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LONGITUDINAL IMPACTS OF SHELTER AND SETTLEMENTS RECOVERY

Case Studies

Mohamed Hilmi & The Shelter and Settlements Working Group



The Background

In recent large scale natural disasters, humanitarian actors were successful in providing effective emergency and transitional shelter solutions. However, durable solutions for more permanent housing issues remain elusive. For example, following 2010 earthquake in Haiti, nearly 120,000 transitional shelters were provided but large scale permanent housing assistance didn't materialize. More than 18 months after typhoon Haiyan, over 200,000 households were without a durable solution and forced into remote relocation. The lack of recovery and reconstruction policies in Nepal points to similar trends, with over four million people continue to live in emergency shelters after one year. In most IDP and refugee camp or settlement contexts emergency shelter solutions are the norm. More so, expectations of the affected communities for more durable solutions are not being met, which often leaves them in an even more vulnerable condition. This weakens the impact and sustainability achieved by the humanitarian community not just in shelter but in all other related sectoral responses in relation to the overall recovery.

Recent discussions during SSWG meetings, Global Shelter Cluster annual meetings and InterAction-UK Shelter Forum discussions points to a fair amount of progress as well as significant gaps in meeting the long-term needs of the affected communities.

Longitudinal Impacts

The overall objective of these case studies is to take a longitudinal look at the correlation between humanitarian shelter and settlement assistance and its impacts on the long-term recovery of the affected population, and to provide recommendations to assist appropriate framing of future emergency and transitional shelter assistance to relevant stakeholders. Within the above objective the case studies will also look at the coherence between shelter and settlements assistance and related sectoral needs, follow-on programming and their long-term outcomes. InterAction, with the support of USAID/OFDA plans to conduct two case studies, one each in natural disaster and conflict settings.

Apart from direct observations, interviews and literature reviews, we intend to discuss if longitudinal studies could provide better understanding of post-emergency assistance, how such studies could be conducted more methodically, and what are the challenges.

LONGITUDINAL IMPACTS OF SHELTER AND SETTLEMENTS RECOVERY

YOGYAKARTA – 2006 EARTHQUAKE

In recent large scale natural disasters, humanitarian actors were fairly successful in providing emergency and transitional sheltering (ES and TS) solutions. Durable solutions for more permanent housing (PH) issues, however, often remain elusive. Recent discussions during Shelter and Settlements Working Group meetings at InterAction, Global Shelter Cluster annual meetings and InterAction-UK Shelter Forum discussions in London point to a fair amount of progress as well as significant shortcomings in meeting the long-term recovery needs of the affected communities.¹

On May 27, 2006, an earthquake measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale hit Yogyakarta, Indonesia, killing nearly 6,000 people, damaging or destroying some 628,000 homes, and leaving 1.5 million people homeless. Ten years later, in 2016, the InterAction SSWG, with the support of USAID/OFDA, conducted a field visit to Yogyakarta, Indonesia to look at the impact, effectiveness and recovery processes from the post-earthquake humanitarian shelter assistance. The following summary highlights key findings from the assessment.

Governance and Disaster Context

A strong and functioning local government structure and capacity, both at the local and national level, was an important factor that facilitated rapid and effective response. Unlike in remote Aceh province, where civil conflict and widespread destruction was observed, Yogyakarta was easily accessible with no security issues. Local and national authorities and civil societies were familiar with each other and able to collaborate and make quick decisions. The city of Yogyakarta escaped major damage and businesses were able to restart quickly.

¹ During this 10-day visit the team met with over 25 national and international actors who responded during the initial stages of the disaster. Many of the informants continue to live in the area, thereby have a longitudinal perspective of the response and recovery processes during the past 10-years. This summary is intended only as an informed preliminary observation on the long-term impacts and the factors that contributed to the recovery. It also provides some useful insights into community DRR practices after 10-years. A more methodological detailed study is required to validate some of these observations.

Preparedness

Weeks prior to the earthquake, news of Mount Merapi starting to erupt prompted many aid organizations to arrive in Yogyakarta with emergency supplies to assist evacuees. Most of these organizations were already working in Aceh reconstruction and had the experience, local staff and basic emergency funding to pivot to additional response activities. This preparedness and pre-positioning helped to speed up emergency assistance and reduce displacement. Many affected villages received immediate emergency shelter materials, water and other basic necessities and were able to shelter in place.

Lack of Relocation

Immediate and fairly successful emergency assistance can be attributed to little or no displacement. The influential Sultan of Yogyakarta, who convened some of the initial meetings with local and international actors, insisted on a no-relocation policy as well as reliance on community's self-help and coping mechanisms. A small number of households without clear formal land title were displaced, including squatters, renters and families living on state owned 'sultan's land'. Other communities who lived in highly risky areas that are prone to landslides were displaced and sheltered in climatically and culturally inappropriate telly tubby concrete dome houses. Adverse effects of these displacements continue to this day. Families who opted to stay in their own land or neighborhoods were able to avoid land tenure issues and clearly recovered much faster than those that were displaced.

Local Capacity and Cooperation

Yogyakarta is home to a highly functional civil society, making it one of Indonesia's most important centers of learning and a hub for many national think tanks and non-government organizations. Many local NGOs had strong relationships with affected communities and local governments, as well as having prior experience responding to smaller and medium scale disasters. This enabled them easy access to key decision makers. Their pre-existing relationship with INGOs, UN Agencies and donors had significant impact on the speed, efficiency and scale-up of the response. The University Gadjadara (UGM) hosted many of the initial shelter cluster, TWIG and SAG meetings while over 5000 capable students assisted in assessment, verification, technical assistance, and monitoring of construction quality. This extensive local involvement contributed immensely to the speed and effectiveness of both the emergency and reconstruction phases.

Coordination

In one of the first full roll-outs of the cluster system, international and local aid agencies were fully engaged in the shelter cluster coordination. This enabled a fairly uniform and cohesive response approaches across agencies. While the sultanate and the local authorities initially promoted a one-step process to rebuilding, i.e. immediate permanent housing, the cluster partners advocated and ultimately implemented a two-step process, i.e. emergency and transitional shelter first, and then permanent housing, to ensure that people had adequate temporary shelter in advance of the upcoming rainy season, the need to avoid displacements, and the time needed to finalize permanent housing assistance mechanisms. Although this two-step process has continued to work well in many more recent disasters, often the permanent housing assistance does not materialize swiftly enough or adequately leverage the humanitarian shelter assistance to achieve similar impacts. Although there was some informal coordination between sectoral actors, lack of systematic multi-sector assessments and programming have left gaps in some locations in terms of water, sanitation and access to other services.

Utility of Emergency and Transitional Shelter Assistance

The case study informants largely agreed that the rapid emergency and transitional shelter assistance as provided had a large and well received impact that enabled a faster recovery process. This rapid shelter relief, combined with follow on reconstruction assistance enabled the communities to swiftly return to normalcy, restart livelihood activities, revitalize the market systems and inject cash into the local economy. Tarpaulins provided during the emergency can be seen being used for sun drying rice, covering cars and temporary buildings such as those erected for weddings or other community events. Informants noted that some TS and its materials were still used in large quantities seven years after the earthquake, mostly for animal shelters, storage, and small shops or work areas. This is remarkable given that some shelters were constructed from untreated bamboo with an initial expected lifespan of eighteen months.

The 10-year field visit encountered a few TS still in use, a few transitioning from sheltering the whole family to sheltering some of the (extended) family, although the majority is serving other functions such as shelters for livestock, kiosks or small shops, storage of agricultural equipment and harvest, sheltering cars and motorbikes and used as supplementary kitchens. In addition, remnant or disassembled materials were still visible, reused for extensions as well as being stored for potential future use and clearly still seen as a valuable household asset.

Local Social Cohesion and Coping Mechanisms

Largely credited to the active involvement and advice of local civil society organizations, international actors adapted their assistance to leverage the tradition of Gotong Royang (mutual help mechanism or neighborhood self-help programs), and provided shelter assistance through POKMAS (neighborhood/community groups) as opposed to individual households. Gotong Royang, where the whole neighborhood assists an individual household in need, ensured high levels of community participation and ownership in the programs. The success of the early assistance can be largely credited to aid agencies utilizing and leveraging existing social cohesion and coping mechanisms, particularly Gotong Royang.

While leveraging existing social structures was a strength of the response, many informants were concerned about the erosion of Gotong Royang and attributed it in part to the way international assistance targeted families – specifically transferring the responsibility to individual households vs. collective community causes. Informants were also concerned about disaster assessments that focused on physical damage as opposed to social and psychosocial impacts and that vulnerability criteria used by many agencies were not adapted to local contexts. While this is a complex issue to look at in a short visit, most informants voiced strong concern about the “arrogance” of international actors and that “they arrive and leave” without understanding long-term consequences of their actions.

Equitable Assistance and the Most Vulnerable

Gotong Royang, a mechanism where communities collectively decided the prioritization and distribution of assistance within their POKMAS neighbourhoods, and Bagi Rata (a system of equitable distribution) largely resulted in quick and fairly equitable assistance to reach individual households. However, nearly two years after the disaster a Handicap International Data showed that the majority of the nearly 20,000 households, with a newly handicapped primary breadwinner, have not managed to complete their permanent houses to a habitable state and were still living in bamboo and tarpaulin shelters. This situation, while improved over the years, still affects many vulnerable families. This is a trend that can be seen in many other disasters since 2006. It is imperative that responders pay particular attention to the most vulnerable households who may require additional and special assistance to recover.

Early Engagement of Development Actors

Nearly a quarter of a million destroyed houses were rebuilt within eighteen months. This is due to multiple factors but importantly, the early engagement of development actors coupled with relatively early funding for permanent reconstruction, played a significant role in speeding the recovery process. Although a two-step process, a number of programs successfully integrated TS and PH assistance, even when less funding was available for permanent housing assistance than initially promised. Knowing that the PH assistance is on the way, families and aid agencies were able to physically locate the TS in such a way that left PH foundations and plats intact. This avoided some land issues as well as continued use of TS as a supplementary unit for several years beyond its expected lifespan. Pre-disaster affordable housing programs in the area also helped to accelerate the reconstruction during post-disaster phase.

Cash Assistance

The Yogyakarta response is noted for its use of direct cash transfer, particularly in the PH programs. At the initial stages, most of the cash assistance was either small amount used for basic shelter materials or supplements for most vulnerable families. However, direct cash transfer through POKMAS system formed the basis for most PH assistance. Cash assistance was conditional on construction progress and quality and supplemented by trainings, technical assistance, rigorous inspections and evaluations that ensured safer and accelerated reconstruction.

Sustainability of DRR Practices

During both the emergency and reconstruction phases, lasting up to 2-3 years, construction practices followed guidelines and codes. However, as time progressed, construction quality diminished. It can be seen that the new concrete masonry constructions are of poor quality and did not follow guidelines or codes and may prove to be even more dangerous than the traditional timber constructions. Households prioritized the size of the home over safe reconstruction, and the impact of the disaster was forgotten. Lack of enforcement and sustained awareness of safety practices continues to inhibit safer recovery and leaves communities more vulnerable to future disasters.

A LONGITUDINAL LOOK AT THE RECOVERY OF CONFLICT AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

NORTHERN UGANDA

Over two decades of conflict in Northern Uganda forcibly displaced up to 1.8 million people from 1986 to 2006 into IDP camps without adequate security or protection and were subjected to brutal attacks, rape, torture, starvation and other forms of violations from all sides. Since then most people have returned to their places of origin with some, mostly the abducted youth and returned child soldiers, living in urban areas of Gulu. However, the physical and psychological suffering stems from poor physical and social environment in camps, the absence of a comprehensive resettlement strategy, and the limited follow-up assistance continue to affect many of these communities.

Almost ten years later, major challenges faced by the returnees include land conflicts, limited psychosocial support, reintegration of youth (former child soldiers and abductees) back in to the society, and limited access to services such as education and health. Many of these issues that continued to affect the communities were directly attributed to the conditions in the overcrowded and unplanned camps and the response that failed to foresee long-term issues in the resettlement areas. Most families with individual or community-owned land are facing lack of tenure security and legal disputes related to land. With ongoing and anticipated large-scale displacements and resettlements in Uganda and other parts of the world some of the following observations could become useful. It's worth noting that many of these lessons are basic good practices and have been well documented elsewhere but often overlooked in practice.

10 years after resettlement, the impact of unplanned and overcrowded camps still affects overall wellbeing and recovery.

During the conflict whole villages were forced by the government to move into unplanned and overcrowded camps. While the immediate negative impacts of poorly-designed camps are well known, even after a decade, the returnees reported enduring physical, social and psychological impacts on individuals and communities. They attributed the conditions in the camp as a direct cause. These poorly-

designed camps eroded already fragile physical and mental wellbeing of the displaced population and undermined social cohesion. Poor access to water, sanitation, health and education services, inadequate and overcrowded shelter, and crowded and ill-designed settlements constrained the ability of most displaced population to cope. A combination of limited mobility and scarce opportunities to generate income contributed to fragmented families and eroded traditional social support systems and coping mechanisms. When camps become a necessity, adequate investments should be made to design camps that address overall health, security and privacy and must preserve and maintain social cohesion and traditional support systems.

Resettlement Strategies Must be Transparent

After the end of hostilities, communities were again forced to move closer to their places of origin into smaller ‘decongestion’ or ‘transit’ camps and then again into their former customary lands. These transit camps were used as a temporary place by communities to inspect conditions of their places of origin. The lack of essential services and adequate resettlement guidance meant that people moved several times between original camps, transit camps and places of origin while attacks continued, although less frequently as time passed. Families were separated while the most vulnerable such as children, youth, and elderly stayed in the original camps. Lack of information either from the government or civil organizations and the fluidity of the situation meant that people end up constructing interim shelters several times. Searching for construction materials such as wood and thatch contributed to significant cases of abductions, rapes and abuses.

Community members asked for examples of resettlement strategies that have resulted in successful returns and recovery in other parts of the world. While documentations on lessons and strategies for resettlement are available, most of the documentations are aimed to help implementing organizations and practitioners and not targeted for the affected communities.

Resettlement and infrastructure interventions require thorough assessment, local partnerships and commitment.

In each of the (at least) three phases of forced displacements, into initial camp, transit camps and places of origin, majority of the families were left to make decisions on their own. Agencies provided limited material and technical support for shelter construction. Communities possessed some skills and ability to

construct their own traditional types of shelters. However, that process of shelter construction such as obtaining additional shelter materials compounded security and protection issues, including GBV and abductions. The reversal of traditional gender roles and the burden put on women and girls to provide for families such as the need to collect shelter materials, firewood and water increased their risks. None of the basic infrastructure and services in the transit camps or neighborhoods in the resettlement areas were planned. Soldiers located themselves in the center of civilian camps that caused increased attacks, abductions and abuse.

Both communities and local government were critical of the way basic community infrastructure and other services related to the settlements were provided, especially during the forced return into transit camps and subsequently into their places of origin.

These and other smaller infrastructure projects were seen by the communities as “NGO owned”, rather than jointly owned with the communities and were poorly maintained and became unusable. Often, the lack of technical capacity, adequate funding and long-term presence hinder the sustainability of these interventions. Engaging in infrastructure assistance needs a thorough assessment, partnerships with local actors and require a long-term commitment.

While security of being in their own home, the social, protection, economic opportunities it provides and the crucial role of shelter in the recovery process were noted by communities. However, lack of forward planning and coordination in this context resulted in duplications and significant gaps between communities. Most of the needs assessments and programming missed the long-term outlook and inter-related recovery needs of the communities but rather focused on the immediate physical relocation.

Address land tenure issues to reduce future conflicts

During the early resettlement period communities did not receive any guidance, support or means to resolve land issues. Marked reduction in attacks and violence, a new land policy requiring individual legal land titles and commercial interest in large scale farming in the area saw rapid increase in land prices and subsequent disputes. Breakdown of social ties and weakening traditional community dispute resolution mechanisms forced people to resort to legal actions in courts but without the understanding of legal process, ownership evidence or legal assistance. Today, land tenure issues are perceived as the most

complex and ongoing challenge faced by individuals, families and communities. The monetization of individual as opposed to traditional community land ownership, in a community where community solidarity, family and social bonds have eroded, caused increased conflicts and further break down of social norms.

Intensification of land conflicts can be, at least in part, attributed to the failure of resettlement actors to understand or foresee the importance of land issues in a predominantly agricultural and pastoral society. These same issues can be seen even in urban areas where people return after long periods of displacement, in Uganda and other parts of the world.

Community mediation mechanisms offered through civil society and local administration have resulted in higher rates of dispute resolutions than official legal discourse in courts. These mechanisms should be supported and strengthened as the earliest possible time. In recent years substantial work has been done in the area of HLP and future responses must invest adequate resources to address these issues.

NGOs Role in Transition and Recovery

Resettled communities, CBOs and local government officials highly appreciated the contribution of international NGOs and their national partners throughout various stages of displacements and the final phases of resettlement. Their contributions, especially in primary education, gender, livelihood support and health had long-term positive impacts. However, most assistance were focused on building structures such as schools, boreholes and health clinics, and less so in community capacity building and human resource development. Most local organizations and national staff trained in various fields continue to serve the communities in Acholi region or other parts of Uganda. Local actors stressed that more focus on skills development of local staff could have had lasting impacts that will stay with the communities.

Most agencies rushed to provide assistance in the transit camp areas, although it was a temporary location, instead of in the resettled neighborhoods. There were various large-scale infrastructure projects such as training facilities, farms and youth centers were carried out by the development actors, especially at the later stages of return that are now mostly abandoned. Programs and activities ended abruptly, and most NGOs left the area without continuity or suitable handover. This seems to have been the pattern with recovery, reconstruction and stabilization programs that followed the humanitarian assistance and resulted

in waste of resources and community resentment. Resettlement and recovery is a long-term process and requires coordination between humanitarian and development organizations, local government and communities.



Authors:

Mohamed Hilmi

INTERACTION

Kelly Van Husen

GLOBAL COMMUNITIES

Jamie Richardson

CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

With Consultants:

Dave Hodgkin

HUMANITARIAN BENCHMARK

Jacky Atingo

INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Mohamed Hilmi & The Shelter and Settlements Working Group:
shelter@interaction.org

ABOUT INTERACTION

InterAction is a convener, thought leader, and voice for nearly 200 NGOs working to eliminate extreme poverty, strengthen human rights and citizen participation, safeguard a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people.

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