

Expanding disaster response: New methodologies and programs help address the same urgent mission

By Mario C. Flores

In 2008, for every new home Habitat built, nearly 10 existing houses were destroyed as a consequence of disasters.¹

Disasters caused by vulnerability to natural hazards are holding back progress toward halving poverty and the achievement of other Millennium Development Goals, according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

Shelter and housing needs created by disasters and conflicts represent a major setback to Habitat's efforts to eliminate homelessness and poverty housing around the world.

Many Habitat organizations have found that responding after disasters is not enough. It is imperative to tackle vulnerabilities and build resilience within families, communities and settlements if we want to see a different outcome to disasters.

That is why Habitat organizations around the world are taking action to help families and communities with disaster risk reduction initiatives. Habitat organizations, especially those located in disaster-prone areas, have developed innovative approaches that provide more comprehensive and meaningful assistance—before and after disasters—to the families and communities we serve.

In southern Tamil Nadu state in India, Habitat's community-based disaster risk management initiatives include preparedness training for vulnerable groups, especially women, children and disabled people. Structural mitigation initiatives include retrofitting roofs to make houses resistant to high winds associated with cyclones.

In the Kumsangir area of Tajikistan, Habitat is reinforcing walls of existing houses with improved traditional technologies, such as mulberry twig grids, to reduce earthquake impact.

These disaster risk reduction strategies for India and Tajikistan are in anticipation of “predictable,” recurrent hazards that are common in those regions. Studies indicate that post-disaster reconstruction can cost seven times as much as disaster risk reduction interventions.²

When disaster strikes, minimizing displacement of families becomes a top priority. In Argentina, a Habitat corps of disaster response volunteers is helping families return to their homes from government shelters by cleaning up and restoring flood-damaged houses. In southern Bangladesh, which was devastated by Cyclone Sidr, Habitat's onsite reconstruction of transitional shelters has accelerated recovery and prevented the disruption of social networks, as it usually happens in forced displacement.

Linking shelter assistance and livelihood support is another key component of a successful intervention.

On the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, severely affected by Hurricane Felix in 2007, Habitat intervened by building hurricane-resistant core houses using materials recycled and processed by affected Miskito communities, which helped restore livelihood activities and much-needed income opportunities.

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In India, Habitat's community-based disaster risk management initiatives include preparedness training for vulnerable groups, especially women, children and disabled people.

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Expanding disaster response
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Providing for gaps in the value chain of shelter production is another goal in disaster response.

After multiple hurricanes hit Haiti in 2008, Habitat provided technical assistance to the United Nations Shelter Cluster in putting together packages of nonfood items—shelter kits for house reconstruction. Trainees from the Habitat Building and Training Center in the city of Gonaives are being hired as skilled laborers to implement repairs and house retrofits with affected families.

These disaster risk management and response examples—and others presented in detail in this issue of *The Forum*—represent program approaches and methodologies that will help achieve Habitat's ultimate goal of eliminating homelessness and poverty housing.

As promising practices are identified, developed and scaled up, the methods become more diverse and innovative. Though the mission remains the same, the high incidence of disasters makes it more urgent now than ever before.

Mario C. Flores is director of disaster response field operations at HFHI. He has a background in civil engineering, human settlements and disaster risk management.

¹ According to data compiled by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters of the University of Louvain in Belgium, some 2.9 million people—485,000 families—were left homeless by disasters in 2008 (www.emdat.be).
² Abramovitz, Janet N., "Unnatural Disasters," Worldwatch Institute (Paper 158). Washington, D.C., 2001.

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Mission statement

The Forum exists to enable the worldwide partners of Habitat for Humanity International to accomplish its mission by providing a means to:

- Promote discussion, the exchange of ideas and best practices, and knowledge sharing;
- Share concerns and challenge our standard ways of doing things; and
- Explore different methodologies and issues relating to housing and poverty worldwide.



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We are all neighbors in times of need

By Jonathan Reckford

In Gulfport, Mississippi—one of the areas of the U.S. Gulf Coast hit hardest by 2005 hurricanes Katrina and Rita—Habitat CEO Jonathan Reckford (second from left) helps raise a wall on a new house with members of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People).

In the 10th chapter of Luke, in the story of the Good Samaritan, an “expert in the law” asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?”

Do you ever ask yourself that question? What is your answer?

For a group of volunteers in Louisiana, the response was simple. Taking a break from driving stakes to mark the foundation of a Habitat house, a heavy-set man straightened up, took off his big black hat and used a handkerchief to wipe the sweat from his brow.

He explained why he and several brothers, an uncle and some nephews—10 Mennonite men in all—had driven straight through from Pennsylvania to build a house with a young, single mother in Louisiana who had lost her home to Hurricane Katrina.

“When a neighbor’s barn burns down, we all go together and build another one,” he said.

When a neighbor is in need, whether that person lives just over the next hill or far away, those who pattern their lives after

Jesus reach out to provide love and support. That is the basis of Habitat’s response to hurricanes and earthquakes as well as to the day-to-day disaster of poverty housing.

On that build site in Louisiana, a young mother shared a day of dusty labor with hard-working volunteers. Strength, perseverance and hope passed from hand to hand with a mallet and a shovel.

In the disaster response vocabulary, there’s a word for what this home partner and the black-hatted volunteers exemplify. It’s “resilience”: the ability to bounce back from the events of life that knock us down.

In building houses and communities with families around the world, we are helping our neighbors become more resilient in the face of inevitable and unavoidable storms and disasters.

Jonathan Reckford is CEO of Habitat for Humanity International.

How to market disaster response projects

What interests bilateral donors?

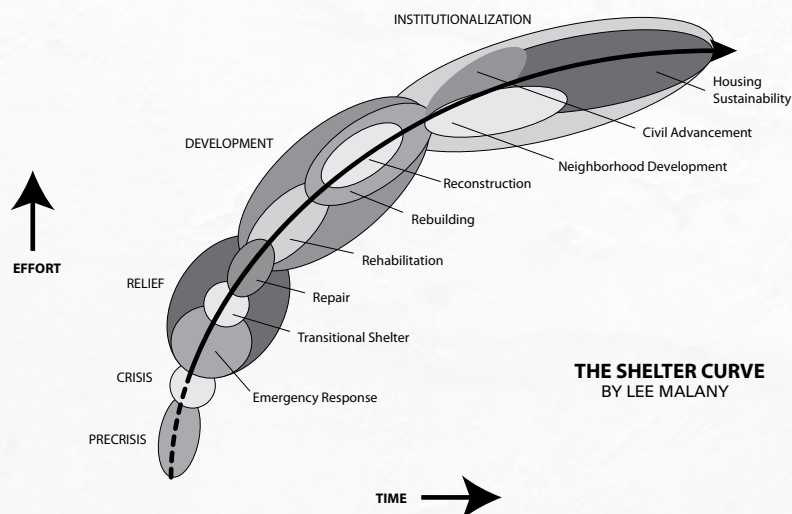
By Todd Garth

What are bilateral donors looking for? How can your program access some of the \$7 billion in humanitarian assistance from bilateral agencies? Disaster response uses a multitude of approaches, but all require designs meeting specific community needs at a point where the relief to development continuum crosses with the interests of donors and with the capabilities of your HFH program. Within this context, here are some of the things that donors are looking for:

- **Donors want to fund competent organizations they know and trust.** If your national organization is not already talking with donor missions, attending shelter cluster meetings, participating in public forums on disaster preparation and mitigation, it needs to start now. If there isn't a shelter cluster or dialogue group, consider starting one and invite others to participate. These are the seeds of future partnerships, grants and subgrants.
- **Donors want to fund organizations that know the context they are working in.** Look at shelter in the context of the relief-to-development continuum, from the blanket wrapped around the earthquake victim pulled from the rubble to the reconstruction of the community. You've heard the phrases "housing is a process" and "housing is a verb." The same is true of shelter—it's a dynamic process. Lee Malany, a USAID disaster consultant and urban planner, expressed it with "The Shelter Curve."

Much of the program discussion at Habitat rightly focuses on improving our performance in the important "institutionalization" portion of the curve. When HFH takes into account disasters, however, it must adapt its interventions to address pre-crisis mitigation and preparedness, emergency response, transitional shelter, repairs, rehabilitation, rebuilding and reconstruction.

- **Donors want to reduce the impact of a disaster before it even occurs.** Sadly, there are places in the world where we know disasters will happen sooner or later. USAID and the UN (www.unisdr.org) speak of "disaster risk reduction" (DRR). According to USAID, "Such activities could include community-based disaster preparedness and mitigation, early warning systems, conflict prevention or mitigation, information dissemination, public awareness campaigns, technical training, national policies and plans, vulnerability and capacity mapping and analysis." All of these are valid approaches for HFH programs in disaster-prone areas and fit well with our shelter and community mobilization expertise.
- **Donors want to fund agencies that can move quickly.** Look at this from two perspectives:
 1. *Rapid preparation of concept papers:* With some planning, baseline data and concepts can be assembled and waiting for the event of a disaster. An update based on actual assessment of the disaster can complete the concept, and concept development achieved within four to five days of the crisis. This is



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What interests bilateral donors?

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the timeline our competition works from. It is unacceptable to wait a week before doing an assessment and another week to submit a concept paper. By that time, funds have been allocated.

2. *Rapid emergency response:* HFH has often said, “We don’t do relief.” But that’s not entirely true. When disasters happen to affiliates, HFH staff and volunteers organize themselves to help—pumping out flooded wells, clearing debris, assessing damage to buildings or offering assistance to other relief agencies. HFH needs to plan to make itself relevant in the immediate aftermath of a disaster so that it is relevant to the community, donors and potential partners. Housing Resource Centers could be a way to formalize and organize this immediate response, meeting emergency needs by ensuring the availability of materials and construction technical assistance. Together with networking and attending shelter cluster meetings, this will lay the groundwork of relationships that will lead to funding success.

- **Finally, donors want to fund organizations that speak their language.** The language of relief is different than that of sustainable development. For example, USAID’s Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) cannot fund “houses,” but can fund “shelter.” There is no difference, but semantics is important to our donors who think of shelter in a relief context and housing in a development context. We need to use their language. OFDA has an entire chart of approved sectors, subsectors, indicators and keywords from which applicants must choose in designing the matrix of their proposed interventions. You will find OFDA language fairly typical to the field. See the 2008 OFDA guidelines at: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/resources/pdf/updated_guidelines_unsolicited_proposals_reporting.pdf (especially pages 112-123).

Habitat’s largest bilateral donor for disaster response is USAID, which at US\$5 million, followed by the Canadian International Development Agency and the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development. Another important resource is HFHI’s Public Funding Opportunities 2008 (available from the Resource Development department in your area office).

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Tsunami recovery evaluation: Looking back, taking stock

By Kathryn Reid

The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami made history as the largest international humanitarian response. For Habitat for Humanity, it galvanized support for making disaster response a part of the organization’s agenda.

Just as the tsunami put Habitat on the world map with other international humanitarian actors, hurricanes Rita and Katrina in 2005 brought disaster response home to the organization’s U.S. identity.

Four years later, Habitat is in a new place in terms of its ability and commitment to respond to disasters.

Looking back to judge how far we have come in disaster response and how we got here is the purpose of a tsunami response evaluation to be completed by HFH during 2009 in India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The study will highlight ways in which disaster response has influenced Habitat programs as well as focus on changes in Habitat’s approach to disaster response and the growth in its capacity to respond.

The tsunami ranked high in what makes a catastrophic event “newsworthy”—numbers of lives lost, dollar amounts of damage—but the international response was much greater than the level of devastation would have predicted.

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Ban Nam Khem in southern Thailand was among the areas devastated by the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004.

Looking back, taking stock of change

Continued from page 5

Different aspects of disaster response such as food relief, medical supplies and services and non-food aid are typically underfunded by 30 percent to 60 percent. The tsunami, with damages estimated at a little less than US\$10 billion, was actually oversubscribed: International aid organizations pledged US\$13.5 billion, and that didn't include funding from church groups, private donations and nongovernmental organizations' fundraising.

Habitat for Humanity received US\$66 million in funding to carry out its tsunami recovery housing program, which has so far served more than 20,000 families in four countries with housing solutions and disaster mitigation.

The tsunami was not only the best-funded international disaster response; it was arguably the most thoroughly studied.

In February 2005, a group of funding organizations, UN agencies and international nongovernmental organizations (including CARE and World Vision) founded the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC) to provide learning and accountability over the unprecedented humanitarian action.

Among the most prominent evaluations of relief and early recovery phases of the tsunami response was the TEC report, with four main recommendations for improving international humanitarian response. They make a good backdrop for reflecting on Habitat tsunami response and subsequent disaster work. Paraphrased, the recommendations are:

- **Reorient aid so that it supports rather than undermines community efforts at relief and recovery.** Local initiatives are the most important for saving lives and rebuilding communities, the TEC study concluded. While responding to the pressures for speed and scale inherent in disaster response, Habitat nevertheless preserves its commitment to community-based action.
- **Increase capacity and links with other actors.** The tsunami highlighted shortcomings in the international

humanitarian system and taxed responders' staffing, logistics and financial management capabilities. It accelerated United Nations reform; the UN instituted its cluster system in 2005, which calls for coordination of agencies working in shelter as well as other relief and recovery "clusters." At the area and national organization levels, Habitat has increased training and capacity building in disaster response and concentrated on working in partnership with other nongovernmental organizations and government entities.

- **Set professional standards for humanitarian action and provide for accountability.** Humanitarian standards and codes of conduct are being fleshed out in the context of UN cluster development. At national, regional and international levels, Habitat staff are participating in shelter cluster management and helping formulate the process for constructing onsite transitional shelter, which is much preferred over tents and temporary, barracks-style shelter.
- **Improve the equity, transparency and flexibility of funding to exemplify "good donorship."**³ Responses that show good donorship are based on needs assessment, not politics. And they involve beneficiaries at all stages, include mitigation and contribute to long-term development. That sounds like Habitat. Through the exigencies of responding to disasters, Habitat has added to its knowledge and improved its practice in development, as well as disaster response.

Kathryn Reid wrote about Habitat's tsunami recovery work during 2005 and 2006, and about hurricane recovery in the U.S. Gulf Coast during 2007. A candidate for a master's in disaster management and sustainable development, she works in HFHI's Disaster Response department.

³ See www.goodhumanitarianandonorship.org.

Rapid shelter recovery in Lebanon

By Dan O'Brien



HFHI LEBANON

Workers rebuild the home of Hassan Khochech and family in Beit Yahoun. Khochech lost his sight in 1979 during the Lebanese civil war and then lost his house in a direct Israeli missile hit early in 2006. "It is like a brother helping a brother," Khochech said about Habitat. "I feel like someone cares about us."

Habitat for Humanity International recently completed a two-year disaster response effort in Lebanon, following the July war of 2006 with Israel. The first phase of the response focused on the rapid recovery of salvageable homes in the rural areas of southern Lebanon.

The government of Lebanon estimates that approximately 15,000 homes were destroyed during the conflict, and nearly 125,000 significantly damaged. Total damages to residential structures alone exceeded US\$1.49 billion.

In response, HFHI representatives worked in close coordination with the UN-sponsored shelter cluster to develop and implement a rapid shelter recovery program in the months immediately following the cease fire. The program was structured to provide an immediate solution while governmental aid and compensation programs were being organized.

The strategy was to repair structures that had only been partially damaged as a result of the fighting. Repairs ranged from US\$500 to US\$5,000. Engineers from implementing organizations were asked to assess the homes and design basic repair schedules to enclose a 40-square-meter space with adequate access to water and sanitation as well as a kitchen.

This "core home" served as a transitional shelter, allowing families to return to their villages while the remainder of construction was completed on the rest of the homes.

The methodology for the program was a "cash for work" model that included integration of local leadership as much as possible. In each community, leadership committees were formed from municipal and civil society leaders. In the absence of appropriate registration and title documents (many of which were lost in the fighting), these committees served as the best way to verify ownership and residency for affected families.

After HFHI technical assessments were completed and verification obtained from the leadership committee, beneficiaries entered into three-party agreements with HFHI and the relevant local leadership committee. The agreements detailed the repairs to be completed, the timeframe, and a compensation schedule for payments to the beneficiaries for completed construction.

Beneficiaries were then given regular assistance and supervision as they managed local builders who completed the majority of the construction. In this way, the program

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Disaster response

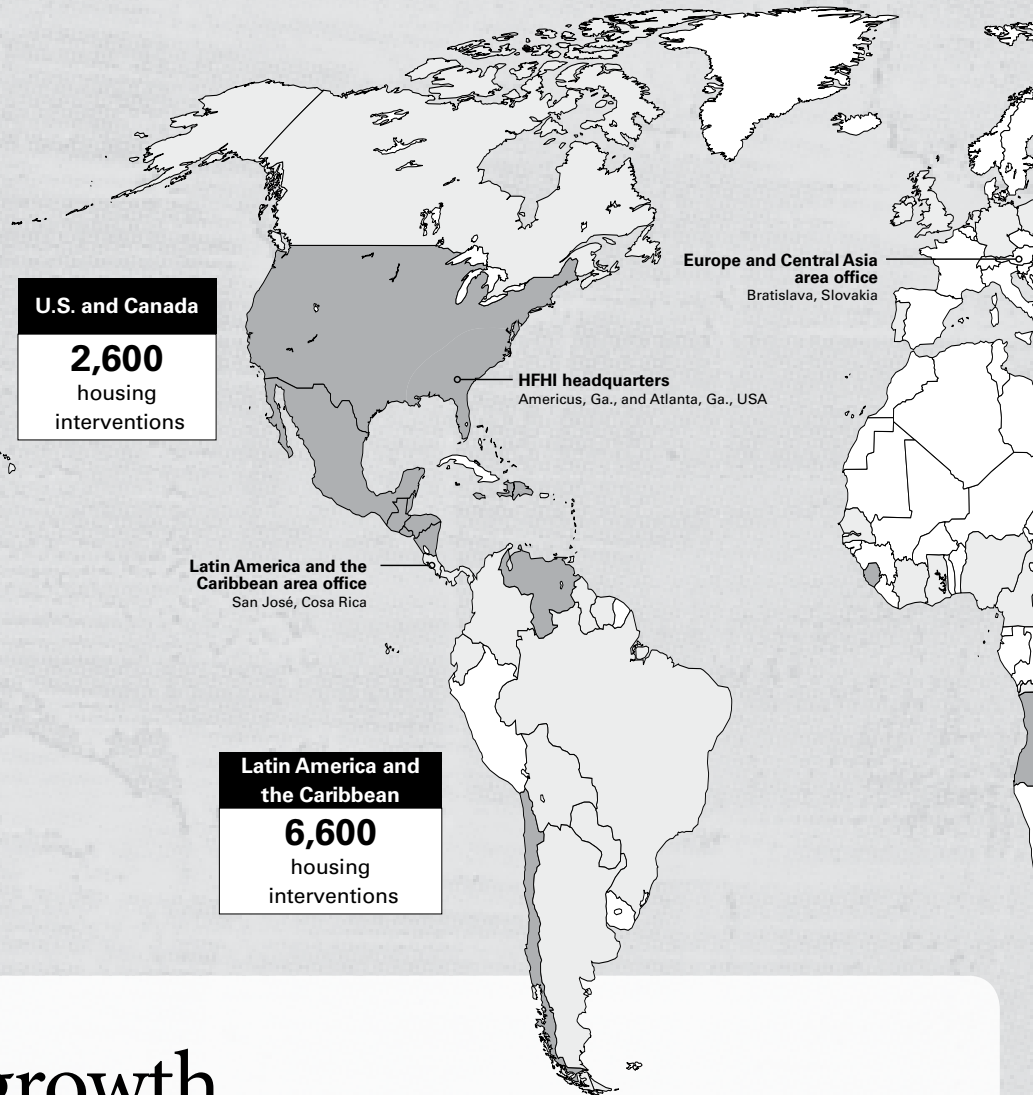
Disaster response by region and hazards

Africa and the Middle East

- 2006 Lebanon - **complex disaster**³
- 2004 Angola - **complex disaster**
- 2004 Sierra Leone - **complex disaster**
- 2004 Burundi - **complex disaster**

Asia and the Pacific

- 2008 India - **Bihar flooding**
- 2008 Nepal - **Saptakoshi flooding**
- 2008 Indonesia - **Situbondo flooding**
- 2008 Nepal - **Bhutanese refugee camp fire**
- 2008 China - **Sichuan earthquake**
- 2008 Myanmar - **Cyclone Nargis**
- 2007 Bangladesh - **Cyclone Sidr**
- 2007 Indonesia - **Jakarta floods**
- 2006 The Philippines - **Typhoon Durian**
- 2006 Indonesia - **Yogyakarta earthquake**
- 2005 Pakistan - **Northwest Frontier Province earthquake**
- 2004 India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand - **Asian tsunami**
- 2002 Afghanistan - **complex disaster**
- 2001 India - **Gujarat earthquake**



A decade of growth

By Kip Scheidler

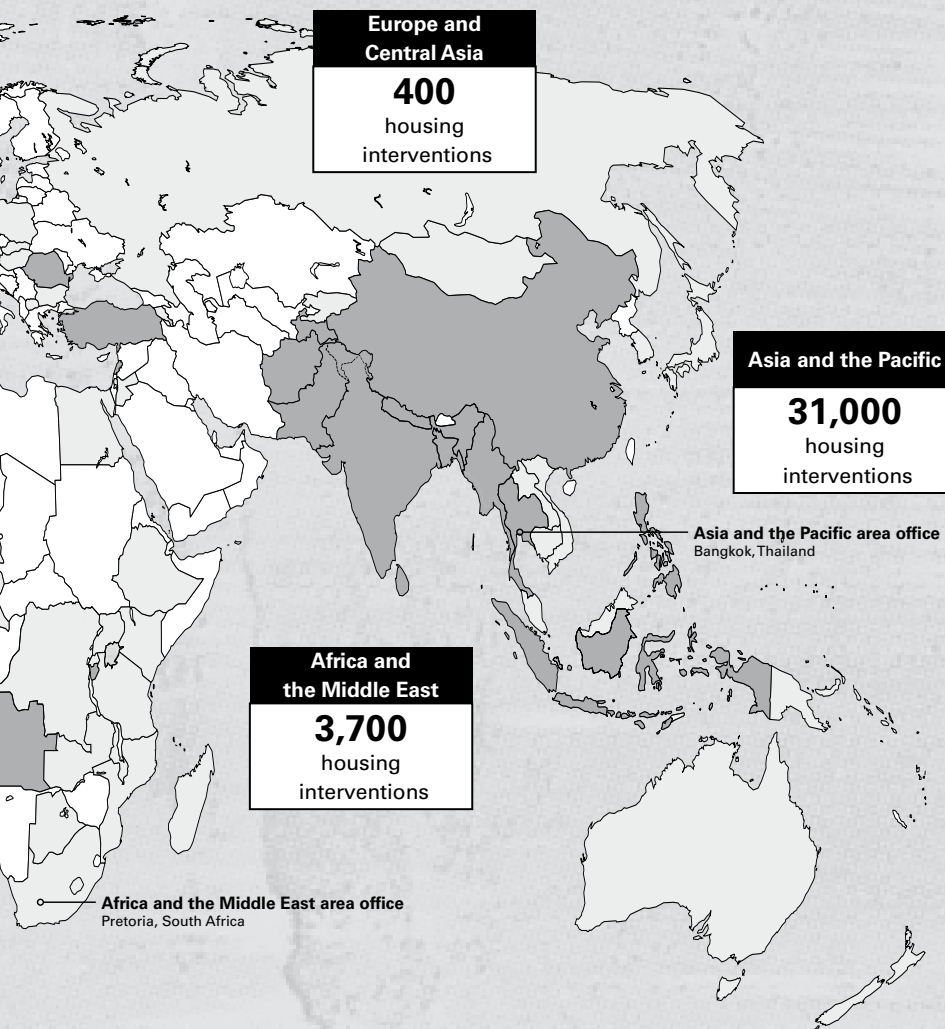
Since 1998, Habitat for Humanity has supported disaster response initiatives of Habitat entities and partners worldwide. In just one decade, more than 44,000 housing interventions have been delivered—approximately 15 percent of the 300,000 Habitat houses that have been built worldwide. The tsunami response in 2004 dramatically increased the capacity within the Asia/Pacific area not only to respond to disasters but also to provide mitigation programs.

With the number and severity of disasters increasing around the world, Habitat for Humanity is called upon more and more

to respond. One key to fulfilling our mission of eliminating poverty housing worldwide is to make disaster response and disaster risk reduction strategies a top priority. This is an exciting time to be involved, as we develop our potential to serve more families through disaster response.

Kip Scheidler is senior director of global disaster response for Habitat for Humanity International. His field experience in disaster response includes the coordination of Habitat's responses to hurricanes Georges and Mitch in 1998; the Venezuelan mudslides in the state of Vargas in 1999, and the earthquakes in El Salvador in 2001.

Programs



Europe and Central Asia

- 2006 Tajikistan - **Kumsangir earthquake**
- 2005 Romania - **Danube flood**
- 2000 Turkey - **Adapazan earthquake**

Latin American and the Caribbean

- 2008 Honduras - **October flooding**
- 2008 Haiti - **complex disaster**
- 2008 Haiti - **Hurricanes Hanna, Ike and Gustav**
- 2007 Chile - **Tocopilla earthquake**
- 2007 Mexico - **Tabasco flood**
- 2007 El Salvador - **multiple earthquakes**
- 2007 Nicaragua - **Hurricane Felix**
- 2005 Guatemala, Mexico and El Salvador - **Hurricane Stan**
- 2004 Grenada, Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican Republic - **Hurricane Ivan**
- 2001 El Salvador - **multiple earthquakes**
- 1999 Venezuela - **Vargas landslide**
- 1998 Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic - **Hurricanes Georges and Mitch**

United States and Canada

- 2008 Gulf Coast, USA - **Hurricane Ike**
- 2008 Midwest, USA - **Mississippi River flooding**
- 2008 Midwest, USA - **tornado**
- 2005 Gulf Coast, USA - **Hurricanes Katrina and Rita**
- 2004 Florida, USA - **Hurricane Charlie**
- 2003 Jackson, Tennessee, USA - **tornado**
- 2003 Alabama, USA - **tornado**
- 2003 Oklahoma and Kansas, USA - **spring tornados**
- 2003 Camilla, Georgia, USA - **tornado**
- 1999 North Carolina, USA - **Hurricane Floyd**

Training, mitigation and other services	
Location	Individuals served
Africa and the Middle East	500
Asia and the Pacific	17,400
Europe and Central Asia	100
Latin America and the Caribbean	200
Total	18,200

¹ Annual Disaster Statistical Review: Numbers and Trends 2007; Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (www.cred.be).

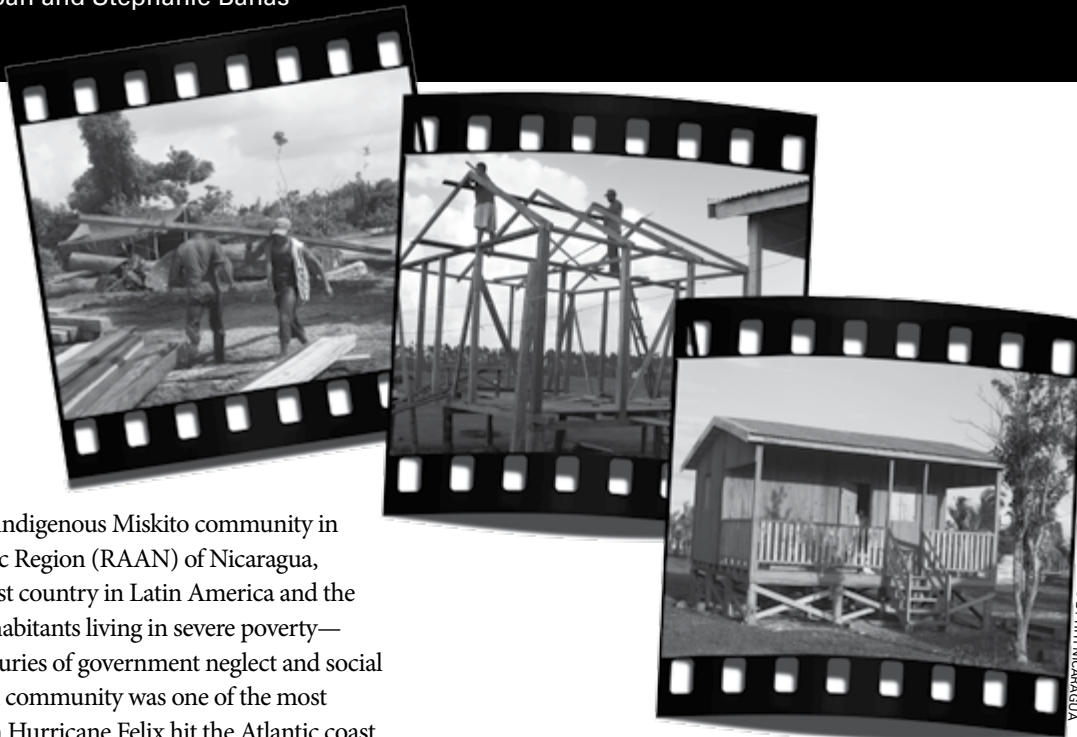
² Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre of Norwegian Refugee Council (www.internaldisplacement.org).

³ Humanitarian crises caused by civil or cross-border armed conflict are known as complex humanitarian emergencies or complex disasters.

WWW.HABITAT.ORG/DISASTER

Rebuilding hope after Nicaragua earthquake

By Belkis Santiesteban and Stephanie Banas



Auhya Pihny is an indigenous Miskito community in the North Atlantic Region (RAAN) of Nicaragua, the second poorest country in Latin America and the Caribbean. With 1,356 inhabitants living in severe poverty—thanks partly to three centuries of government neglect and social discrimination—this rural community was one of the most significantly affected when Hurricane Felix hit the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua in September 2007.

Only four homes and three functional latrines were left standing in Auhya Pihny in the wake of the storm. The residents had no choice but to use the outdoors for relief, thus increasing the risk of illness, parasites and infections.

Infirmity and environmental damage in turn affected the community's traditional means of survival: agriculture, timber and fishing. The resulting post-disaster circumstances were unsustainable and getting worse exponentially.

Habitat for Humanity International's Disaster Response department, together with Habitat for Humanity Nicaragua and the American Nicaraguan Foundation (*Fundación Americana Nicaragüense*), prioritized the response toward the community's most immediate need: shelter.

The goal for the initial recovery effort, "Rebuilding Hope in Auhya Pihny," was to rebuild the original 150 homes that had been destroyed by the storm. The new houses, which sit on stilts in order to protect against flooding and use local timber that was downed in the hurricane, were completed in September of 2008—just one year after the storm.

Still, financing for the initial stage of recovery did not cover solutions to the community's secondary issues: wastewater treatment and environmental degradation due to the lack of functional latrines—fundamental elements for the guarantee of adequate living conditions and a healthy environment.

In addition, overcrowding is still an issue in Auhya Pihny, where the reconstruction of the original 150 homes did not fully resolve the problem of a disproportionate number of housing

units to people. As families expand, it is custom for new Auhya Pihny generations to live close to their nuclear family, and even before the disaster hit several generations were living in exceedingly cramped spaces under a shared roof.

After the initial rebuilding, the challenge shifted toward seeking funding and support to resolve these overcrowding issues.

The resulting project, called "Reconstruction of Auhya Pihny" and funded by Cargill International and Habitat, administers additional post-disaster solutions in two phases.

The first phase includes the construction of 150 new latrines, an integrated potable water and waste management system, and a public education campaign focusing on new and efficient personal and community hygiene practices. Habitat, a local nonprofit organization, provides technical support through the latrine design and a water and sanitation feasibility study.

To resolve the issue of overcrowding, an additional 80 homes, with respective latrines, will be built in the second phase of the project.

In the development of disaster recovery efforts in Auhya Pihny, a key factor of success has been the fundamental, central role of the local community. In both the design and implementation phases, the opinions, convictions and insight of the centuries-old Auhya Pihny culture helped shape the outcome.

Belkis Santiesteban is communications coordinator for Habitat for Humanity Nicaragua. Stephanie Banas is a writer and editor for Habitat for Humanity's Latin America/Caribbean office.

Disaster mitigation blooms on trees in Tajikistan

By Katerina Bezgachina



A homeowner surveys the damage of a 2006 earthquake in Kumsangir.



Habitat partner families learn how to reduce their risks in the next quake.



A partner family stands proudly in front of their newly reinforced home.



Mulberry branch technology saves 30 percent in costs.

PHOTOS BY HFHTAJIKISTAN

Every year, Tajikistan, located in the Pamir range in Central Asia, experiences more than 5,000 tremors and earthquakes, the magnitude of which can go as high as 7 or 9 on the Richter scale.

In most mountainous villages, homes cannot withstand such strong vibrations. Destruction caused by natural hazards exacerbates poverty in the country, where almost half of the population lives on less than US\$2 a day.

Rebar and concrete, traditionally used to reinforce homes, are financially out of reach for many Tajik families.

Habitat, in partnership with the local Institute of Seismology, came up with an inexpensive and sustainable house reinforcement technology that provides much-needed safety to low-income rural communities. It uses the mulberry tree, which grows in abundance across the country.

Trees are cut seasonally to harvest silk cocoon—the mulberry twigs have no other use and are therefore freely available. They are bound into grids and attached to walls using plaster mixed with straw and wool. This simple and affordable design makes strong buildings.

As a result, the risk of being trapped, injured or killed in the house during an earthquake is significantly reduced, and as homes are more stable, families have time to escape in case of emergencies.

So far, homes reinforced with this “mulberry tree” technology have survived two earthquakes. The first one occurred in December 2008 and measured 5.8 on the Richter scale. It sent tremors into Rasht district, where 80 homes had been reinforced. This January, a second earthquake with the epicenter in Afghanistan had a magnitude of 6 and was felt in the Kumsangir district, where 120 homes were reinforced. A post-disaster survey in both locations showed that the reinforced houses were not damaged.

Another advantage of the mulberry tree technology is that it can either be built into new construction or added to existing houses. It is 30 percent cheaper than the standard techniques used in the seismically unstable regions. If applied to existing houses, the construction costs can be reduced by five times.

Plus, there is no need to demolish and rebuild the house from the foundation up—a factor of paramount importance in Tajikistan, where very often families cannot afford new houses.

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Disaster Corps ready, willing and able

By Giovanni Taylor-Peace

Volunteers are the heart, soul and helping hands of Habitat for Humanity.

Touched by others' losses, many people feel a compelling need to use their skills and experience to help disaster-affected families and communities return to normalcy.

Whenever they call Habitat for Humanity International and ask how they can help with long-term recovery, we introduce them to the Disaster Corps program.

The Disaster Corps concept has been under development at the area and international levels for quite a few years. First Builder teams organized after the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 were a precursor to the Disaster Corps program now managed by the Global Disaster Response department at HFHI's headquarters in Atlanta.

The concept of the program is to develop and maintain a strong contingent of volunteers who can support Habitat's disaster response and preparedness initiatives worldwide.

Disaster Corps began as the result of a partnership between HFHI and the Corporation for National Community Service in the United States. The idea was to engage "baby boomers" in the community recovery work needed on the U.S. Gulf Coast after hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit in 2005.

Spreading beyond the Gulf, in 2008 Disaster Corps volunteers assisted U.S. affiliates in Iowa and Indiana after flooding and in Iowa, Virginia and Tennessee following severe storms and tornados. Volunteers helped with cleanup, repairs and construction management for new builds.

While the First Builder initiative was focused on identifying and deploying skilled construction volunteers, Disaster Corps harnesses expertise in other areas that are needed to support disaster response projects, specifically management, resource development, logistics and communications.

This aligns with the Global Disaster Response department's mission to build capacity at the field and regional levels to address post-disaster situations as well as key risk-reduction opportunities in an efficient and effective manner.

Disaster Corps volunteers are trained in disaster preparedness, the U.S. disaster assistance process, organizational capacity building, Habitat for Humanity's mission and operating model and the psychology of disaster. This wide-ranging background information prepares volunteers to use their skills and experience in a post-disaster setting and to adapt to a rapidly-changing situation.

Flexibility is essential as volunteers fill in the gaps as a local affiliate's staff and board members deal with long-term effects of the disaster in their personal and professional activities.

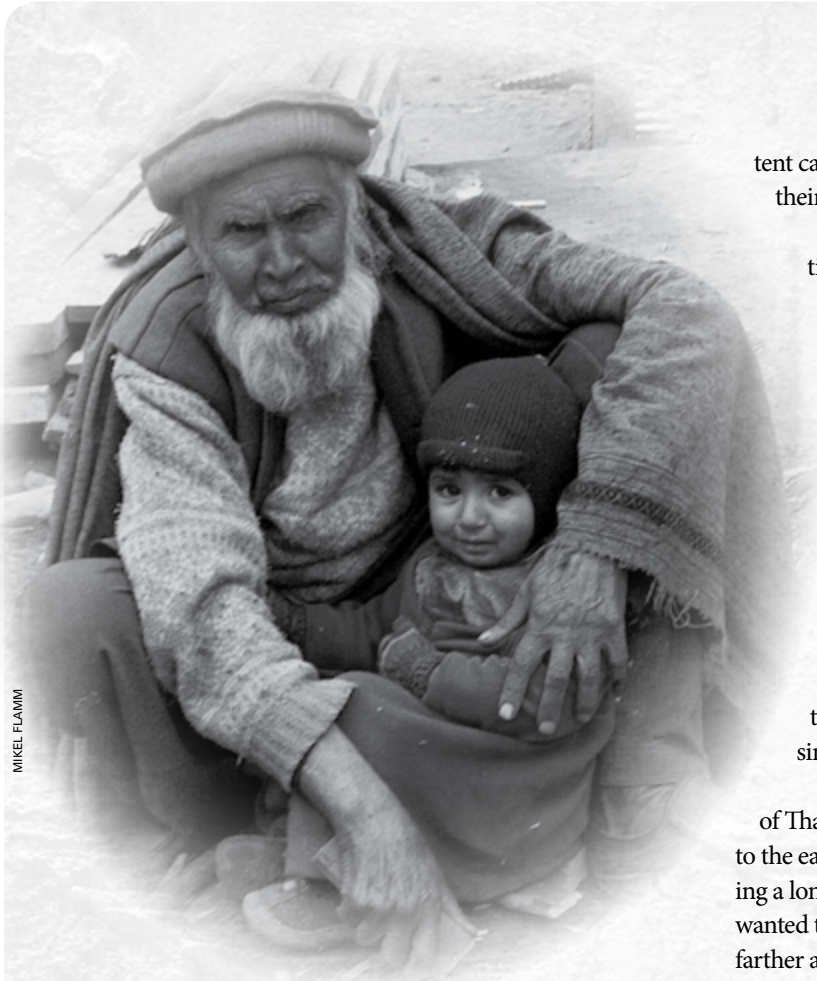
To date, more than 11,600 volunteer hours have been contributed to Habitat affiliates by Disaster Corps members. This represents a significant contribution in terms of work that may have been lacking while an affiliate struggled to recover on its own.

The Disaster Corps group currently consists of about 135 volunteers of varied skill and life experiences. There is potential for growth as the Global Disaster Response team finds ways to engage these volunteers in international work.

Moving forward, the focus for the program remains on making sure that interested volunteers—with or without specialized skills—can contribute to Habitat's disaster response projects, so that more families can obtain safe, decent and affordable shelter.

These volunteers give their best when the need is greatest. We aim to provide them the means to restore hope by building stronger homes and communities throughout the world.

Giovanni Taylor-Peace is a specialist in global disaster response at Habitat for Humanity International.



MIKEL FLAUM

Transitional shelters and long-term homes

A Pakistan case study

By Wong Hiew Peng

The 7.6 magnitude earthquake that struck Pakistan and neighboring India and Afghanistan in October 2005 dealt a harsh blow to remote poor communities. Pakistan-administered Kashmir, Indian-administered Kashmir and the eastern districts of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province bore the full brunt of the earthquake.

Habitat for Humanity International responded to the earthquake with an initial commitment of US\$250,000 to provide technical assistance and support to HFH Pakistan and partner organizations. In the immediate aftermath, HFH Pakistan helped the Swiss-based International Organization for Migration distribute waterproof tents, blankets and winter survival kits.

Habitat's goal, however, was to build earthquake-resilient permanent homes.

Some families required transitional housing. These families had either chosen to stay on their land instead of relocating to

tent camps or had been in tent camps but wanted to return to their land as winter approached.

HFH Pakistan looked at the available shelter solutions, including a dome-shaped shelter design offered by Partner Aid International, a Swiss-based development and relief agency. The design was adapted to create transitional homes that could be assembled by a trained team in 30 minutes and featured materials that could be reused later in permanent houses.

A transitional shelter costs about the same as a tent—US\$200 to \$250—but it had the advantages of lasting longer, being more secure and providing better protection in harsh weather conditions.

Materials used in the transitional shelter included 12 pieces of steel rebar, six semicircular pieces of tubular pipes, eight galvanized corrugated iron sheets, insulation material that could be unblown foam and metal ties similar to those for tying cotton bales.

The first transitional house was assembled in the village of Thanda Katha on Feb. 20, 2006. Within a year of responding to the earthquake, Habitat had moved forward with establishing a long-term program. In the second phase, HFH Pakistan wanted to create more permanent housing solutions in areas farther away from Balakot, the epicenter of the earthquake.

At that time, Pakistan's Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority announced a US\$3.5 billion, three-year recovery plan for earthquake-affected areas. Families building their homes to new earthquake-resilient designs were eligible for government grants.

To ensure that houses would be rebuilt successfully, HFH Pakistan established community-based resource centers in Mansehra and Balakot. The centers continue to serve three important functions: as bases for local Habitat teams to store construction materials; as places for members of the communities to come together and decide about their rebuilding programs; and as places for people to receive training and advice.

HFH Pakistan adopted the idea of sawing and processing many of the salvaged but heavy timbers into lighter pieces for the new earthquake-resilient house design. To reach people living in remote communities, HFH Pakistan made constant use of three mobile sawmills that were paid for by the Japan Platform, a multi-body funding agency, through HFH Japan.

Wherever the sawmills were located, villagers would bring their salvaged timber for cutting into boards and trusses for lighter roofs. Reusing existing materials meant fewer trees needed to be felled for home construction, and the use of less wood actually made stronger homes.

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In the wake of the 2004 Asian tsunami, preparedness is key for Indian families

By James Samuel

Habitat for Humanity's pilot disaster preparedness and mitigation project was conceived as part of the post-tsunami reconstruction project in southeastern India following the December 2004 Asian tsunami.

As part of the disaster response program, Habitat included disaster preparedness and mitigation in its housing intervention for affected families. The project was also designed for replication in other disaster-prone areas in the Asia/Pacific region.

The project was implemented in July 2008 in Tamil Nadu state and the Union Territory of Puducherry. Both of these tsunami-affected areas regularly suffer from torrential rains and floods during the annual monsoon period as well as droughts and cyclones.

The dangers from the raging elements are heightened for the very poor and marginalized communities such as the fishing community and Dalit people living in these areas who lack awareness of risks and protective measures.

Due to the long-term nature of such a project, Habitat adopted the strategy of working through REAL (Rural Education and Action of Liberation), a local nongovernmental organization working with tsunami-affected people in India, as well as Goodwill Industries, an international NGO.

Both organizations had already built strong relationships with the affected communities. By incorporating disaster preparedness and mitigation aspects, Habitat was able to add value to its local partners' development initiatives for these vulnerable groups.

The goal of the pilot project was to equip vulnerable families in 41 coastal villages with skills for disaster preparedness and mitigation. As of June 2008, the pilot project had served more than 9,150 families in the Union Territory of Puducherry and in the neighboring Cuddalore and Villupuram districts in the Tamil Nadu state.

Recognizing children to be among the most vulnerable groups in the community, Habitat worked to train students and teachers in 15 schools in Villupuram district in the appropriate response to natural hazards. Students were taught to be aware of the risks and impacts of various hazards, as well as measures for minimizing damage and loss.

Students and teachers also received training in how to prevent, be prepared for and mitigate disasters. Nearly 2,250 students and 70 teachers from 15 schools were trained. Some 4,000 booklets on disaster management, published in the local vernacular, were also distributed.



Habitat trained women's groups to be aware of the risks of various natural hazards, as well as measures for minimizing damage and loss.

In addition, Habitat rehabilitated houses through its local partners to improve structural safety. Improvements were made to nearly 800 houses in six villages. They included sealing septic tanks, repairing and retiling roofs, refinishing floors, strengthening house walls and providing staircases for immediate evacuation.

The disaster preparedness and mitigation project has the potential of reaching a few thousand more families as local partners continue the work in vulnerable communities by developing village contingency plans and forming task forces to respond to hazards.

In the 41 villages where Habitat and its partners conducted training, village-level disaster management committees will be formed. Each committee will be made up of the village headman, representatives from women self-help groups, young people, schoolteachers and children, among others.

The committees will select and coordinate volunteers for village-level task forces to handle early warning, rescue and evacuation, first aid, water and sanitation needs, and trauma counseling. Together with trained volunteers, the committees will prepare the village emergency response and disaster management plans.

The goal is for the vulnerable communities to be in a better position to approach the local government or other organizations to advocate for measures to reduce their vulnerability through capacity building and mitigation.

James Samuel is disaster response manager in HFHI's Asia/Pacific area office.



PHOTO BY WORLD CONCERN

Greater impact through partnerships

By Scott Peterson

Local carpenters trained by World Concern, in partnership with Habitat for Humanity, rebuild homes in Myanmar.

Cyclone Nargis, which struck Myanmar in May 2008, paved the way for Habitat to forge partnerships in new arenas.

After the cyclone, Habitat's Asia/Pacific area office joined the UN Emergency Shelter Cluster and Logistics Cluster meetings held in Bangkok and Yangon. The cluster movement was founded by the United Nations less than a decade ago, with a view to create a voluntary coordination gathering—organized into sectors such as shelter, health, logistics, education, and water/sanitation—to bring efficiency to disaster relief and response through nongovernmental organizations.

Given Habitat's expertise and focus on shelter, the UN clusters provide opportunities for building a closer relationship with relief and response agencies in concert with Habitat's own capacity.

Habitat's partnership with World Concern first began in strife-torn eastern Sri Lanka and tsunami-hit southern Thailand, but Cyclone Nargis enabled both organizations to expand into new areas in Myanmar. World Concern has been working in Myanmar since 1995, but it was not established in the devastated Ayeryawaddy delta nor experienced in implementing the construction of a large number of cyclone-resistant shelters and refuges.

Despite its expertise in housing, Habitat could not respond unilaterally to the cyclone without a pre-established legal basis for its presence in Myanmar. The partnership between Habitat and World Concern in Myanmar, thus, was a natural fit in the provision of technical skills, resources and project design.

To date, more than 280 transitional shelter houses have been constructed in three villages in Myanmar, with 156 more under construction in two new communities. Community infrastructure projects such as jetty and fresh-water storage tanks have also recently been completed with the support and supervision of Habitat staff and World Concern.

Drainage basins, low-tech desalination solutions, rechargeable lamp distribution with community solar-cell recharging stations, and safe shelters are being implemented in a holistic approach to improve the lives of home partner families and help break the cycle of chronic loss of life and property to flooding and natural disasters.

Funding is being sought from more donors to roll out a second phase of the project, focusing on disaster response and development, with hopes that up to 3,000 additional families can eventually be served in the delta through transitional shelter housing.

Discussions are under way about how to adapt this successful spirit of cooperation to other programs throughout the Asia/Pacific region.

The progress of the Habitat-World Concern partnership in Myanmar reflects the longer-term view of transition that has been adopted in Bangladesh's cyclone response project and is under consideration in Habitat's flood response in India's Bihar region and southeastern Nepal.

Habitat's partners range from corporations, governments and humanitarian agency donors to local community-based organizations, home partners and technical specialists.

In Habitat's post-tsunami reconstruction in Indonesia, partnerships with local suppliers even created viable businesses. The suppliers, prescreened by Habitat, were empowered by skills, training and machinery provided by Habitat to produce quality bricks, blocks, wooden door frames, windows and so forth. Their relationships with Habitat enabled them to continue as stand-alone enterprises owned by the workers.

At the individual level, people who have been trained as masons or carpenters, for example, could also command higher wages.

Among the four tsunami-affected countries in which Habitat rebuilt lives and homes, India has seen the most efficient delivery of homes, given its focus from the onset on building strong working partnerships with local NGOs to implement the intervention. To date, India has built nearly 10,000 houses with tsunami-affected families and provided disaster preparedness and mitigation training to more than 9,000 people.

After Cyclone Sidr slammed into Bangladesh, donor funds were not sufficient to include a latrine or clean water facilities in the transitional core shelters that Habitat built for affected families. With funding support from UNICEF and HFH Great Britain, 480 families living in transitional core shelters will now have latrines to improve their health and quality of life.

In the Bihar region of India and southeastern Nepal, London-based international charity WaterAid is in discussions with Habitat over water and sanitation response, which similarly could not be supported by other more traditional emergency relief funding providers.

In this way, Habitat looks beyond the traditional model both internally and externally, with a view toward solutions that address poverty reduction in a much broader way than the single-sector shelter approach adopted by many disaster relief providers.

Scott Peterson is disaster response adviser in Habitat for Humanity's Asia/Pacific area office.

Rapid shelter recovery in Lebanon

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not only resulted in transitional shelter but also provided a much-needed injection of capital into the local economies of the villages. Furthermore, repairs were completed on what would become the permanent homes for the beneficiary families, avoiding the creation of too many temporary structures.

With a US\$1.9 million grant from USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, combined with support from the Emily Anton Memorial Foundation and BibleLands Foundation, HFHI helped 432 families in nine villages over a period of about nine months. There was a 98 percent compliance rate among beneficiaries for appropriate use of funds, with noncompliant beneficiaries making full restitution for misspent funds.

By the conclusion of the program, the government of Lebanon had mobilized its response agencies and spread to the majority of previously underserved communities, effectively ending any further expansion of the rapid shelter recovery program. HFHI refocused operations to address shelter protection activities in the southern suburbs of Beirut as well as full home reconstruction support in the rural villages and vocational training activities. Over the lifetime of the response, HFHI assisted 1,834 families through these programs, including the rapid shelter recovery program.

Dan O'Brien has worked in the HFHI Lebanon program as project manager for the disaster response effort since 2006.

Disaster mitigation blooms on trees in Tajikistan

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"We could not afford to rebuild the house," said Gani, head of a family of eight who rebuilt his home with a Habitat loan. "The recommended 'mulberry branch' solution was just the very thing we needed to reinforce the house instead of rebuilding it. It saved both resources and time, and I now know how to build a safe house with local materials."

Another aim of the project in Tajikistan is to ensure that construction norms and standards for rural earthquake-resistant homes are integrated into the official building code. Some 70 percent of the population lives in rural areas. Previously, there were no standards for this type of construction; thus, rural homes were more susceptible to damage when natural hazards occurred.

Low-income beneficiaries of the program live in the remote, rural Kumsangir area of Tajikistan near the Afghan border. Working with a local partner organization, Habitat for Humanity set up a revolving fund from which eligible low-income families were offered loans to pay for the house reinforcements. After these loans are repaid, funds are accessible to other members of the community.

To date, more than 200 houses have been reinforced, 160 are awaiting transformation and 400 more are being assessed for future upgrades.

Katerina Bezgachina is the communications coordinator in the Europe Central Asia area office.

Transitional shelters and long-term homes

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One of the goals of HFH Pakistan was to turn the dome-shaped transitional shelters into larger permanent homes that could be built from existing materials. Conforming to government standards, Habitat produced a house design that involved a 3-foot-high rock-and-wood wall, with an upper section of lighter corrugated iron roof sheets, metal side sheeting, and insulation.

The estimated cost of a new home that was built with commercially bought materials was US\$2,500. By dismantling and reusing materials from the transitional shelters and salvaged timber and wood, the cost was just US\$500.

In rebuilding their homes, the families' efforts were boosted by Habitat volunteers. In late January 2007, a 16-strong team of university student volunteers organized by HFH Korea helped build 25 transitional shelters and 15 permanent homes in Batsanger, Ghanool and Kanshian.

They also used the sawmill facilities at the Balakot Habitat Resource Center to cut wood and timber for 56 families to use

in their new homes. HFH Korea raised US\$35,000 from KOICA (Korea International Cooperation Agency) for rebuilding homes with earthquake survivors.

In late 2007, HFH Pakistan entered a new phase in post-earthquake reconstruction. Through HFH Canada, the Canadian International Development Agency began funding a continuation of HFH Pakistan's work in four affected Union Council areas.

The two-year, US\$900,000 project will see an extension of the mobile sawmill services as well as training out of the HRCs at Balakot and Mansehra.

An estimated 6,000 families are expected to benefit from the training, which includes full-day sessions on introduction to earthquake-resilient home designs and construction techniques for building safely.

Wong Hiew Peng is a writer/editor for HFH in Asia and the Pacific.