



Habitat for Humanity's

Disaster Risk Reduction and Response

Pathways to Permanence



ON THE COVER

After devastating floods and landslides struck India in June 2013, Narita and her children moved into a new home built as part of Habitat for Humanity's response to the disaster. Habitat for Humanity India's Uttarakhand disaster response plan included providing emergency shelter kits; repairing partially damaged houses; and building transitional shelters, permanent homes, and schools and community centers.

Contents

Strategy provisions apply to all Habitat for Humanity-branded entities.

Branded entities include, but are not limited to, headquarters, area offices, branches, national organizations, consolidated entities, field offices, Habitat resource centers, Habitat community centers, disaster response centers, regional support centers, affiliates and state support organizations.

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The earthquake that struck Haiti on Jan. 12, 2010, destroyed more than 250,000 homes, many of them in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area.



Preface

As Habitat for Humanity International began assembling and distributing emergency shelter kits in Haiti after the January 2010 earthquake, the response team started looking to the next set of interventions. In coordination with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Shelter Cluster, the Habitat response team decided that transitional shelter solutions were needed by a significant number of families who were facing the upcoming hurricane season. The unavoidable question arose: Transitional shelters ... transition to what?



Emergency shelter kits were distributed in Haiti as an early part of Habitat's response to the 2010 earthquake.

A vision for the shelter continuum

There are several critical response components in post-disaster scenarios, usually referred to as “sectors.” One key sector is shelter, which aims to provide disaster-affected individuals and households with assistance conducive to protection from natural and man-made hazards. Technically, “sheltering” starts when the victim is pulled from the destruction and wrapped in a blanket or jacket for protection. The sheltering process does not end until the victim is in his or her permanent house, built to appropriate standards. How we go from a blanket to a permanent house is far from a well-defined protocol.

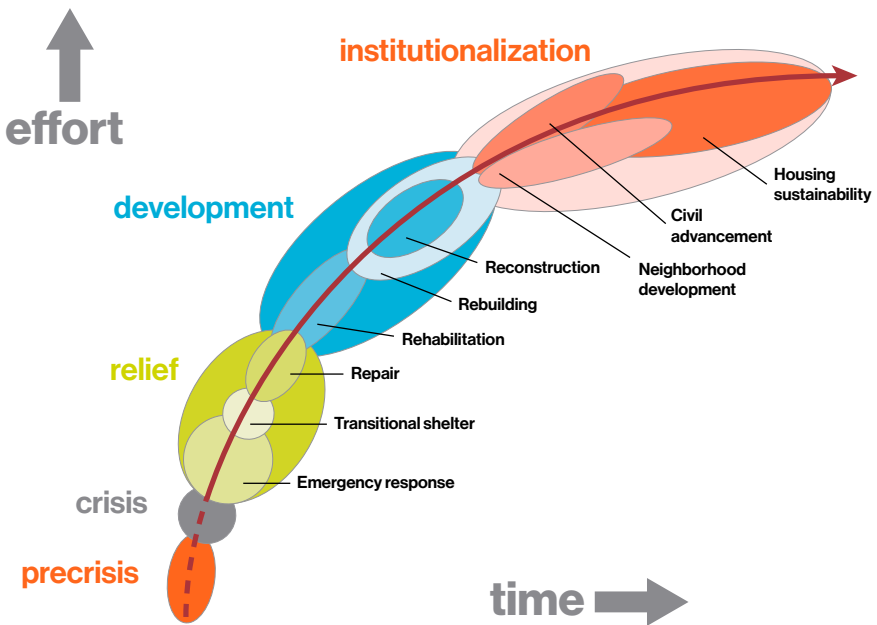


Figure 1: The Shelter Curve, a representation of the shelter continuum.

The course of sheltering between these end points is what we may call the “sheltering function.” The sheltering function is a dynamic, evolutionary process in the nature of a continuum, rather than a set of disconnected efforts. (The Shelter Curve graph¹ illustrates an approximation of this concept). This continuum is like an elastic thread of shelter-related activities that can be expanded or contracted as needed to fit the time frames, phases and effort levels after any particular crisis. The scope of these activities is usually based on the magnitude and complexity of the crisis.

Mind the glass walls

There are many divides within the humanitarian sector, and even more so when shelter and settlements are discussed: humanitarian and development, shelter and housing, relief and recovery, recovery and reconstruction, etc. This fragmentation can also involve the scope of mandates of organizations (and sometimes departments within those organizations), in addition to donors’ mandates.

There is also an artificial divide between phases in a post-disaster scenario, with the assignment of the term “shelter” to the relief phase and the term “housing” to the recovery or development phase. But in reality, there is no difference between shelter and housing. A shelter is a house and a house is a shelter regardless of the type or style. Although a common distinction is that shelters are built in relief and houses are built in development, in both cases the words carry no indication of quality, standards, type of materials or construction specifications.

The truth is that there is no clearly acceptable, universal definition for “shelter” as applicable to humanitarian sheltering purposes. Many adjectives are placed in front of the word “shelter” to convey a variety of meanings to fit the needs at any particular time, such as emergency shelter, temporary shelter, transitional shelter, durable shelter, permanent shelter, core shelter, intermediate

¹ The Shelter Curve graph has been facilitated by Lee Malaney, disaster response and mitigation engineer, and land, shelter and infrastructure specialist with the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, or OFDA.

shelter, progressive shelter, etc. Of course, one can substitute the word “house” for “shelter” in this list. New terms also are sometimes established, such as “one warm, dry room” or “starter house.”

Habitat for Humanity has an advantage when trying to conceptualize and break through these divisions. There is an end goal in mind: a safe, decent place to live. There is also an understanding that shelter programs are more than houses, ensuring that communities, settlements and social fabrics are built into Habitat’s programming. These two aspects should be combined to develop solutions and services that promote the process of early recovery of durable shelter, which also feeds into the reduction of vulnerabilities.

The concept of Pathways to Permanence

Habitat for Humanity believes that safe, decent shelter provides the platform upon which much of post-disaster assistance is built: health, water, sanitation, livelihoods, safety, education, etc. To support these crucial processes, the Pathways to Permanence strategy places affected families on a path to durable, permanent shelter solutions using incremental stages as needed (e.g., erecting an emergency shelter, accessing or affirming land rights, improving a transitional shelter solution, defining next steps for a disaster-damaged house, or expanding a new core house solution).

Pathways to Permanence is the process of reducing vulnerability and supporting disaster-affected families and communities using holistic program interventions that enable incremental progress toward the achievement of permanent, durable shelter and settlements.

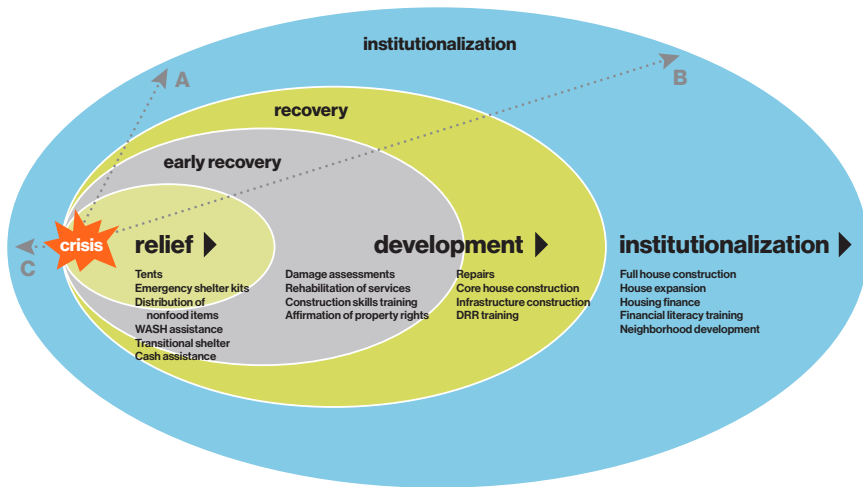


Figure 2: Families A and B will walk different “pathways” toward a permanent housing solution. A number of shelter support interventions can enable incremental improvements to their shelter conditions along the way. Family C has the means to quickly resort back to its predisaster permanent housing condition.

This approach focuses as much on the process of sheltering and risk reduction as it does on the products that may support it. Depending on the situation, actual shelter products may be differently designed, and shelter components will often be used in different ways. Products that support the process may include, but are not limited to, emergency shelter kits, technical assistance for disaster damage assessments, transitional shelters, technical assistance for affirmation of property rights, core housing schemes, and disaster risk reduction training.

Residents of Harisiddhi village in the Lalitpur district clean up after a magnitude-7.8 earthquake struck Nepal in 2015.

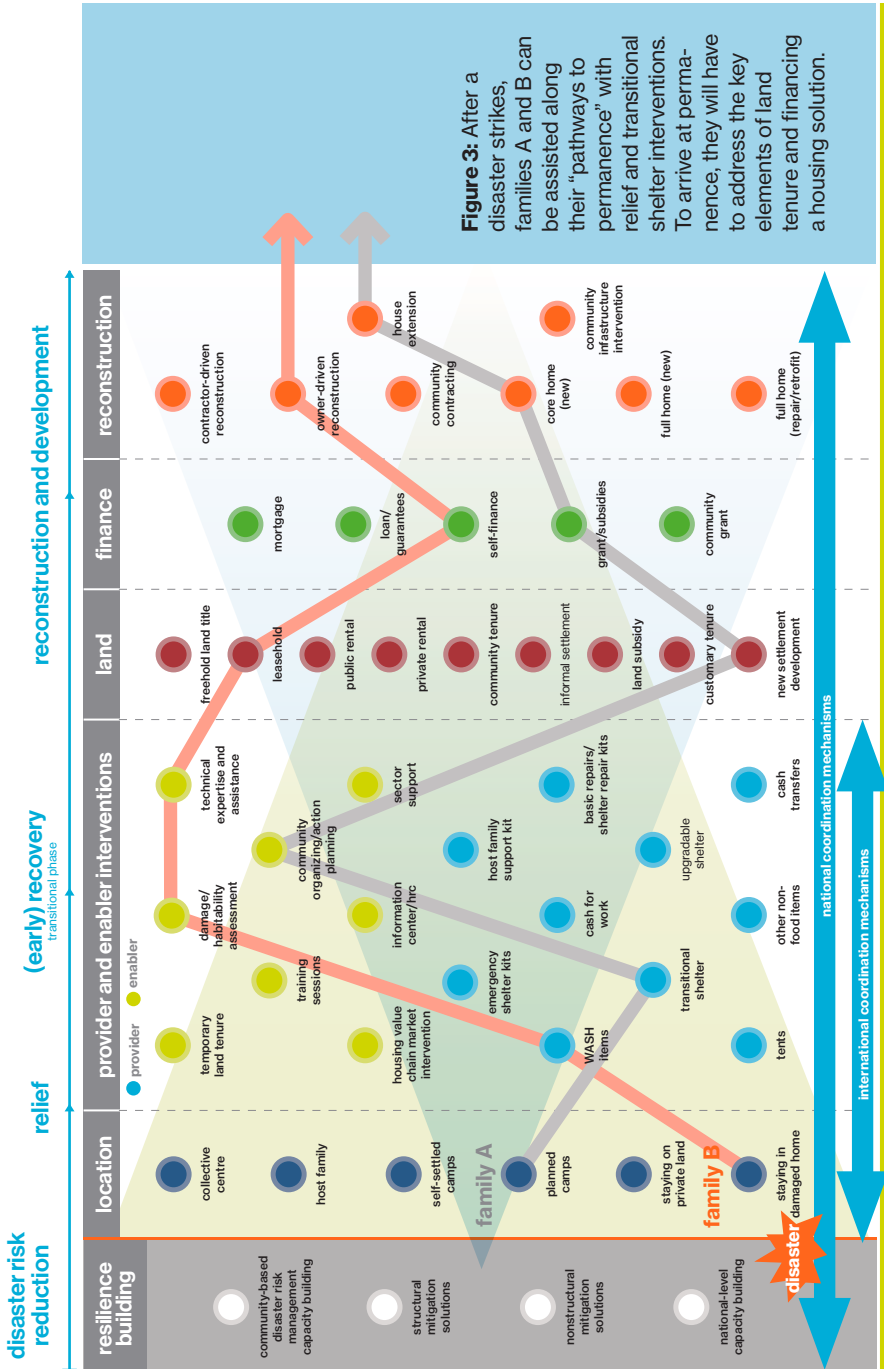




Families may enter the “pathways to permanence” at different points after a disaster strikes. Habitat has learned that in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, affected families with shelter needs almost always come up with “default solutions” by themselves. Effective shelter assistance and programs will seek to build on those efforts, channelling such default solutions into synergies that will take them, in different iterations, to the next incremental step by potentially improving on various aspects (for example, reconstructing a foundation, substituting shelter elements with better quality materials, adding another room, etc.). This shelter continuum takes a disaster-affected family from homelessness to a permanent, durable solution in a time frame that can last from a few weeks to many years.

Strategy highlights

- **Pathways:** There are multiple pathways toward permanent, durable shelter, and different circumstances, contexts, capacities and means will exist for different families. Habitat interventions should recognize these variables. Interventions should support these different pathways, targeting the most vulnerable in the population.
 - **Process:** By focusing on the process of sheltering and risk reduction, Habitat’s interventions recognize the incremental nature of shelter in the program design and the range of roles Habitat may play at different stages of the process. Support for this process can include the provision of shelter elements, the construction of shelter units, the development of housing support services, and support for the market housing value chain. Additionally, given that families will have different pathways toward permanent, durable shelter solutions, the provided support may differ, and it may change over time.
 - **Reduced risk:** Recovery must leave communities safer by building resilience and reducing vulnerability. By identifying hazards and disaster risks, intervention programs should develop strategies that mitigate those risks by structural and nonstructural means.
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- **Holistic interventions:** Seeing shelter and settlements as central to other critical interventions, a shelter program should not entail only rebuilding physical structures, but also restoring social, economic, natural and cultural environments while becoming a platform for health, water, sanitation, livelihoods, protection, education and other post-disaster assistance.

- **Empowerment and support:** Families and communities should not be viewed as victims of a disaster, but as partners in their reconstruction process. Empowering the capacities and strengths of families to participate in program design is critical to the outcome of the interventions. Program design also should look at the environment in which reconstruction will take place and try to strengthen government and community capacities, invest in the housing value chain, and enable rebuilding of livelihoods.

- **Incremental approach:** Recognizing that reconstruction can take years and is very capital-intensive, scaled shelter solutions are likely to use an incremental building methodology. It is also likely that Habitat's role would change throughout this incremental process from provider of solutions to enabler of housing support services.

- **Permanent solutions:** The goal of finding permanent, durable shelter solutions drives all interventions. This solution will look different based on the context of a country's housing mix, but it could include owner occupancy, rental housing, cooperatives, public housing, etc.

In addition to the above, it is important to highlight two cross-cutting issues central to this strategy: First, that these are peoplecentric pathways, and second, the need for advocacy. Interventions in either a development or disaster response setting are more successful when the affected population participates in the decision-making process. Listening and responding to feedback from affected people when planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programs — and ensuring affected people understand and agree with the proposed pathways — ensures that interventions are supporting their choices.

There may also be significant regulatory barriers toward achieving early recovery in durable housing solutions. Habitat supports and advocates for changes in governmental policies or the adoption of new policies to ensure that immediate decisions are made with long-term implications in mind.

Pathways to Permanence in action

When Habitat for Humanity puts Pathways to Permanence to work, the response team carefully examines a set of priorities in order to guide and inform disaster risk reduction and disaster response program design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. These priorities become a framework for a Habitat project cycle.

1. Community-based programs for both disaster risk reduction and disaster response interventions

Community-based disaster risk reduction and disaster response programs are characterized by a highly participatory process that engages local resources and seeks to build up local decision-making and multisector participation. Habitat for Humanity fully embraces the concept that grassroots or community development must be focused on long-term sustainability to be counted as true development. We further believe that comprehensive disaster management is an integral part of that long-term sustainability. Both in the predisaster and post-disaster stages, successful outcomes in risk reduction or response interventions are directly proportional to the role and level of involvement of the communities themselves. Disaster-affected families and communities are the true first responders after a disaster, and it is crucial that they see themselves as active participants and owners of their recovery processes. Designing programs supported by this concept is fundamental if shelter-related interventions are to enhance community resilience and the reduction of vulnerabilities, fostering development. Because nothing happens in a vacuum, it is important to take a look at how post-disaster scenarios usually develop, and to consider the implications on families seeking to restore the inextricably related conditions of their shelter and livelihoods.

Investing efforts in community engagement can make all the difference in the implementation phase of shelter-related programs. These efforts begin with identifying local leaders to facilitate the community's involvement in pre-program activities, such as initial assessments. They continue with participating in the design of shelter interventions and actual sweat equity in construction-related activities. The same applies in community-based disaster risk management. Best practices in the sector have shown that this approach, which assigns as much importance to the participatory process as to the outcome of programs, is the right and most respectful one. A community-driven, rather than agency- or donor-driven, approach is the key to successful and sustainable interventions.

The use of local materials, labor and technical know-how is strongly encouraged. Apart from the obvious benefit to local livelihoods and economies, the preference of local, culturally appropriate shelter solutions ensures their sustainability and multiplies the potential for incremental improvements undertaken by the beneficiaries themselves.



Community members help skilled and unskilled laborers build a shelter solution for returnees in a northern Afghanistan village.

2. Preference for on-site reconstruction over relocation and displacement

Avoiding displacement and helping households to quickly return to their own land to initiate recovery and reconstruction are key steps to restarting family livelihoods and community economic recovery. Relocating families to barracks and tent camps for long periods encourages dependence and slows the reorganizing and planning that are needed for a community-based response program.

Experience has shown that households that are able to avoid displacement after disasters recover faster than those that need to spend time in spontaneous or planned camps. In the middle point are those households that find support with host families near their original locations. This is important because families need to resume their livelihoods and draw support from established social support networks. When disruption of these two elements is high, recovery becomes difficult. The main failure of shelter relocation schemes is the lack of planning and provision of support around these issues for families if they are resettled in housing projects away from their familiar environment. If relocation becomes the only available option (because of high risk in original locations or issues of land rights), programs should consider (and budget) follow-up support for integration of the new settlement and families into the existing environment, with investments in livelihood support and facilitation of services. Think settlement, not just houses.

3. Agencies and donor coordination: A commitment to work collaboratively in all areas

Habitat's disaster risk reduction and disaster response programs emphasize collaborative work with partners to ensure that the goal of comprehensive disaster management becomes a reality. The current standard for coordination is advanced by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, or IASC, an interagency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making involving U.N. and other humanitarian partners, and is operated under the leadership of various United Nations agencies. Leadership of the Shelter Cluster is shared between the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, or IFRC, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR. The former is the convener of the Shelter Cluster for natural hazards, and the

latter is in charge of the Shelter Cluster during complex humanitarian or conflict-related emergencies.

Habitat for Humanity strongly supports this and other coordination mechanisms that address gaps in shelter assistance and help avoid duplication or interventions that may cause harm to affected populations. Shelter can be pivotal for interventions in other sectors, such as access to drinking water, provision of sanitation, enhanced safety, and livelihood support activities in the home. In other words, coordination is sought not only within the shelter sector, but also with all related sectors.

Coordination of donor support to reconstruction activities (both geographically and in terms of products and methodology) is also encouraged. An increased number of households can be assisted at a more reasonable cost if shelter solutions are provided in a noncompetitive, coordinated environment.



Members of a women's self-help group engage in disaster preparedness planning as part of training in a tsunami-affected coastal village in Tamil Nadu state, India.

4. Compliance with global and local standards and accountability to program beneficiaries

As a matter of principle, Habitat for Humanity supports the right of affected people to assistance and protection with dignity, impartiality and without discrimination in times of disaster, calamity and civil strife. Habitat frames disaster response programs within the humanitarian imperative that action should be taken to prevent or alleviate human suffering arising out of disaster and conflict, within the ethics of unconditional help based only on need. Habitat's mission principles have always emphasized action toward those in greatest need first; assistance without any type of discrimination; participation of those in need of assistance; dignity for all people; neutrality and independence from political, economic or foreign policy objectives; and an understanding of housing as a fundamental human right.

To ensure the implementation of these principles in shelter programs and to foster accountability, all Habitat disaster response interventions seek compliance with provisions in globally recognized standards, including but not limited to the Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief; the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, or Sphere; the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability, or CHS; and the Private Voluntary Organization Standards as defined by the American Council for Voluntary International Action, or InterAction. In addition, disaster response interventions involving permanent housing aim to comply with applicable local standards and with Habitat's own Housing Quality Standards. This guidance applies to all stages of the program/project cycle (conceptualization, design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, etc.).

Final thoughts

Recovery after a disaster begins on Day 1, with the understanding that when it comes to shelter assistance, one size does not fit all. Comprehensive disaster management demands that consideration be given to both the vulnerabilities and the capacities of affected families, creating opportunities to place the ownership of the recovery process into the hands of those families. This is the unequivocal consideration of Habitat for Humanity's Pathways to Permanence, in the pursuit of Habitat's institutional vision: A world where everyone has a decent place to live.



In the community of Kavre, north of Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, Habitat for Humanity Nepal has distributed over 200 shelter kits to families affected by the earthquake in April 2015. A total of 5,065 shelter kits have been distributed in 11 districts.

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Habitat's emergency shelter kits provided a quick response to the immediate shelter needs after the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti.



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