

Rapid Shelter Lessons Review

from the ALNAP Lessons Paper: Responding to earthquakes 2018¹

Summary

The lessons below are those specific to supporting shelter and settlements needs and are taken from the 2018 ALNAP paper 'Responding to Earthquakes'. The paper synthesised a range of documents from different earthquakes to draw out those lessons which may be transferrable to other earthquake contexts. These lessons cover a wide range of environmental impact, security, cash assistance, debris management, cultural appropriateness, HLP and transition to recovery. This document is designed to be read in parallel with the original paper which contains the references. For the full references cited below, please see the original ALNAP paper at [2018 ALNAP Lessons Paper - responding to earthquakes.pdf](#) (visited 15.02.23).

In brief, for support to shelter and settlements in the aftermath of earthquakes, ALNAP collected the following lessons:

- Ensure the appropriate balance between using locally sourced reconstruction materials and preserving a country's natural resources.
- Increase the security of makeshift shelters, which use tarps, with timber and locks.
- Shelter needs can be covered in certain situations with unconditional cash transfers (UCTs).
- Clearing the debris requires identifying available spaces that can temporarily house rubble or that can be used to build temporary shelters.
- The humanitarian community should also undertake any further feasible actions to ensure that a lack of documentation does not delay reconstruction and resettlement efforts.
- Humanitarian agencies can agree with the financial service providers to use NGO ID cards as opposed to national ID cards, which people may have lost.
- Implement housing programmes, not only for property owners but for all people whose homes were damaged or destroyed by the earthquake, and whether or not they possess the correct documentation.
- While there is clearly a need to withstand further shocks, humanitarian organisations must also consider how reconstruction efforts can preserve a location's cultural heritage.
- Use transitional shelters only as part of a wider process for establishing permanent housing.

¹ Juillard, H. and Jourdain, J. (2019) ALNAP Lessons paper: Responding to earthquakes. ALNAP/ ODI: London

- Ensure that transitional shelters arrive quickly enough after the earthquake.
- Ensure that if opting for transitional shelters, the response be adapted to the specific context.
- Donors should amend their strategies in light of criticisms that they are more willing to fund transitional shelters that can be constructed and operational within a year, than to provide funding for ‘slow and incremental’ initiatives.

The full lessons can be found in the pages below. Please note the headings correspond with those in the original paper, but some heading have been omitted since no shelter lessons were found in those sections.

Collection of Full Shelter Lessons

A. Across the project cycle

Lesson 4: Ensure that cross-cutting issues such as gender, security and the environment are incorporated at all stages of the response

Earthquakes should be used as an opportunity to ‘build back greener’

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“Ensure the appropriate balance between using locally sourced reconstruction materials and preserving a country’s natural resources. The IFRC response after the Haiti Earthquake attempted to reduce transportation emissions in order to lower its carbon footprint. However, due to widespread deforestation, the organisation ultimately opted to use imported wood for shelter reconstruction (Rees-Gildea and Moles, 2012: 32). “

Ensure safety and security for earthquake-affected populations

“Increase the security of makeshift shelters for earthquake-affected populations, such as using solid wood instead of windows covered by tarps or by including locks on doors (Hirano, 2012: 7). “

C. Strategic planning

Lesson 8: Locate spaces to store debris and, if appropriate, use short-term conditional assistance to clear it

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“Earthquakes cause a significant amount of debris and rubble when they destroy buildings and other infrastructure (Kilby and Williamson, 2011; Jackson, 2015). This is particularly relevant in urban settings. As demonstrated by previous responses, one of the most urgent actions is to clear the debris to make critical roads and rescue sites accessible (Mughal et al., 2015). This requires identifying

available spaces that can temporarily house rubble or that can be used to build temporary shelters. A previous ALNAP Lessons Paper credited the mapping and use of free spaces in Nepal for storing debris as a success of the humanitarian response (Sanderson and Ramalingam, 2015). At the same time, however, the number of debris storage areas after the earthquake in Nepal proved to be inadequate, which demonstrates how difficult debris management can be in post-earthquake contexts.”

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“Although this is not necessarily earthquake-specific, it must be noted that beyond conditional assistance, there have been various successful examples of using unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) in earthquake response. Examples of this are listed below.

- Christian Aid’s (2012) use of UCTs after the Haiti Earthquake to meet a wide range of basic needs, including food, fuel, shelter materials, and paying medical bills.”

Lesson 9: Anticipate issues related to lack of documentation and complex land tenure

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“Another issue that humanitarian actors should anticipate after an earthquake is that of land tenure. The weak and often confusing land ownership laws in countries such as Haiti have had significant negative consequences on the recovery process. These challenges can take considerable time and resources to overcome, as sorting out informal ownership and the lack of records can require local government entities, such as city councils, to provide permission or act as a negotiator with landlords for work to begin (World Bank, 2016: 87; Solidarités International, 2017: 24). Complicated land tenure in Nepal also negatively affected recovery processes (Jackson et al., 2016: 9). Possible ways forward include the following:

- Work with government to ensure that all landless people are provided with a victim identification card, and that women’s names are included on these cards if there is only one card provided per household. The humanitarian community should also undertake any further feasible actions to ensure that lack of documentation does not delay reconstruction and resettlement efforts (ibid.: 44).
- Ensure that the delivery modality chosen for reconstruction programmes does not exclude any groups (including women) that have lost or have never had official IDs (Barber, 2016: 5). If cash assistance is used, ensure that Know Your Customer (KYC) regulations are adjusted, for example, by agreeing with the financial service providers to use NGO ID cards as opposed to national ID cards.
- Implement housing programmes, not only for property owners but for all people whose homes were damaged or destroyed by the earthquake, and whether or not they possess the correct documentation. For instance, in Nepal, the government’s post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA) noted that the National Shelter Policy should be the basis for all reconstruction programmes. This policy requires the government to provide poor people or those who reside in unsafe settlements with land (Barber, 2016).”

E. Implementation

Lesson 12: Prioritise the repair of existing structures, support owner driven reconstruction, preserve architectural heritage and use relocation and resettlement only as a last resort

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“In doing so, the humanitarian community should strive to find the right balance between ‘building back better’ and preserving architectural heritage. While there is clearly a need to withstand further shocks, humanitarian organisations must also consider how reconstruction efforts can preserve a location’s cultural heritage, as this is a source of identity for affected populations and can support psychological recovery (Audefroy, 2011: 461; Barber, 2016). One way to achieve this is through owner-driven reconstruction, which means providing affected communities with financial, material and/or technical assistance so that they can rebuild their homes (or oversee local labourers who handle the reconstruction). As well as offering a method for preserving architectural heritage, owner-driven reconstruction can be an empowering and dignified approach, allowing populations to be proactive in their own recovery and adjust the reconstruction efforts to their needs (Jha et al., 2010; Tafti and Tomlinson, 2015). Participatory methods such as the participatory approach for safe shelter awareness (PASSA) are also useful to ensure that affected populations drive reconstruction choices (Rees-Gildea and Moles, 2012: 27). “

Lesson 13: Be cautious with setting up transitional shelters, which may hinder longer-term reconstruction

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“After the 2010 Haiti Earthquake, the use of transitional shelters was controversial because there were fears these shelters would become permanent, which complicated longer-term reconstruction plans. For this reason, transitional shelter came under a wide range of criticism and started being defined as ‘a total waste of money’, ‘counter-developmental’ or ‘only fitting donors and aid agencies’ needs, not that of people’ (Sanderson et al., 2014: 144). Despite the evidence supporting these critiques, it must also be acknowledged that transitional shelters have actually helped meet the needs of earthquake-affected populations in several instances. After the 2003 Bam Earthquake in Iran, authorities estimated that permanent housing would not be available for at least two years in urban areas. By installing transitional shelters on vacant urban lots, the authorities avoided the displacement of populations to camps (Jha et al., 2010: 19-20).

When using a transitional shelter approach, humanitarian organisations should bear in mind the following lessons:

- Use transitional shelters only as part of a wider process for establishing permanent housing. Key actions include promoting a safe return strategy, developing neighbourhoods across all sectors (e.g. education, waste management, leadership, livelihoods, etc.), and investing in knowledge, skills and capacities to build safe communities (Cohen, 2012: 7; Sanderson et al., 2014: 144; Vahanvati and Mulligan, 2017).

- Ensure that transitional shelters arrive quickly enough after the earthquake. In Haiti in 2010, the humanitarian community struggled to reach consensus on the shape of transitional shelters and to procure the necessary materials, which meant that the first shelters had barely been built within four months of the earthquake (Sanderson et al., 2014: 141). By this time, several affected populations had already restarted economic activities in camps, and transitional shelters were no longer fit for purpose. In Sri Lanka, however, the first transitional shelters were received four weeks after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and were considered rather successful.
- Ensure that if opting for transitional shelters, the response be adapted to the specific context (Davidson, 2011: 14). Transitional shelters are more complex in urban areas due to density and space parameters (Sanderson and Ramalingam, 2015: 19). Similarly, transitional shelters are often more successful in middle-income or high-income countries because their resources enable a move to permanent reconstruction more easily (Sanderson et al., 2014). Nonetheless, the previous example of the 2003 Bam Earthquake contradicts these rules to some extent - the earthquake happened in an urban context in Iran. Taking all examples into account, it seems clear that agencies need to recognise that every disaster is unique and that the only way to really determine whether an approach may be successful is to consult affected populations from the outset (Jha et al., 2010: 18).
- Donors should amend their strategies, in light of criticisms that they are more willing to fund transitional shelters that can be constructed and operational within a year than to provide funding for 'slow and incremental' initiatives (Sanderson, 2014: 147). Indeed, this is one of the factors explaining why transitional shelters were implemented in contexts where they were not appropriate. Safer homes, stronger communities refers to this, observing that possible interruptions in funding often hinder permanent reconstruction strategies (Jha et al., 2011: 16). In addition, an output-oriented set-up led to a preference for short-term infrastructure projects over those suited to better alleviate poverty (Lu and Xu, 2013). The latter type of project involved investments that were generally larger and longer term (Chen et al., 2016: 66). “