Haiti Earthquake 2010: Lessons learned and essential questions

### Initial actions
- Initial actions are crucial – they either support longer-term development or undermine it.
- Recovery is the overriding challenge and realistic (long) timelines needed.
- Prepare in advance for the problems of scaling up not simply by identifying resources but also by making systems and practices suitable for maximum participation by local people.
- Stick to areas of agency competence. There is a tendency with more money and competition to move outside of core competencies.
- Hire strong people who know the place and the context and are experienced in emergency response.

### Relief issues
- Needs assessments are key. Joint assessments are important where possible. Assessment information should be shared with all relevant stakeholders.
- Ratio of dead to injured varies widely – response should be on actual assessment not rules of thumb.
- Disease is unlikely – out of 600 geophysical disasters only 3 were found to lead to epidemics.
- Let the living bury the dead – lack of proof of death can have an impact on livelihoods, inheritance or remarriage. Not knowing about person’s death can also have a psychological impact.
- Pay people to clear the rubble. Protect property rights, provide protective equipment and deal with hazardous material responsibly.
- There is no gap or stability phase between relief and recovery as may occur with refugee emergencies or similar complex emergencies. Households begin their recovery efforts immediately after the earthquake.

### Participation and Communication
- Close consultation with the community is needed so that policies and programs are based on community priorities.
- Clear communication and full information about recovery plans is important – the availability of information has a large impact on recovery and potential dependency on relief. Ensuring communication to women and marginalized groups is important.
  - Be clear about whether support is temporary or longer term.
- At various points in programming, ask recipients if assistance is appropriate.
- Use local advertising and marketing firms to convey key messages and reach target groups.
- Greater attention should be paid to what constitutes ‘local capacity’ and the extent to which existing groups offer potentially viable partnership for agencies.
- In urban setting: Community-based and geographic targeting may be more difficult as communities can be defined by family and social networks rather than geographic proximity. This may make local preparedness more challenging.

### How are we communicating our future plans to affected communities so that people can plan their own recovery strategies?

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1 Lessons taken from ALNAP Responding to earthquakes 2008: Learning from earthquake relief and recovery operations; ALNAP Responding to urban disasters: learning from previous relief and recovery operations; Consolidated Lessons from Tsunami Evaluation Coalition; Expanded Summary Tsunami Evaluation Coalition; and correspondence with Camilo Valderrama about IRC’s Pakistan earthquake response.
How do we plan to collect information about our programs and how are we remaining flexible in our response? What complaint and feedback mechanisms can we put in place for our programs?

Shelter and construction

- Transitional shelter should be based on needs assessment and integrated with permanent shelter solution
- The costs of planning restrictions to communities should be balanced against the risk. People commonly return to forbidden zones.
- Agencies should support people’s desire to remain near their homes and only resettled when essential for safety.
- Support land rights of the poor. Accelerated procedures for resolving property disputes and for fair rules on property title.
- Shelter should be designed to resist likely future hazards. Environmental impact needs to be assessed. Requires special skills

Coordination

- Strong and early representation in coordination bodies is important
- Effective coordination, partnerships and communications are paramount
- Multistakeholder planning essential
  - A joint recovery plan
  - National recovery standards can be important
  - Collect and share information – map out affected area (overlaying community and gps/satellite maps)

What is our coordination and communication strategy with other agencies and the government? What are the key policies we need to advocate for with the government, UN, donors?

Local economic development

- Loss of livelihoods can be the highest priority for affected communities
  - Loss of human capital, assets, employment, and markets.
- “Pro-poor” response includes rapidly assessing pre-existing markets, supply and value chains, re-establishing ‘foundation markets’ that underpin the development and participation of crisis affected population
- Cash for work and cash grants preferred by communities and allow families to meet their immediate needs.
  - Cash support can prevent quick selling of productive assets at low prices.
  - Cash provides the most flexible assistance (where functioning markets)
- Communal labor is unrealistic and unjust to rely on voluntary labor if long term work needed. Cash for work may be most appropriate but need to understand context.
- Use of cash and local procurement are preferred where possible
- Livelihoods are closely tied to shelter
  - Seven economic impacts of shelter (p. 17)
- Support sustainable livelihoods
  - Avoid unsustainable such as fishing after the tsunami where over-fishing was a problem
- Livelihood interventions may be needed at multiple levels
  - Individual, community, industry

What is the likely impact of our interventions on longer term recovery? What is the impact of our actions on local markets? Where might we be able to use cash grants instead of other programming? How are we assessing where we can use local procurement and cash?
Inequalities

- Agencies need to analyze relief and recovery policies to determine impact on men, women, children, privileged and disadvantaged. Disasters can allow for major social changes but agencies should be realistic about the existing constraints. Aid is likely to reinforce inequalities unless corrective action is taken.

Do our programs increase, reinforce or reduce existing inequalities? How will we assess this? Are there gatekeepers who might prevent some groups from benefiting from our programs? What actions are needed to reduce the program support of inequalities?

DRR (many lessons in documents, particularly TEC report)

- Disaster risk reduction is a long-term commitment and should be based on an assessment of full range of risks—not just future earthquakes
  - Earthquakes are harder to promote risk reduction for because are rare.
  - Possible actions on pg. 10 of ALNAP Responding to Earthquakes Review
- Communities should be encouraged to develop contingency plans.
- Build back better

How do our programs consider risk assessment and how do they reduce future disaster risk?

Social capital key to recovery

- Community driven approach to post-disaster recovery. Much assistance target individual households or national governments. There is a need to provide assistance for physical, social and economic infrastructure at community levels. Social funds and block grants may be helpful for this.

How are our programs and approaches supporting social capital/cohesion? How are they undermining it? How might we use a community driven approach to providing services?

Food security

Key differences between urban and rural food insecurity (Box 3 in Urban Disaster Review)

- Urban households often rely on a more varied diet.
- Urban households pay more for food in both time and financial costs, particularly the urban poor for whom food is their largest expense.
- The dependence of urban livelihoods on insecure employment (often informal) decreases the ability to protect against future food insecurities.
- Urban social networks can be important in meeting basic food needs, and may be positively or negatively impacted by geographic positioning in a city.
- Urban households are smaller in average size, but have higher proportions of children to adults and higher proportions of non-family members.
- Urban women’s participation is greater in income-generating activities.
- Food insecurity is enhanced by inadequate infrastructure and social services in urban areas.