

# A NOTE TO THE POLICY MAKER

## Background

*Safer Homes, Stronger Communities: A Handbook for Reconstructing after Disasters* was developed to assist policy makers and project managers engaged in large-scale post-disaster reconstruction programs make decisions about how to reconstruct housing and communities after natural disasters.

As the handbook demonstrates, post-disaster reconstruction begins with a series of decisions that must be made almost immediately. Despite the urgency with which these decisions are made, they have long-term impacts, changing the lives of those affected by the disaster for years to come.

As a policy maker, you may be responsible for establishing the policy framework for the entire reconstruction process or for setting reconstruction policy in only one sector. The handbook is emphatic about the importance of establishing a policy to guide reconstruction. Effective reconstruction is set in motion only after the policy maker has evaluated his or her alternatives, conferred with stakeholders, and established the framework and the rules for reconstruction.

As international experience—and the examples in the handbook—clearly demonstrate, reconstruction policy improves both the efficiency and the effectiveness of the reconstruction process. In addition to providing advice on the content of such a policy, the handbook describes mechanisms for managing communications with stakeholders about the policy, for improving the consistency of the policy, and for monitoring the policy's implementation and outcomes. The handbook does not tell you exactly what to do, but it should greatly improve the likelihood that the reconstruction policy that is established leads to good outcomes.

## Defining the Reconstruction Policy

The handbook begins with a statement of guiding principles (shown in the adjacent box). These guiding principles encapsulate the handbook's advice and reflect some of the key concepts behind it, including participation, collaboration, sustainability, and risk reduction.

Reconstruction begins the day of the disaster. Therefore, one of the principal challenges of the policy maker is to work quickly to establish the policy basis for reconstruction, while taking time to confer with stakeholders and plan the reconstruction properly. The purpose of this Note is to summarize some of the important parameters of the policy-making exercise and to provide a conceptual framework for the reconstruction policy.

Reconstruction policy needs to be defined in five principal areas: (1) the Institutional Strategy, (2) the Financial Strategy, (3) the Community Participation Approach, (4) the Reconstruction Approach, and (5) Risk Management. The handbook's flow chart (shown after the table of contents and in miniature below) graphically represents this process. It also includes one other critical activity, common to all of these policy areas: implementation of a monitoring and feedback system. Also shown in the flow chart are the other critical activities in each of the five policy areas. The following sections summarize the key policy issues within each of the components of the reconstruction policy.

## Handbook Guiding Principles

1. A good reconstruction policy helps reactivate communities and empowers people to rebuild their housing, their lives, and their livelihoods.
2. Reconstruction begins the day of the disaster.
3. Community members should be partners in policy making and leaders of local implementation.
4. Reconstruction policy and plans should be financially realistic but ambitious with respect to disaster risk reduction.
5. Institutions matter and coordination among them improves outcomes.
6. Reconstruction is an opportunity to plan for the future and to conserve the past.
7. Relocation disrupts lives and should be minimized.
8. Civil society and the private sector are important parts of the solution.
9. Assessment and monitoring can improve reconstruction outcomes.
10. To contribute to long-term development, reconstruction must be sustainable.

The last word: every reconstruction project is unique.

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**Institutional Strategy.** People make reconstruction happen, but they will act mostly through different types of organizations. Beginning with government itself, one of the most critical early steps for the policy maker is to identify who will do what and how the numerous organizations that may be involved in reconstruction will work together. A second critical set of decisions has to do with the rules under which reconstruction will take place, that is, what are the laws, regulations, and institutional arrangements, both formal and informal, that will apply and will regulate what reconstruction agencies do. For instance, will projects be subject to existing building codes or environmental law, or will exceptions be made? How will nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) be involved, and how formal should their agreements to provide assistance to affected communities be? The institutional strategy must also evaluate the capabilities of the organizations involved and decide how their activities will be coordinated. What reconstruction responsibilities will local governments handle, for instance, and how will they report back? Whether an effective, coordinated institutional strategy is established, and is then monitored and adjusted as reconstruction proceeds, can determine the success or failure of the entire reconstruction program.

The handbook provides guidance on institutional strategy in several chapters, covering everything from how humanitarian agencies and reconstruction agencies work together (Chapter 1) to providing guidance on institutional options for organizing reconstruction (Chapter 13). In each chapter, the Key Decisions section identifies the roles and tasks that need to be assigned and proposes the appropriate agency to assign them to. Ultimately, many of these decisions need to be made by policy makers and reflected in the institutional element of reconstruction policy. (The chapters that correspond to each policy area are shown in the flow chart.)

**Financial Strategy.** Without financial resources, there will of course be no reconstruction. But a shortage of resources is not the greatest risk in managing the financial aspects of reconstruction. Greater risks are found in the lack of control of financial resources and in the lack of effectiveness of the resources that are spent. Most of the resources spent on reconstruction are not government's. Yet once they are pledged to the reconstruction effort, good post-disaster financial management requires that these commitments be taken into consideration in planning and that their expenditure be tracked. This points out once again the importance of coordination among agencies involved in reconstruction, as well as the need for systems that will permit accurate programming and tracking of expenditures, no matter the funding source.

Resources must not only be mobilized, programmed, and tracked, but some must be allocated and delivered directly to those affected by the disaster. For this population, the design and execution of the assistance strategy for housing is their principal concern and may be the sole metric by which they evaluate the policy framework, since it is the decision that will most directly affect them. Yet for the policy maker, this is, in fact, a complex set of decisions that have social, economic, and logistical implications. The assistance strategy must be tailor-made to the country and the disaster, and take into account existing social policy, as well the social equity and development objectives established for reconstruction. Lastly, preventing the misuse of resources must be a priority of policy makers, and anticorruption measures must be planned for and implemented throughout the reconstruction process.

The handbook provides guidance on mobilizing finance, tracking expenditures, and allocating and delivering resources to households, and includes measures for qualifying recipients of assistance and redressing their grievances (Chapter 15). It also suggests criteria for designing the assistance scheme (Chapter 4) and explains how financial management and procurement are handled in World Bank projects (Chapters 22 and 23). An entire chapter is dedicated to measures to mitigate corruption (Chapter 19).

**Community Participation Approach.** What is the role of affected communities in reconstruction and who decides on that role? Government cannot control what people do after a disaster, but the reconstruction policy can establish an approach to communication and interaction with affected communities that puts them in the center, capitalizing on the community members' wisdom, experience, and energy, or, alternatively, an approach that frustrates and disempowers all involved. Engagement with affected communities begins with communication, and a two-way consultative form of communication is strongly encouraged. Affected communities should have the opportunity to participate in policy making, including in the institutional and financial elements described

above. Working “as a community” in reconstruction will be a foreign concept in many places, and there can be capture of these processes and the resources that are provided. Therefore, facilitation and oversight are critical to ensuring that community-based efforts are effective, properly governed, and truly participatory.

Guidance is found throughout the handbook on putting and keeping affected communities in the driver’s seat during reconstruction, recognizing that there will be pressures to establish a more “efficient,” top-down approach and that the commitment to participatory reconstruction needs to come from the top. Chapters and case studies demonstrate different models of participation and advice on recruiting community facilitators (see in particular Chapter 12). Also provided are practical tools, such as guidelines for training (Chapter 16), participatory assessment (Chapter 2), and social auditing (Chapter 18).

**Reconstruction Approach.** If reconstruction begins the day of the disaster, what does it mean for government to define the reconstruction approach? This element of reconstruction policy addresses how physical reconstruction will be carried out at the community level, starting with the important issue of the role of affected households in the actual reconstruction. Depending on the respective roles of households and reconstruction agencies, different forms of support will be needed, whether it is finance, training, or community facilitation. One critical issue that the reconstruction policy must address is whether transitional shelter will be provided to affected households. Transitional shelter can smooth the transition from disaster to permanent housing, but it has difficult cost and logistical implications that must be analyzed.

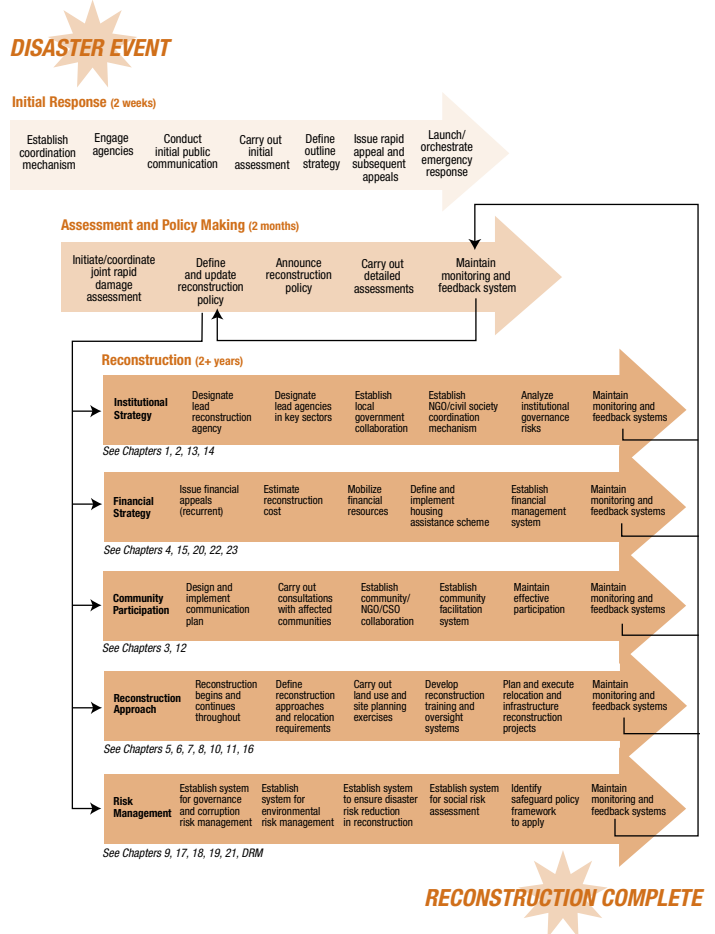
The reconstruction policy may need to create incentives to ensure the coordination of housing and infrastructure reconstruction. It will absolutely need to establish the goal of improving the safety of rebuilt housing and infrastructure, starting with defining standards to reduce the vulnerability to future hazards for all reconstructed and repaired housing and establishing the means for implementing these standards as broadly as possible. This must apply to housing built with public reconstruction funds, and should ideally extend to all rebuilt and repaired or retrofitted housing, no matter the funding source. In some cases, risk reduction will imply relocation of households or entire communities, and the policy must define the conditions for this. Again, coordination among agencies on these issues is key, so that households cannot circumvent the safety standards by seeking an alternative funding source.

Land use is almost always a difficult issue in reconstruction, and the reconstruction policy should anticipate this. The issues that may arise include, among others, (1) the need to replan land uses for housing and infrastructure, (2) the demand for tenure security, (3) the need for land for reconstruction, and (4) price escalation of land. In countries with extensive informal settlements and poor land administration and land use planning, solving these problems can hold up reconstruction. The policy should identify solutions or at least the means of reaching them.

Handbook chapters provide guidance on all policy issues related to the reconstruction approach, including the use of transitional shelter (Chapter 1), relocation (Chapter 5), land use and planning (Chapter 7), infrastructure reconstruction (Chapter 8), and housing design and technology (Chapter 10).

**Risk Management.** Finally, the reconstruction policy must ensure proper risk management in a number of areas, including (1) governance and corruption risk, (2) environmental risk, (3) disaster risk reduction, and (4) social risk. This is a disparate set of risks, but they share the common

## The Process of Response and Reconstruction



See full size version on page viii.

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characteristic that poorly managing them during reconstruction can result in unforeseen or undesirable outcomes, delays, and loss of credibility for the individuals and institutions involved. These risks can be anticipated and measures can be taken to reduce vulnerability to them. This begins with establishing a culture of risk management in reconstruction and ensuring that tools to analyze and mitigate risks are widely understood and diligently applied.

Risk reduction begins with analysis and extends to project design and implementation. Each component of the policy should incorporate monitoring, which serves as a risk reduction tool by providing early signals that project design or implementation is poor or that communities are dissatisfied with outcomes. Some of the activities mentioned as good practice in the other policy areas also serve to reduce risk, for instance, the use of two-way communication, training, or good financial tracking. The handbook provides additional tools specifically identified as tools for risk management. These include methodologies for corruption risk assessment (Chapter 19), disaster risk management (Technical References), environmental management (Chapter 9), and social risk assessment (Chapter 4).

While it might seem logical that experts in disaster management would take a risk management approach to reconstruction, this is not always the case. However, the authors strongly encourage policy makers to do so, and to incorporate this approach through the inclusion of a risk management component in the reconstruction policy.

### **How Policy Makers Can Use the Handbook**

Policy makers can use the handbook in a number of ways to help improve reconstruction outcomes.

The handbook can assist in the design of the reconstruction policy by offering a systematic approach and a comprehensive set of options. The handbook can serve as a shared frame of reference for specialists with diverse backgrounds who may be called on to assist government in proposing specific policies or in implementing reconstruction.

Policy makers can also encourage the use of the handbook by central and local government officials and officials of NGOs and civil society organizations to help them develop a common understanding of goals and the means to reach them and to improve the consistency of their interventions and, therefore, the efficiency of reconstruction. The assessment methodologies and other guidelines included in the annexes can serve as useful tools for joint action by a range of actors.

Please note that the house icon 🏠 is used throughout the handbook to alert the reader to related information elsewhere in the chapter or in another chapter.

The handbook is supported by a Web site, <http://www.housingreconstruction.org>, and a community of practice. The Web site contains additional materials related to each chapter and other relevant topics. Copies of the handbook can also be downloaded from the Web site.

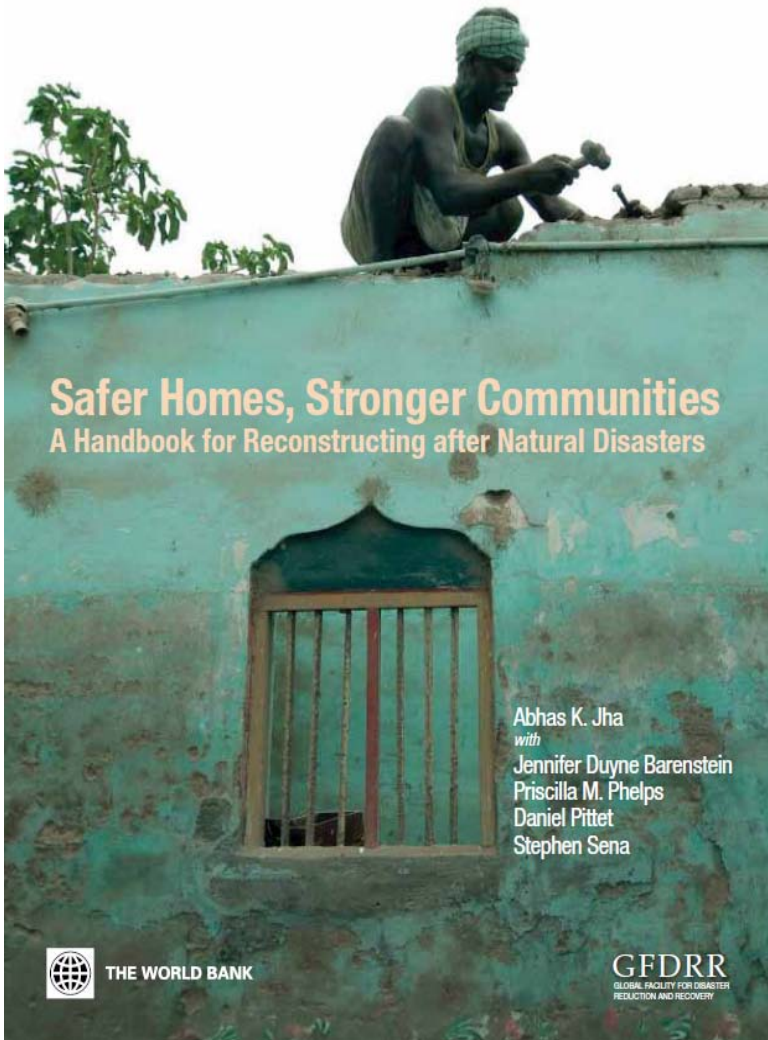
The handbook will be updated periodically as comments are received from users and as the disaster reconstruction field and its best practices evolve. As you read and use the handbook, please feel free to comment on its contents at the Web site. User comments are most appreciated and will be taken into consideration to improve the next version of the handbook.

We sincerely hope that this handbook gives you the guidance you need to accomplish your goals and to provide the policy leadership in challenging post-disaster situations.

#### ***The Authors***

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