Vision, Aims and Objectives

What is self-recovery?

People affected by a crisis are the first responders, initiating their recovery process immediately after the shock; they continue to work on improving their lives regardless of external support. Between 80 to 90 percent of people affected by disaster and displacement seek shelter and start to recover their homes with little to no external or formal assistance. They self-recover. Shelter self-recovery is a survivor-led process of recovering adequate living conditions and regaining a sense of home. Depending on the level of loss, needs arising from specific personal circumstances and individual capacities and resources available, people rebuild their homes and lives in very different ways, within different timeframes and consequently with very different results.

What is supporting shelter self-recovery?

Supporting shelter self-recovery is an approach to assisting people in their self-recovery processes: recovering adequate living conditions and re-establishing a sense of home. The approach takes seriously the Grand Bargain commitment on localization, offers a bridge over the humanitarian/development nexus and takes a radical look at ‘participation’.

Through accompaniment and facilitation of people’s self-recovery processes and the provision of additional resources where needed, a self-recovery approach aims to complement, reinforce and accelerate crisis-affected people’s efforts to repair and rebuild in ways that can strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerabilities to future crises.

A shelter self-recovery approach has the potential to benefit people at significant scale, maximizing positive outcomes and sustainability.

Supporting shelter self-recovery requires a shift in mindset from ‘product’ to ‘process’.

How to support self-recovery?

The design and implementation of a programme that supports shelter self-recovery rests on three building blocks:

1. A broad and holistic context analysis. >>See page 8 and 9 for more.
2. Facilitation and accompaniment to remove barriers to recovery, fill gaps in capacity and foster an enabling environment. There are many options of supporting methodologies. >> see page 10 and 11 for more.
3. A process of community mobilisation and engagement. >> See page 11 for more.

These building blocks are embedded in the ‘mortar’ of a flexible process of adaptive programming.

Potential benefits of supporting shelter self-recovery...

Reaching scale and increasing cost effectiveness

Product-based approaches often fail to reach a significant percentage of the affected population. Supported by enabling strategies, self-recovery approaches will benefit a range of people and the broader community, reaching significant scale and value for money.

Allowing for flexibly timed support

Self-recovery begins within days of a disaster. But not everyone will start that process at the same time, and some pace. A self-recovery approach will respect priorities and allow for flexible timing of support.

Improving living conditions by informed choice

Informed decision-making can improve living conditions through better choices regarding: rebuilding locations; safer buildings; disaster risk reduction; healthier homes; improved security; reduced the risk. Achieving a good understanding of local building practices and people’s aspirations will be a critical part of this process.

Laying the foundations for an integrated recovery

While impacts, or multiple effects, of adequate housing – including physical and mental health, livelihoods, protection, importance of home and home-making – are recognised as being essential to recovery, supporting self-recovery into people manage their recovery process according to their needs, priorities and plans.

Acting as a catalyst for psychosocial recovery, well-being and social cohesion

Supporting shelter self-recovery promotes people’s mental health and psychosocial well-being. Ownership and engagement in the active process of home-making and home-rebuilding, facilitate a restoration of a sense of pride, self-worth and dignity, and reduce helplessness. Additionally, self-recovery relies on collective action that enhances social cohesion and sense of home and belonging.

Strengthening capacities, resilience and disaster risk reduction

Supporting shelter self-recovery is an opportunity to generate long-term capacities in adequate, durable and affordable housing that are locally-relevant, resulting in better prepared communities. It is closely linked to the discourse on the humanitarian-development nexus.

SUPPORTING SELF-RECOVERY EXPLAINED

Supporting self-recovery requires a shift in mindset from ‘product’ to ‘process’.

Underlying principles of supporting self-recovery

The central principles that initially encouraged an exploration of self-recovery, and emerged from practice and field research, are not unique to a supporting self-recovery approach, but are valuable for all shelter programmes.

People affected by crises are leaders of their own recovery process.
- Significance of people’s capacities and resources
- Respect for choice and control
- Consideration of different needs and speeds
- Women and girls at the center

Humanitarian agencies can complement affected people’s strengths and capacities.
- Locally-led responses
- Complementing and accompanying existing efforts and plans
- Facilitating recovery processes
- Management of risk
- Support people to make informed choices

Disaster response to leave societies improved, not just restored.
- ‘Better’ should be considered in its most holistic sense. It does not just mean ‘safer’
- ‘Better’ outcomes include improved access to water, sanitation, livelihoods, protection, health and DRR in all contexts

For households with limited resources, it is probable that there will be building quality compromises and standards may be missed.
- Recognise the primary role and responsibilities of the affected population
- ‘We should strive to go from “good enough” to as good as possible’
- Judgement will be needed to determine what will be ‘good enough’ in any given context

Too many examples of reconstruction projects remain unoccupied for socio-cultural reasons, because they were rebuilt in the wrong location, they did not include basic facilities, or for other reasons that were not anticipated.
- People are most likely to build houses that are appropriate and suited to their needs if they are the main drivers of their choices and decisions
- Additional support can be offered to people who do not have capacities to self-recover so that these capacities can be built
- Consider sheltering as a multi-faceted and holistic discipline

...and some challenges

Barriers to holistic humanitarian programming

Recovery is a holistic and multi-faceted process, and its definition will vary from household to household and between communities. Humanitarian assistance is organised in sectors (sometimes criticised for being rigid and failing to integrate) and, as a result, it can be difficult to implement holistic programming that is integrated between sectors.

Restrictive mechanisms within the humanitarian system

Emergency response funding is often limited to one year, or less. However, shelter assistance needs to include a medium to long-term perspective. Moreover, AIDIs priorities often focus on quantitative indicators. These may fail to capture people’s actual self-recovery progress and success which would be better monitored and evaluated by qualitative indicators and outcomes.

Agency constraints and limitations

International agencies may lack experience in the housing sector and be concerned about legal liabilities. Perceptions of supporting shelter self-recovery may be considered too complex and risky. Accepting that some risk and liability must remain with the survivors and respective authorities and therefore creating partnerships with local actors, will help overcome this concern as well as facilitating ‘localisation’ and other Grand Bargains aspirations.

Marginalised and vulnerable groups cannot self-recover.

People with compounded vulnerabilities may not be able to recover with only self-recovery support and may need additional shelter support.

Urban contexts, relocation and displacement

Urban contexts are more complex than rural settings with more to be considered and more actors involved. Urban experts and planners may help in understanding existing self-recovery, and to develop adequate strategies to support these local dynamics.

Refuges and displacement

Finding shelter will always be a priority for refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) and only a minority are provided with shelter by INGOs or government. Supporting self-recovery, aiming at helping both affected and host communities, may help those in informal settlements, abandoned buildings or even sleeping rough.

And some way to mitigate challenges ...

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How to do a context analysis

People affected by a crisis are the first responders, initiating their recovery process immediately. A good analysis of the context is the first building block of supporting self-recovery. It will learn from the past and understand what is currently being done and compare their plans for the immediate future; why are some choices made and not others. This is much more than a needs assessment that counts damaged houses. It analyses how to support a community as an entity in itself. It will also help to be a baseline for future MEAL activities.

Initial orientation

Immediately after the crisis, gain a background understanding of the context and first orientation about the scale, main barriers to and gaps for self-recovery. Explore possible funding options and understand whether a supporting self-recovery approach is feasible.

Rapid context analysis

As soon as possible, validate initial assumptions and explore how best to address them to inform further planning. This can be done through discussions, interviews, rapid walks, knowledge attitude and practice surveys.

Detailed context analysis

Once funding is secured, through working with the affected population, fill in the details of the programme strategy and confirm activities.

Specific assessments

At the different stages of the programme, as needed, conduct assessments on a particular topic of interest in order to provide necessary evidence to inform programme. For example, a market assessment or a study of HLP issues.

Iterative Analysis and Monitoring and Evaluation

Conduct assessment throughout the programme to make regular assessment, establish how people's priorities are changing over time and ensure that the programme adapts to new circumstances, priorities, etc.

Impact evaluation

After the project is complete, and if possible some years later, assess the impact of the project using innovative and community-led evaluation methods.

ACCOMPANYING SELF-RECOVERY

Support options and modalities

‘Doing more with less’ need not be restricted to a single support option. A three-pronged approach of cash, materials and technical assistance can be successful in many contexts. Other forms of accomplishment that may target community and local government levels are equally important and may take the form of advocacy, training, legal support, infrastructure works and more.

How to address barriers

The role that humanitarian organisations can play in advocating for and promoting an enabling environment for self-recovery should not be underestimated. Whether it is advocacy for changes in policy at national level, liaison between local institutions and communities, facilitation of community mobilization or providing legal support to households, organisations can be key influencers in removing institutional barriers.

• Institutional barriers include complex and restrictive legislation, policies or guidelines. Legal support can solve land ownership and mediate disputes.

• Access to finance is a clear barrier. Cash programming, market interventions, microfinance and other options can lift this barrier.

• Rebuilding access to services and functioning infrastructure can speed recovery and mitigate risks.

• Leave no one behind. Ensure that all marginalized and minority groups are included and build on existing community networks and methods of social cohesion.

• Women, young girls and small children spend a disproportionate amount of time in the home. A gendered approach is essential for all good shelter programming.

How to fill gaps in capacity

• Awareness raising and advocacy. Information, Education, Communication (IEC) is one way to raise awareness through a variety of media: posters, leaflets, banners, radio and television slots, dramas and many more.

• Training and two-way exchange of knowledge. There is much to learn from vernacular domestic architecture and indigenous construction practice. Local training centres, local teachers, ‘training of trainers’, or ‘cascade training’ should be considered.

• Accommodation through technical experts and rising teams. ‘Rising teams’; typically a small mixed-gender team from the neighbourhood itself, will regularly visit each household to ensure understanding of necessary compliance and diagrammatic understanding.

• Model houses. Building model or demonstration houses is an essential support option for large scale development.

How to facilitate access to resources

Access to resources is critical and without these materials, labour, finance or knowledge is essential for successful self-recovery.

In-kind provision of materials

In contexts where physical access to markets is difficult, direct in-kind provision of materials or tools may be appropriate. Expertise and hard to access materials, such as corrugated roof sheets, fencing or hurricane straps, will encourage safer construction.

Access to markets

Facilitating transport links and access to markets can support self-recovery. Bulk buying of some materials - sand, gravel, timber etc - can bring down costs.

How are we searching for?

Before and during programmes aiming to support self-recovery, many aspects of the context need to be understood. These include:

• Understanding existing self-recovery

A critical aspect is to focus on people's strengths and capacities first, while also analysing the barriers to their recovery. It is important to understand the dynamics of what people are doing, and plan to do, as they cope with immediate and long-term needs and priorities.

• Economic factors

Understanding economic dynamics at different scales will help to identify bottlenecks, gaps and priorities in accessing markets, labour and financial resources for self-recovery, and how these can be addressed through good programming.

• Political, legal and institutional factors

Political and legal factors have a significant influence on shelter self-recovery and often present systemic barriers that can be difficult to overcome. For advocacy strategies, it is important to understand the layers of political and institutional complexity, the power structures, and related interdependencies.

• Social-cultural and knowledge factors

Social structures and cultural factors have a significant influence on people’s behaviour and the choices they open to them. Understanding people's knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) towards housing, their strengths, weaknesses and ambitions, is critical to determine how best to support.

• Hazards and the physical environment

Altering the physical landscape, hazard risk and access to resources can influence resilience and ability to recover.

Local building practices

People build their homes according to their needs, interests, preferences, ability, and environments, often making use of easily available local materials. Observing local building cultures, traditional house design, materials, labour for construction and maintenance and any preponderance undertaken as a hazard is approaching, will inform shelter self-recovery programming.

Partners and other stakeholders

Mapping stakeholders, their interests and influences at different levels, can help identify potential partners and where communications and advocacy efforts can be best targeted.

Communication channels

Which are the best engagement pathways to establish collaboration? There may be varied methods of engagement and to ensure reaching the most important groups, it is important to know the preferred communication methods and channels that are used and trusted.

Access to finance and cash programming

Direct provision of cash (cash transfer programming) or vouchers are straightforward ways of providing financial support. Note that these are often modest sums, less than the cost of rebuilding, but may help to leverage other available resources, for example savings, loans or remittances from the diaspora. Rental support can be very appropriate especially in the case of displacement to urban contexts.

Access to grants, loans, subsidies and microfinance

Further support to access grants, fair loans, subsidies and microfinance is also valuable. Village savings and loans associations (VSLA) is an established mechanism for accessing finance in a fair and equitable manner.

The community leads

Support for shelter self-recovery focuses on supportive engagement and emphasises a shift from perspective from externally led implementation of projects to accommodation and facilitation of community self-recovery.

Community-led context analysis and assessment

The community is best placed to lead on assessing strengths and vulnerabilities and the likely success of different development approaches. Some assessments, such as building damage and safety, may need specialised expertise.

Community-led programming

Community-led programming provides opportunities for affected people to engage, learn and retain ownership and responsibility. It can strengthen social cohesion and resilience. It leaves a legacy of skills and knowledge. There will be a need to plan for sufficient time and human resource. Training, advice and technical accompaniment will be needed.

Leaving no one behind and targeting support

A self-recovery approach should aim to support the majority, if not all, of the population. However strengths, needs, priorities and choices will vary and consequently support should be tailored accordingly. Awareness training could be for entire community, construction training for carpenters and masons. Families and groups that do not have the capacity to self-recover will need extra support.

Community-led implementation

The role of external organisations is to facilitate and support families and communities along their own recovery pathways. A ‘community action plan’ will identify priorities and needs and define the most appropriate external support. Recovery will proceed at the community’s pace and will flow and alter as time goes by. Assembling organisations need to be able to adapt accordingly.

Learning together - what does success look like?

Conventional MEAL (monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning) processes - beyond the need for donor reporting - have limited value in a approach that supports self-recovery. Evaluation and monitoring needs to be community-led and continuous, constantly allowing for iterative improvements. There are innovative tools that facilitate learning and participation such as Community Score Cards, Outcome Mapping, Most significant Change and Participatory learning.

Iterative process

A supporting shelter self-recovery programme requires a different approach to needs assessments than a conventional shelter programme. The intent is to inform programme activities through iterative and continuous context analysis, which builds on the strengths and capacities of affected people and takes into account their plans and priorities in order to identify gaps and barriers to recovery.

Through this holistic process, agencies will be well equipped to adapt to changes in the environment or to people’s circumstances, and responses will be more relevant and effective as a result. A shift in mindset, the ability to capture both qualitative and quantitative data and the use of iterative monitoring processes underpins a successful context analysis process.

ANALYSING THE CONTEXT: A CONTINUOUS AND HOLISTIC PROCESS

Facilitation and accompaniment: support options

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