

1 A good reconstruction policy helps reactivate communities and empowers people to rebuild their housing, their lives, and their livelihoods.

A reconstruction policy should be inclusive, equity-based, and focused on the vulnerable. Housing reconstruction is key to disaster recovery, but it depends on the recovery of markets, livelihoods, institutions, and the environment. Diverse groups need diverse solutions, but biases will creep in, so a system to redress grievances is a must.

2 Reconstruction begins the day of the disaster.

If traditional construction methods need to change to improve building safety, governments must be prepared to act quickly to establish norms and provide training. Otherwise, reconstructed housing will be no less vulnerable to future disasters than what was there before. Adequate transitional shelter solutions can reduce time pressure and should be considered in a reconstruction policy. Owners are almost always the best managers of their own housing reconstruction; they know how they live and what they need. But not all those affected are owners and not all are capable of managing reconstruction; so the reconstruction policy must be designed with all groups in mind: owners, tenants, and landlords, and those with both formal and informal tenancy.

3 Community members should be partners in policy making and leaders of local implementation.

People affected by a disaster are not victims; they are the first responders during an emergency and the most critical partners in reconstruction. Organizing communities is hard work, but empowering communities to carry out reconstruction allows their members to realize their aspirations and contribute their knowledge and skills. It also assists with psychosocial recovery, helps reestablish community cohesion, and increases the likelihood of satisfaction with the results. This requires maintaining two-way communication throughout the reconstruction process and may entail the facilitation of community efforts. A real commitment by policy makers and project managers is needed to sustain effective involvement of affected communities in reconstruction policy making and in all aspects of recovery, from assessment to monitoring.

4 Reconstruction policy and plans should be financially realistic but ambitious with respect to disaster risk reduction.

People's expectations may be unrealistic and funding will be limited. Policy makers should plan conservatively to ensure that funds are sufficient to complete reconstruction and that time frames are reasonable. Rebuilding that reduces the vulnerability of housing and communities must be the goal, but this requires both political will and technical support. Housing and community reconstruction should be integrated and closely coordinated with other reconstruction activities, especially the rehabilitation and reconstruction of infrastructure and the restoration of livelihoods.

5 Institutions matter and coordination among them improves outcomes.

Best practice is to have defined a reconstruction policy and designed an institutional response in advance of a disaster. In some cases, this will entail a new agency. Even so, line ministries should be involved in the reconstruction effort and existing sector policies should apply, whenever possible. The lead agency should coordinate housing policy decisions and ensure that those decisions are communicated to the public. It should also establish mechanisms for coordinating the actions and funding of local, national, and international organizations and for ensuring that information is shared and that projects conform to standards. Funding of all agencies must be allocated equitably and stay within agreed-upon limits. Using a range of anticorruption mechanisms and careful tracking of all funding sources minimizes fraud.

6 Reconstruction is an opportunity to plan for the future and to conserve the past.

What has been built over centuries cannot be replaced in a few months. Planning and stakeholder input help to establish local economic and social development goals and to identify cultural assets for conservation. Even a modest amount of time spent designing or updating physical plans can improve the overall result of reconstruction. Reconstruction guidelines help ensure that what is valued is preserved, while encouraging more sustainable post-disaster settlements. Improving land administration systems and updating development regulations reduces vulnerability and improves tenure security.

7 Relocation disrupts lives and should be kept to a minimum.

Relocation of affected communities should be avoided unless it is the only feasible approach to disaster risk management. If relocation is unavoidable, it should be kept to a minimum, affected communities should be involved in site selection, and sufficient budget support should be provided over a sufficient period of time to mitigate all social and economic impacts.

8 Civil society and the private sector are important parts of the solution.

The contributions of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and the private sector to reconstruction are critical. Besides managing core programs, these entities provide technical assistance, advocacy, and financial resources of enormous value. Government should encourage these initiatives; invite NGO, CSO, and private entity involvement in reconstruction planning; and partner in their efforts. Government should also require accountability and make sure that these interventions are consistent with reconstruction policy and goals.

9 Assessment and monitoring can improve reconstruction outcomes.

Assessment and monitoring improve current (and future) reconstruction efforts. Unnecessary assessments can be minimized if there are policies that require institutions to share assessment data and results. Local communities should participate in conducting assessments, setting objectives, and monitoring projects. Using reliable national data to establish monitoring baselines after the disaster increases the relevance of evaluations. Monitor both the use of funds and immediate physical results on the ground and evaluate the impact of reconstruction over time.

10 To contribute to long-term development, reconstruction must be sustainable.

Sustainability has many facets. Environmental sustainability requires addressing the impact of the disaster and the reconstruction process itself on the local environment. The desire for speed should not override environmental law or short-circuit coordination when addressing environmental issues. Economic sustainability requires that reconstruction is equitable and that livelihoods are restored. Livelihood opportunities in reconstruction should be maximized. Institutional sustainability means ensuring that local institutions emerge from reconstruction with the capability to maintain the reconstructed infrastructure and to pursue long-term disaster risk reduction. A reliable flow of resources is essential and institutional strengthening may be required.

The last word: Every reconstruction project is unique.

The nature and magnitude of the disaster, the country and institutional context, the level of urbanization, and the culture's values all influence decisions about how to manage reconstruction. Whether government uses special or normal procurement procedures, how it weighs the concerns of speed versus quality, and what it considers the proper institutional set-up and division of labor will also vary. History and best practices are simply evidence to be weighed in arriving at the best local approach.