetal.wud.pdf>
- 23 Relevant markets that the sector would want to analyse include construction materials (i.e. what can be sourced locally, at an appropriate quality, and quickly by the affected population versus what is easier/faster/cheaper to source in bulk nationally/internationally), construction labour and other technical skills (not only numbers of available people but their competency levels – guides, training needs and audience), land, housing supply, rental markets, access to finance and credit, debt, remittances, rent, services, transportation, etc



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**PHOTOS**

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