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# Building Back Better in Post-Disaster Recovery

**Disasters continue to increase in frequency and magnitude. The asymmetries of advancing technological capacities and the narrowing choices of poor communities are possibly contributing to hazard exposure while the rate of urbanization is accelerating and the climate is changing—to calamitous outcomes.**

**Efficient and effective post-disaster reconstruction and recovery can arrest the devastation inflicted on humanity and impede the fall of poor communities into cyclical poverty. Recovery and reconstruction, through their phases, provide the opportunity to rebuild beyond pre-disaster states for safer, more sustainable and resilient communities.**

## **What is Building Back Better?**

Building Back Better (BBB) is an approach to post-disaster recovery that reduces vulnerability to future disasters and builds community resilience to address physical, social, environmental, and economic vulnerabilities and shocks. Recovery within a BBB framework gives impacted communities the chance to reduce risk not only from the immediate hazard but from threatening hazards and conditions as well.

Risk reduction now permeates development activities. Yet BBB, distinct from development, does not focus on rectifying a country's development deficits but on ensuring the result of recovery is sustainable safety for more resilient communities.

## **To Which Sectors Does BBB Apply?**

BBB applies to all aspects and sectors of post-disaster recovery. In infrastructure reconstruction, BBB concordantly supports communications, education, energy, health, housing, transport, and water and sanitation. In livelihood recovery, BBB extends to such sectors as agriculture and livelihoods, commerce, employment, industry, and public services. BBB also applies to cross-cutting issues such as environment, gender, and governance.

### **BBB in Infrastructure Reconstruction**

BBB offers the opportunity to rebuild stronger, safer, and more disaster-resilient infrastructure and systems. The following activities would constitute BBB in the reconstruction of physical assets:

- Introducing *disaster risk reduction* measures (including building codes and regulations) to increase the resilience of physical assets being reconstructed, such as earthquake-resistant

- building designs or raised-floor elevation in flood-prone areas.
- Introducing and enforcing appropriate *land-use planning regulations*, which curtail reconstruction in high-risk areas.
- Reconstructing improved *hazard-control infrastructure*, such as flood embankments.
- *Replacing* damaged assets with context-sensitive, technologically updated alternatives. For example, modernizing damaged telecommunications equipment to keep up with technological advances.
- Using recovery as an opportunity to *right-size infrastructure* to better meet community needs. For example, reconstructing hospitals with an adequate number of beds.

## BBB in Livelihood Recovery

BBB builds resilience in the employment and livelihoods sector by using recovery as an opportunity to promote disaster-resilient livelihoods that are sustainable in the long term and able to withstand the risks from disaster events. Examples of specific interventions include:

- *Promoting resilient agriculture and livestock.* For example, communities in Bangladesh started farming ducks instead of chickens as ducks are naturally more resilient to and able to withstand the effects of a flood.
- Introducing *business continuity systems* for employment and livelihoods, enabling large businesses as well as small and medium enterprises to quickly resume operations after a crisis.
- *Promoting the use of materials and technology* in manufacturing processes that are easily repaired after damage from disasters.
- *Building financing mechanisms* that fast-disburse affordable, low-interest financing to businesses affected by the disasters.

## BBB in Cross-Cutting Issues

BBB is also an integral part of the cross-cutting issues of recovery, including environment, gender, and governance. Some examples of BBB activities in cross-cutting areas are as follows:

### Environment

- Rebuilding/restoring *physical and environmental infrastructure* to reduce vulnerability, protect the environment, and restore natural ecosystems. For example, using mangroves as natural protection against sea intrusion.
- *Integrating sustainable environmental practices* and natural resource management within recovery activities. For instance, promoting forestry and/ or agro-forestry initiatives like fruit or commercial tree farming as alternative sources of income.

### Gender

- Providing *gender-specific support* for reconstruction and recovery, so that the differing needs of women and men are met through recovery.
- Using recovery as an opportunity to *bridge the gender-resilience gap*. Women may be more vulnerable to the impact of disasters; gender-specific support has the capacity to improve future resilience.
- *Rebuilding in a way that is inclusive* of women, girls, boys, and men from the affected population.

### Governance

- *Introducing business continuity* for government systems and public services.
- *Preparing contingency response mechanisms.*
- *Mainstreaming disaster risk management* across all sectors.

## Key Propositions for BBB

Ten key propositions for Building Back Better were gleaned from the Indian Ocean Tsunami disaster recovery process. The United Nations Special Envoy Report<sup>1</sup> provides insight into reducing the number of casualties when disasters strike and to improving the safety and economic vitality of affected communities.

1. “*Governments, donors, and aid agencies must recognize that families and communities drive their own recovery.*” Speeding the completion of recovery programs, and in the process short-circuiting the rights of affected populations, is pointless.
2. “*Disaster recovery must promote fairness and equity.*” Exacerbating any existing patterns of vulnerability and discrimination within societies is contrary to disaster response.
3. “*Governments must enhance preparedness for future disasters.*” Increasingly, the world is becoming more vulnerable to hazards of different kinds.
4. “*Local governments must be empowered to manage recovery efforts, and donors must devote greater resources to strengthening government recovery institutions, especially at the local level.*” Sub-national civil servants can link recovery assistance and sustainable development effectively.
5. “*Good recovery planning and effective coordination depend on good information.*” Timely and accurate information—the basis of good analysis—is crucial throughout a relief and recovery process.
6. “The UN, World Bank, and other multilateral agencies must clarify their roles and relationships, especially in addressing the early stage of a recovery process.” Disaster recovery and reconstruction gains efficiencies when multilateral agencies are aligned and work in complement.
7. “The expanding role of NGOs and the Red Cross/ Red Crescent Movement carries greater responsibilities for quality in recovery efforts.” As recipients of significant humanitarian funding, a rethink to better harmonize and coordinate their roles is needed.
8. “From the start of recovery operations, governments and aid agencies must create the conditions for entrepreneurs to flourish.” Reviving and expanding private economic activity, employment, and securing diverse livelihood opportunities for affected populations is necessary for sustainable recovery.
9. “*Beneficiaries deserve the kind of agency partnerships that move beyond rivalry and unhealthy competition.*” Instead, harnessing efforts across local and international organizations and working (or not working) well together can determine the quality and outcome of the recovery process.
10. “*Good recovery must leave communities safer by reducing risks and building resilience.*” An important test for a good recovery effort is whether it leaves survivors less vulnerable to natural hazards. This underscores the importance of identifying mechanisms to reduce risk and operability plans at the outset.

<sup>1</sup> William J. Clinton (2006). *Key Propositions for Building Back Better: Lessons Learned from Tsunami Recovery* (Office of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery; 2006). New York: United Nations.



Photo credit: UNDP Ecuador

## Overview

Efficient and effective post-disaster reconstruction and recovery can arrest the devastation inflicted on humanity and impede the fall of poor communities into cyclical poverty. The Build Back Better initiative has been promoted in post disaster recovery to encourage communities and stakeholders to rebuild beyond the pre-disaster state for safer, more sustainable and resilient communities. This brief guidance note is intended to introduce recovery players and stakeholders to the concept of Build Back Better. The Note highlights some of the sectors to which the concept can apply within the recovery process for sustainability.

For more information on implementing recovery programs,  
please visit the GFDRR Recovery Hub:

**<https://www.gfdrr.org/recovery-hub>**



The Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) is a global partnership that helps developing countries better understand and reduce their vulnerabilities to natural hazards and adapt to climate change. Working with over 400 local, national, regional, and international partners, GFDRR provides grant financing, technical assistance, training and knowledge sharing activities to mainstream disaster and climate risk management in policies and strategies. Managed by the World Bank, GFDRR is supported by 34 countries and 9 international organizations.