

Handbook on Owner- Driven Housing Reconstruction



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Preface

The number of disaster events has almost doubled in the last 20 years and the frequency, magnitude and impact of these crises is on the rise. Although significant advances have been made in reducing the loss of life related to some types of events, the direct economic losses from such disasters have increased significantly due to damage to both private and public infrastructure. While damage to infrastructure disrupts services, for a poor family, losing their home can have devastating consequences.

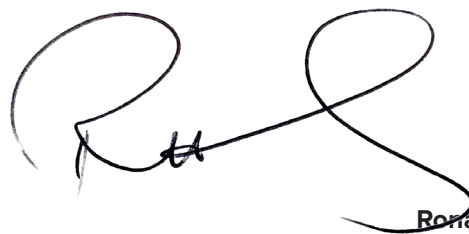
The images of anguish and suffering of those who have lost their homes and belongings after a natural hazard event are stark, compelling and all too frequent. It is often the poor and the vulnerable who are the most affected and those are also the populations who find it most difficult to rebuild their homes because of a lack of resources, capacities and access to the knowledge needed to help themselves or obtain institutional support. For most people, a house is much more than just a structure in which a person lives. It is a place that is vital to our identity, security and sense of belonging.

In the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal earthquake, UNDP supported the construction of 26,912 houses in the Gorkha district, assisting homeowners to access the funds, technical guidance and information needed to build or rebuild their houses. This experience has further increased our in-depth experience and knowledge in housing reconstruction. An integral part of this success story has been the adoption of an owner-driven housing reconstruction approach that enables the transfer of skills to beneficiaries, reaching remote areas and adopting local solutions through participatory methodologies.

This Handbook aims to provide guidance and support for all those who will be involved in housing reconstruction in the future, from decision makers and reconstruction experts to project technical staff. By sharing the UNDP Nepal experience and the lessons learned there, the Handbook provides guidance on all the phases of housing reconstruction, discussing damage assessment, programme design, implementation and reconstruction while encouraging risk reduction programme components and promoting the sustainability of project interventions and their achievements.

By developing the Handbook, we want to share the knowledge gained by UNDP and support inclusive future housing recovery efforts. While the Handbook provides technical information on housing reconstruction and its processes, it never loses its focus on the most vulnerable, supporting the reader to develop participatory, inclusive and transparent housing recovery programmes.

Although the handbook originates from the experience of one organization and its interaction with its governmental and non-governmental partners and beneficiaries, our wish is that it will be used broadly as a reference to support future post-disaster housing recovery efforts.



Ronald Jackson

Head

Disaster Risk Reduction & Recovery for Building Resilience

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Foreword

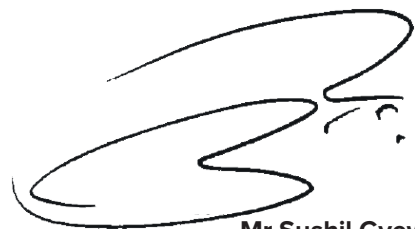
The earthquakes that shook Nepal on 25 April and 12 May 2015 were the most devastating in recent years in terms of their human and physical impact as well as their geographic extent. Approximately 9,000 people lost their lives, more than 22,000 people were injured, and more than 800,000 houses were damaged.

Reconstruction was a daunting task, given the challenging topography of Nepal and the lack of skilled personnel able to carry out the work. The National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) took on the task, and planned the housing reconstruction component, allocating funds and developing a portfolio of housing designs to support the disaster-affected populations as they built or rebuilt their houses. There were however several challenges in its implementation which could have obstructed the NRA objective of constructing disaster resilient houses using local practices and local artisans. This Handbook demonstrates that with sustained technical assistance to families, it is possible to not only achieve the targets but to do so much more.

With funds from the Government of India, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) assisted families in building 26,912 houses in the Gorkha district of Nepal, the epicentre of the earthquake, applying its owner-driven housing reconstruction approach. The initiative not only enabled homes to be re-built, but also contributed to the localization of viable disaster-resilient technologies that reduce the risk of earthquake damage through participatory approaches. The Handbook offers insights into the role of the federal government, local municipalities, communities, masons and women who led housing reconstruction efforts. It also offers an understanding of the complex processes which need to be addressed during the planning of a large-scale housing programme, such as the approvals process, policy directives, capacity building, awareness and education, managing funds and monitoring reconstruction. The social technical assistance provided by UNDP and its partners helped families navigate the different processes for accessing support for housing reconstruction. The success of the Owner-Driven Housing Reconstruction was instrumental in influencing the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) to recommend ODHR as the most appropriate approach to post-disaster housing reconstruction.

The Owner-Driven Housing Recovery Handbook has been developed based on our Nepal post-earthquake housing reconstruction experience and seeks to inform and guide post-disaster housing recovery efforts in any context. We look forward to sharing this experience globally with countries that are planning housing reconstruction programmes.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Government of India for financing the Nepal post-earthquake housing recovery programme, and to UNDP for providing the technical knowledge and expertise necessary to the implementation of the housing recovery programme, building on continuous support as a means of strengthening infrastructure resilience in Nepal.



Mr Sushil Gyawali
Chief Executive Officer

Statement

The notion of Owner-Driven Housing Reconstruction (ODHR) has gained currency over the last two decades. Giving affected communities agency not only enables better long-term outcomes in the built environment, but also provides immediate co-benefits to communities, such as strengthening and expanding building skills and revitalizing the local economy. However, each disaster setting is different and ODHR principles cannot be applied in a dogmatic way. It is in this context that UNDP socio-technical facilitation of the ODHR programme following the 2015 Gorkha earthquake assumes great significance. This publication encapsulates the knowledge and experience gained from those efforts. The Handbook demonstrates that ODHR is a key building block of “Build Back Better” not just in a physical, concrete sense, but more holistically, incorporating and fostering other social dimensions of recovery.

I am reminded of an event on the theme of “Build Back Better” organized by the School of Planning and Architecture and SEEDS in Delhi some years ago. The organizers, rather playfully, deconstructed the notion of BBB into three inter-related themes: a) back to building better, b) better build back and c) build back better.

To me, this deceptively simple formulation encapsulates the multiple dimensions of BBB. The first refers to its baseline conditions: regular building practices, with or without a disaster. If we do not have building practices that focus on the qualities of resilience, we can scarcely hope to turn the practice around overnight in the wake of a disaster. The second articulates a sense of urgency to build back. If we build back too slowly after a disaster – on the pretext of building back better – then that itself will compromise community resilience. And finally, recovery provides an opportunity not only to improve the quality of the built environment but also to improve livelihood systems, reduce inequalities, enhance people’s participation and strengthen the institutional systems that proactively seek to assess and reduce disaster risks.

This publication is a contribution to all of those three dimensions of BBB. It will help convert the theory of ODHR into concrete action, thus enabling communities to exercise their agency and build a resilient future for themselves.



Kamal Kishore

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The views expressed here are personal.

Acknowledgements

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This Handbook is primarily based on the experiences gained and lessons learned by UNDP during the implementation of Owner-Driven Housing Reconstruction (ODHR) after the 2015 Nepal earthquake. Many persons informed this Handbook by sharing their first-hand experience and participating in meetings and interviews: government officials, UNDP current and former staff at country and field level, disaster risk reduction managers and consultants, housing experts, recovery stakeholders, and international and non-governmental organizations. Among them:

1. Krishna Vatsa, Member, National Disaster Management Authority Delhi, India
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