

# Natural Disaster Lessons Learned: A Review of Other Donor Disaster Assistance Documentation

## 1. RELIEF PHASE

- “*Revival of the economy.* There is an urgent need to restart the economy of the affected areas, which can be done in part by providing wage employment to local people for debris removal, construction, and the restoration of heritage sites. This type of program, if well designed, minimizes the potential for mistargeting. Transfers to households, for consumption or investment purposes, could also be envisaged.” (World Bank and Asian Development Bank, 2001; p. xi)<sup>1</sup>
- “Guiding Principles of WFP Food Distribution: (1) Fairness; (2) accountability to beneficiaries; (3) coordination and accountability to donors, governments, implementing partners and within [donor and/or contracting organization]; (4) transparency; (5) respect [of all involved].” (Joint Emergency Food Aid Programme, 2003; p. 12)<sup>2</sup>
- [International relief] agencies may find it appropriate to provide food, and medical assistance and other survival kits without much [local] consultation. Participation becomes appropriate [as well as economical and beneficial to the disaster victims] when the situation improves and people are in a state in which they can participate effectively.” (Ntata, 1999; p. 37)<sup>3</sup>

## 2. RECOVERY PHASE

### 2.1 Management

- “*Accountability.* Disasters are political; therefore there is a greater need for transparency through accountability systems within recovery institutions, especially for large disbursements of funds.” (Telford et al, 2004; p. 42)<sup>4</sup>
- “*Decentralization.* Greater emphasis should be placed on the quick decentralization of assistance to better match needs and ensure that all communities are addressed.” (Telford et al, 2004; p. 42)<sup>5</sup>
- “*Tap local resources.* Make use of local leaders, organizations and community assessments.” (Telford et al, 2004; p. 42)<sup>6</sup>
- “*Participation.* At the local level, the participation of the affected population throughout the project cycle helps develop project ownership by the community.” (Telford et al, 2004; p. 42)<sup>7</sup>
- “Empowering individuals and communities. While relief and charity are important in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster, they should be

replaced as soon as possible with efforts to foster ownership and involvement by the people. There are some instances encountered indicating that relief assistance is sometimes creating competition for handouts, community conflict, and dependency. Greater local participation and contributions to the reconstruction effort could reduce social tensions and lead to more sustainable development efforts. The majority of reconstruction efforts should be undertaken by the affected population themselves.” (World Bank and Asian Development Bank, 2001; p. xii)<sup>8</sup>

- “Successful implementation [of recovery projects] will thrive on the trust that close and intensive communication between executing agencies and disaster victims helps build up. Group solidarity is often strengthened by losses shared throughout a disaster-struck community, so that working with local community groups with the assistance of NGOs can help keep information channels open between victims and those trying to assist. By working through local community groups, reconstruction projects themselves can help...rebuild social organizations disrupted by the natural disaster.” (Gilbert, 2001; p. 31)<sup>9</sup>
- The simpler the reconstruction plan, the better. “An appropriate institutional framework is crucial for [reconstruction] success. Institutional arrangements should be as simple as possible, existing institutions should be fully used and entirely new agencies generally avoided. The head of the [operation] should be selected for his or her decision-making ability and access to the [host] country’s chief executive.” (Gilbert, 2001; p. 31)<sup>10</sup>

## **2.2 Collaboration**

### **2.2.1 General**

- “*Coordinate and set standards.* Closer coordination between institutions avoids duplicity of efforts and provides for greater efficiency, which leads to the achievement of recovery goals. Common standards ensure more equitable assistance.” (Telford et al, 2004; p. 42)<sup>11</sup>
- “Thirteen additional U.S. departments and agencies received disaster recovery funds [for disaster projects in Latin America], and eight of these were linked with USAID’s program. Many of these agencies had little or no prior experience in working overseas....Nevertheless, USAID officials generally agreed that many agencies added value to the program once the initial start-up problems were resolved. In particular, USAID officials most often cited the four agencies with scientific, technical, and engineering expertise not available at USAID – the U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.” (Ford, 2001; p. 19)<sup>12</sup>

- “Community involvement, whenever possible, should be fostered by indigenous groups and organizations. Organizations with pre-existing links to the community are most likely to be trusted and are usually close enough to the community to remain involved to monitor implementation. Outside assistance, then, can take the form of training, research and information sharing, and financing of demonstration projects.” (UNDP, 1994; p. 47)<sup>13</sup>
- “‘Food for work’ programs [after Hurricane Mitch in Honduras] achieved two parallel objectives: recovery works were carried out by local labor and, at the same time, helped create a source of family income.” (Telford et al, 2004; p. 42)<sup>14</sup>
- *Comprehensive recovery.* Recovery programs should not only include physical recovery projects but also socio-economic and psychological recovery.” (Telford et al, 2004; p. 42)<sup>15</sup>
- “As a temporary intervention, emergency assistance also needs to be tightly constrained in time lest it undermine long-term sector policies and reform. Thus, all emergency disbursements should be completed by approximately 30 months. After this period, attention should shift to insurance, mitigation and sector work.” (Gilbert, 2001; p. iv)<sup>16</sup>
- “Emergency assistance should be tightly circumscribed and not try to embrace otherwise deserving and needy cases of poor families, but who were unaffected by a disaster. Resources for reconstruction are limited and these people would be beneficiaries of normal development programs and projects.” (Gilbert, 2001; p. iv)<sup>17</sup>
- “Well-trying and proven approaches are recommended for their ease of application and likelihood of success. This principal [sic] is explicitly incorporated in the policy of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which prescribes that: ‘the execution of a rehabilitation project should not involve complex new design and technical work or require the use of extensive technical assistance.’” (Gilbert, 2001; p. 26)<sup>18</sup>

### 2.2.2 Donor

- “[Local] participation helped to prevent the creation of community tensions or conflicts among different social groups within the affected communities. In addition, it helped to strengthen existing capacities, making the employment of large numbers of agency staff unnecessary.” (Ntata, 1999; p. 31)<sup>19</sup>
- Local participation can help with the ‘information deficit’ that often faces international donors when responding to a natural disaster. “Even where other agencies have been operating for sometime, a new agency may find that the critical information as regards their intended programme is not available. One

the problems involved seems to relate to lack of institutional memory within agencies because of very short contract periods of staff.” (Ntata, 1999; p. 36)<sup>20</sup>

- “In principle, it is desirable to involve beneficiaries in monitoring and evaluation of the programme but sometimes difficult to achieve in practice....Nevertheless, the experiences of some [international relief] agencies demonstrated that increased involvement of beneficiaries in the programme in fact constitutes an in-built monitoring and evaluation mechanism.” (Ntata, 1999; p. 37)<sup>21</sup>

### 2.2.3 National and local government

1. “*Communication and transparency*: Communication and information dissemination are important to the successful and harmonious implementation of the...reconstruction program. Policy initiatives, financial assistance, and technical know-how will not be effective without a system to convey their content swiftly and equitably to the public, to hear of and assess their suitability and sustainability within communities, and to make appropriate adjustments based on community feedback. There is thus a need for the [host] government to devise a communication strategy to support the recovery program and ensure effective dialogue between the government, the public and other partners.” (World Bank and Asian Development Bank, 2001; p. xii)<sup>22</sup>

## **2.3 Water and Sanitation**

- “The involvement of community organizations or local water boards in the rehabilitation of water systems reduces costs and appears to improve the quality of service.” (Telford et al, 2004; p. 42)<sup>23</sup>
- “In general, emergency repairs should aim to restore conditions as nearly as possible to those that existed before the disaster, rather than attempt any substantial upgrading of the service. However, the real risks of a cessation of funding after the initial repairs have been made should also be taken into account. In addition, any opportunity should be taken to incorporate into the system some basic protection against similar disasters and other local hazards.” (PAHO/WHO, [http://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/hygiene/emergencies/em2002chap7.pdf](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/hygiene/emergencies/em2002chap7.pdf); p. 7)<sup>24</sup>

## **2.4 Health**

- “It is important to designate specific health staff for public-health surveillance. Neighbourhood and community health workers, as well as the personnel of temporary relief centres and hospitals, should be alert to patients presenting with any of a list of diseases, including typhoid or paratyphoid fever, cholera, typhus, plague, encephalitis or meningitis, as well as to excessive numbers of poisonings (including food poisoning) or cases of malaria. Histories should be taken from these patients, contacts identified, and the source of the disease isolated. Surveillance of public-health problems may be possible to some extent even

under the worst conditions of large-scale population movement. Existing reporting systems can be extended to create an area-wide surveillance system that covers priority diseases, including serious water- and sanitation-related epidemic diseases.” (PAHO/WHO, [http://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/hygiene/emergencies/em2002chap11.pdf](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/hygiene/emergencies/em2002chap11.pdf); p. 4)<sup>25</sup>

## 2.5 Housing

- “The often chaotic aftermath of a natural disaster is not a propitious moment for advancing new long-term housing sector goals or pursuing housing sector reform. Housing components of emergency reconstruction projects thus become primarily instruments of short-term economic and social recovery. When implemented on a large scale, however, they can impact the overall supply of housing. For that reason, they should not undermine housing sector policy or reform, and embody best practice standards, especially in adopting land use and building codes that mitigate the risks of exposure to existing natural hazards.” (Gilbert, 2001; p. iv)<sup>26</sup>
- “Poor homeless victims of natural disasters are likely to include squatters. Since they are neither formal owners nor renters, they require special attention during the housing reconstruction. ...Task teams working on emergency housing reconstruction projects will want to have reliable lists of disaster victims and accurate damage assessments from a trustworthy source. This is to ensure that assistance goes to bona fide victims and is not wrongly captured. These teams need to be alert to the moral hazard posed by three phenomena that can undermine attempts to reach genuine uninsurable poor victims: (i) a minority of people – taken from all income groups – who purposefully settle in hazardous zones to claim compensation from local authorities that far exceeds the cost they incurred invading such areas; (ii) a relatively small number of nevertheless very mobile people who may move into a disaster zone in the immediate aftermath of a disaster to claim entitlement for compensation; and (iii) unscrupulous individuals who inflict more damage to their own house, in order to be eligible for more compensation.” (Gilbert, 2001; p. 27)<sup>27</sup>
- “[E]mergency housing reconstruction projects should pay special attention to mitigation measures to reduce the impact of future disasters and encourage greater insurance penetration in order to share the risk of losses through natural disasters more widely. ...Among the most important mitigation measures will be land use controls to steer vulnerable poor families especially away from occupying disaster-prone locations along seismic fault lines or in flood plains. Enforcement of disaster resistant building codes would be another key mitigation measure. The design, dissemination and enforcement of land use and building codes pose major challenges in most disaster-prone countries, but they need to be tackled head-on beyond the emergency recovery effort to become a central feature of sector policy and reform in these countries.” (Gilbert, 2001; p. 31)<sup>28</sup>

- “In the immediate aftermath of the typhoon which destroyed houses and businesses in the Pacific an instant ‘building boom’ ensued which quickly outstripped the local resources of the islanders. Government funding (supplemented by international aid) was made available for immediate reconstruction....” The infusion of so much outside funding created an inflationary spiral that soon left out much of the population from both being able to reconstruct their own homes with the increasingly less valuable government grants. “One local development agency understood the plight of the small homeowners and initiated a self-help building program incorporating skills training, and disaster mitigation techniques that could easily be integrated into the repair of small single family dwellings....With the skills training they acquired, and the savings in the cost of labor for the rebuilding of their houses, many families were able to completely repair their own homes in ways that left the homes stronger than they had been before the typhoon struck. Not only were the houses repaired and strengthened, but the owners gained a new self-sufficiency and an understanding of how to reduce their own vulnerability.” (UNDP, 1994; p. 41)<sup>29</sup>
- “Temporary housing should be avoided.” (Gilbert and Kreimer, 1999; p. 18)<sup>30</sup>

## 2.6 Agriculture

- “Relief aid operations which register only male heads of households or community leaders as beneficiaries have serious drawbacks. Food distributed to men is often sold on the market or used to supply armed forces. Where polygamous marriage is common, as in Gaza and Tajikistan, targeting male household heads can have adverse nutritional impacts since rations have to be widely shared and the status of wives may determine their children's access to food. Men may also use food aid as a means to reinforce their control over female kin.” (*Development and Gender IN BRIEF*, <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/dgb4.html>)<sup>31</sup>
- “More targeted credit programs would have been useful [in the aftermath of the 1998 floods in Bangladesh], given that poor households borrowed heavily in the informal private market during the floods and NGO credit programs were limited in scope. To avoid delays and to minimize leakages, these rural credit programs for disaster relief should be designed and put in place before disasters occur. Maintaining a structure of social programs that can be scaled up in the event of a disaster is more important than maintaining a large stock of food.” (del Ninno et al, 2001; p. 103)<sup>32</sup>
- “Ultimately, food security in Bangladesh [following the 1998 floods] was largely maintained through an appropriate mix of public interventions [e.g., emergency rice distribution], private market trade flows [import tariffs on food stuffs had recently been removed and therefore allowed a faster and larger influx of rice and other grains following the floods and contributed to keeping rice prices fairly

stable], and an extensive system of private borrowing.” (del Ninno et al, 2001; p. 103-4)<sup>33</sup>

## ➤ 2. 7 Gender

- “Women are most effective at mobilizing the community to respond to disasters. They form groups and networks of social actors who work to meet the most pressing needs of the community. This kind of community organizing has proven essential in disaster preparedness and mitigation.” (Gender and Natural Disasters, <http://www.paho.org/English/DPM/GPP/GH/genderdisasters.PDF>)<sup>34</sup>
- “A narrow view of the consequences of disaster leads to a focus on the purely physical, the social realities are ignored and, again, gender concerns are marginalized. Women will continue to be disproportionately affected by natural disasters unless disaster workers and officials acknowledge their vulnerable status and tailor relief efforts to respond to it.” (Gender and Natural Disasters, <http://www.paho.org/English/DPM/GPP/GH/genderdisasters.PDF>)<sup>35</sup>

## 3. DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION

- “Community-based banks formed from the repayment of recovery loans can help finance long-term risk reduction and development projects.” (Telford et al, 2004; p. 42)<sup>36</sup>
- “*Warning and prevention.* The distribution of communication systems and motor boats in flood-prone areas and the provision of courses in prevention and mitigation at the local level develop greater consciousness of risk and help prepare the population for future disasters.” (Telford et al, 2004; p. 42)<sup>37</sup>
- “Disaster and recovery and reconstruction projects...are neither short-term emergency relief nor long-term development assistance – more typical USAID programs.....Inadequate levels of staff and contractor support, efforts to help ensure that financial controls and oversight measures were in place, the involvement of numerous other U.S. government agencies, and attempts to ensure competition among contractors and grantees affected the pace of implementation. (Ford, 2001; pp. 3-4)<sup>38</sup>
- “Although USAID missions had the authority to waive full and open competition for awarding contracts and grants, it was used sparingly. Using sole source awards would have speeded up the award process, but it likely would have precluded U.S. firms from being awarded contracts.” (Ford, 2001; p. 18)<sup>39</sup>
- “Mitigation measures should always be included” in any disaster response. (Gilbert and Kreimer, 1999; p. 2)<sup>40</sup>

- “In complete contrast to reconstruction – where smaller projects are more successful – larger mitigation projects perform better on average than smaller ones.” (Gilbert and Kreimer, 1999; p. 3)<sup>41</sup>
- “Institutional development is extremely important for mitigation to promote disaster awareness, planning and early warning systems....Institutional development requires [host] government commitment and willingness to enforce mitigation requirements [such as land use and building codes.]” (Gilbert and Kreimer, 1999; p. 3)<sup>42</sup>
- “Recovery programs should be designed to reduce vulnerability through: targeting areas of high risk; support of the private and non-formal sectors; and enhanced management training programs. (Gilbert and Kreimer, 1999; p. 3)<sup>43</sup>
- “[The] president [of the United States] should direct the NSC to develop, with broad interagency participation, a set of criteria to govern U.S. civilian and military engagement in humanitarian, human rights, and peace operations....Second, the president should request that the secretary of state and the USAID administrator develop a policy paper and institutional mechanisms to promote protection of crisis victims,” especially internally displaced persons (IDPs), for whom there is a limited formal institutional framework of protection....[Last], the administration should develop a ‘Foreign Disaster Response Plan’ – modeled on the domestic Federal Response Plan – to manage U.S. government staff and resources devoted to foreign humanitarian crises.” (Cohen and Kunder, 2001; p. 7)<sup>44</sup>
- Incorporate disaster management into development planning. Make minimizing losses from natural disasters a goal of sustainable development. (Gilbert and Kreimer, 1999; p. 3)<sup>45</sup>
- “Mitigation has to be affordable. Cost-effectiveness should be encouraged but not to the extent of sacrificing the disaster mitigating effect of an investment. Encouraging potential victims to share some of the costs of disaster impacts should provide an incentive for private investment in mitigation. One important caveat, however: poor communities that cannot afford mitigation should be provided with safety net assistance.” (Gilbert and Kreimer, 1999; p. 4)<sup>46</sup>
- “Significantly within the [World] Bank’s portfolio, half of the top disaster mitigation countries do not appear among the top disaster reconstruction countries....Conversely, it must be of concern that half the countries among the Bank’s top clients for reconstruction projects are not in the first rank of demand for disaster mitigation projects.” (Gilbert and Kreimer, 1999; p. 23)<sup>47</sup>



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## Endnotes:

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