

Shared Lessons on Post-Disaster Recovery



Regional Knowledge Forum on Post-Disaster Recovery, October 2015

Natural hazard-related disasters continue to cause significant loss of life and serious threats to the attainment of development goals in Southeast Asia. Over 2004–2014, the region witnessed large-scale disaster events, including the 2004 earthquake and tsunami, which affected several countries especially Indonesia and Thailand; the 2008 cyclone (Nargis) in Myanmar; the 2009 typhoon (Ketsana) in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam; the 2011 floods in Thailand; the 2011 and 2013 floods in Cambodia; and the 2013 typhoon (Yolanda) in the Philippines. These events call for “business-not-as-usual” responses to post-disaster recovery. The experiences from post-disaster recovery generate lessons and vast knowledge of managing post-disaster recovery for the affected country and the region as a whole.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) recognizes the importance of facilitating sharing of knowledge on post-disaster recovery from within and outside the region with its developing member countries, especially since post-disaster support is expected to remain an important area of its operations over the medium term, reflecting the trend of rising disaster losses. With this objective, ADB organized the Regional Knowledge Forum on Post-Disaster Recovery on 20–21 October 2015 in Manila, which was attended by over 80 government leaders and decision makers, development partners, and civil society representatives. The forum provided a venue to exchange lessons from post-disaster recovery programs—2004 earthquake and tsunami in Aceh and Nias, Indonesia; 2005 Hurricane Katrina, United States; 2006 earthquake in Yogyakarta and Central Java, Indonesia; 2011 floods in Thailand; and 2012 Hurricane Sandy, United States—

with central and local government officials from the Philippines, who are in the midst of implementing Typhoon Yolanda recovery interventions. Deliberations at the forum repeatedly emphasized the importance of the following in the post-disaster recovery process: horizontal and vertical coordination, iterative planning, flexibility in implementation, speedy delivery, maintenance of a culture of urgency, community and private sector engagement, strengthening of local capacity, active and constant communication, and managing of expectations. The forum sessions highlighted the following shared lessons.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR POST-DISASTER RECOVERY

Planning and budgeting for post-disaster recovery require quick action and strong government leadership.

Fast-track initiation of recovery. After a large-scale disaster, the overlap between the humanitarian response on the one hand and early recovery and reconstruction on the other, often described in post-disaster recovery literature as “phases of post-disaster response,” may need to be increased to fast-track the initiation of economic recovery, thereby reducing the overall fiscal burden of the disaster. Moving forward, the development of ex ante financing instruments for post-disaster responses will be critical to ensure the availability of resources for timely recovery and reconstruction efforts.

We thought it important to start the recovery process even while relief is ongoing.

—Arsenio Balisacan, Philippines

Develop a strategic framework to guide recovery. A strategic framework to guide recovery is needed in the aftermath of a disaster. The recovery framework should outline the strategies aligned with the long-term development strategies of the affected area, articulate the short- and medium-term needs across sectors and the budgetary requirements, describe the regulatory and institutional reforms needed to fast-track recovery implementation, and detail

the role of the government and nongovernment stakeholders and the coordination mechanism between them.

Establish government-led institutional setup and coordination mechanisms. The choice of institutional setup to lead and coordinate the recovery will differ among countries depending on their legislative, policy, and governance structure. However, experiences demonstrate that the success of such a setup rests on the political importance attached, including the selection of a credible leader; clearly defined mandates; and adequate power and authority to command actions across agencies. Coordination remains a crucial function of such setups and should strengthen—not weaken—existing government-led systems and ensure horizontal coordination across sectors and vertical coordination from the local to the national and international level.

Almost all recovery programs in the world experience the 2-year itch—24 months into the implementation, progress remains slow—slow in the face of death and disaster, slow relative to the need—while expectations are high.

—Heru Prasetyo, Indonesia

People tend to say “we do not know, so we can not agree to that.” This we need to avoid. We need to make all efforts so that they can not say that they “do not know.”

—Ladawan Kumpa, Thailand

Strengthen local capacity. Large-scale disasters can easily overwhelm local capacities. From assessment and planning to implementation and monitoring, local government units may not possess the adequate technical and financial capacity to carry out basic functions and mandates related to recovery. This requires abundant technical assistance to support the local governments and help build a cadre of local experts.

Local capacity is crucial because it is at the level of towns, cities, and counties where ‘the rubber hits the road.’ Even jurisdictions with the largest and highest capacities can still be overwhelmed by disaster. From the local perspective, implementing post-disaster recovery projects seems like “drinking from a fire hose”... when you are at your weakest and with a thousand rules for how to do it.

—Scott Davis, United States

BEYOND BUSINESS AS USUAL

Overcoming challenges in implementing recovery and finding opportunities to link recovery to development.

Build back better and strengthen resilience. Despite the tragedy that each disaster brings, they also offer a unique window of opportunity to address root causes of vulnerability—such as improper land use zoning, poor enforcement of building codes, and gender inequality—and in the process strengthen resilience. The “building back better” process should adopt a multi-hazard, systems-based, and integrated approach, factoring in current and future risks; apply engineering standards for strengthening the resilience of physical assets; employ strategies and tools for pre-disaster financial planning; and strengthen capacities for managing residual disaster risk through local preparedness and business continuity management.

Adopt a phased and flexible approach. Full recovery takes time, during which different priorities may be addressed at different periods. Thus the implementation of the recovery program requires a phased and flexible approach that allows for the program focus to be adjusted over time to meet evolving needs.

Involve local communities in the overall recovery effort. In the aftermath of a disaster, communities want to be informed of the government’s plans for recovery. Since the purpose of recovery is to support the affected communities and strengthen their resilience, the recovery process should give ample time and space for the voice and aspirations of the communities to be heard. Engaging local communities from day one will promote ownership of the recovery process and contribute to its success.

KEEPING RECOVERY ON TRACK

Monitoring and evaluation makes the recovery process transparent, accountable, and credible.

Establish monitoring systems to improve transparency and accountability. Having a unified, web-based, and geographically referenced monitoring system that is accessible to all implementing agencies, local governments, and development partners is critical for successful recovery. Such a mechanism provides up-to-date information on the recovery process, pinpoints overlaps and gaps, and enables partners to strengthen synergies among their interventions.

Manage expectations by making critical use of communication. As recovery is everyone’s responsibility, communicating roles, goals, and progress is an important pillar of the recovery process. It is therefore imperative that communication be consistent and comprehensive to coordinate all efforts. A robust monitoring system is needed to enable the effective communication of the process and progress toward recovery.

Consolidate experience into policy, planning, and financing. Recovery reveals policy issues, institutional bottlenecks, and operational hurdles that impede post-disaster recovery efforts. National laws and policies get in the way of speed in project implementation, such as policies on procurement, land acquisition, and the many required permits and clearances needed to start projects. Through monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge sharing, these policies can be reviewed and revisited as necessary.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has adopted an integrated disaster risk management (IDRM) approach which is in line with the priorities of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and is applied in its support for post-disaster relief, early recovery, and reconstruction. This integrated approach allows disaster response actions to strengthen resilience to future hazard events, taking into account both current and possible future forms and levels of disaster risk, as well as to improve access to innovative disaster risk financing solutions to enhance government capacity to provide timely relief, early recovery, and reconstruction interventions. Knowledge solutions, such as this Regional Knowledge Forum on Post-Disaster Recovery, play an important role in the IDRM approach. The forum was organized with support from the ADB Integrated Disaster Risk Management Fund.



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Publication Stock No. ARM157733-2