Sustainable Post-Disaster Recovery – Turning Disasters into Opportunities for Development –

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Abstract:
The response to major natural disasters is still dominated by humanitarian assistance and emergency management. At the same time, long-term reconstruction efforts too often rebuild the conditions of risk existing before disaster, quite literally creating the conditions for future and often more severe disasters. Meanwhile, the gap between emergency assistance and long-term reconstruction remains unfilled, a window of opportunity for factoring risk reduction measures into recovery is lost and what support to recovery exists (from government agencies, bilateral and multilateral agencies and NGOs) takes place in an uncoordinated and fragmented manner.

As the combined cost of disaster loss, humanitarian assistance and reconstruction investment continues to grow, clearly a new approach is required. Experience from recovery efforts following a number of major natural disasters in recent years (Venezuela landslides and floods, 1999; Gujarat earthquake, 2001 etc.) show that in order to promote sustainable post-disaster recovery and to turn disasters into opportunities for development, recovery planning should support and build on existing local and national capacities, rather than emphasise external assistance. It should be structured on bottom-up decentralized planning and programming rather than on a top-down master planning model. It should seek to factor risk management and reduction considerations into all recovery activities from the outset. It should pilot viable recovery approaches at the local level that can then be mainstreamed into longer-term reconstruction efforts. It should provide a strategic framework that allows the coordination of multiple actors from the local to the international levels. When recovery is addressed in this way it can close the “gap” between emergency relief and sustainable development; facilitate a sustainable reduction in such vulnerabilities and risks; improve co-ordination; enable a rapid recovery of livelihoods and development and build local capacities and demonstrate approaches that can be applied more broadly.

While international frameworks to improve humanitarian co-ordination and to promote disaster reduction are now well established, the issue of post-disaster recovery has not received attention appropriate to the magnitude of the issue. A coordinated international effort is required to: raise awareness of recovery issues; address the resource gap between humanitarian assistance and longer term reconstruction; forge partnerships and coordination mechanisms; develop and strengthen national capacities and to develop a set of approaches, methodologies, procedures and mechanisms for sustainable post-disaster recovery.