

Helpdesk Research Report: Technical Assistance for Post-Disaster Recovery

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Query: Identify literature on the role of international technical assistance and capacity building programmes in supporting long term recovery in post-natural disaster environments including coordination with disaster relief efforts. Highlight the implications for donor programming in such contexts.

Enquirer: Office of the Australian Civilian Corps, AusAID

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1. Overview

The literature on technical assistance (TA) makes scant reference to post-disaster contexts, focusing instead on post-conflict and fragile situations. Likewise, the literature on early recovery focuses much more on post-conflict rather than post-disaster situations, and makes little explicit reference to TA or capacity building in either context. In the few instances where capacity building in post-disaster contexts is discussed, it tends to be in the relation to immediate humanitarian assistance and community-level capacity building, which is usually carried out by NGOs.

Due to the paucity of literature making explicit recommendations for technical assistance to support long-term recovery in post-disaster conflicts, this report is limited to the more general literature on donor support to early and long-term recovery in post-disaster conflicts, and the literature analyzing what makes technical assistance effective in any context. Both of these literatures contain lessons which could apply the delivery of TA in post-disaster contexts.

Much of the criticism leveled against TA is the same as that leveled against early recovery interventions (see below). These include:

- the fact that TA remains largely supply-driven
- a low level of ownership and involvement on the part of partner countries
- the use of management systems created outside the national civil service which tends to undermine national capacity development, distort public-sector salaries and diffuse accountability
- weak procedures for identifying needs and for planning and designing technical cooperation support
- insufficient analysis of national contexts and underlying capacity constraint.
- insufficient attention to ensuring that TA personnel have the necessary skills and profiles for specific contexts
- weak integration and coordination with national development strategies

According to Land (2007) demands for TA personnel are extremely varied and situation specific, both between and within countries. Countries that exercise strong leadership and have well-defined development strategies are better placed to articulate their needs in this regard. In the context of post-disaster recovery, the examples of Indonesia and Thailand following the 2004 tsunami appear to support this finding. In the case of Indonesia, for example, government were able to identify four areas in particular where the international community could add value through technical assistance: bringing additional external capacity; financial management and funding; building capacity; and linking different actors.

The emerging literature on early recovery, which largely consists of technical guidance, contains minimal lessons for donors on how they can most effectively deliver technical assistance in these contexts. However, some of the general recommendations made in this literature could be seen to have a bearing on technical assistance, including the following:

- Conduct assessments of need and capacity to determine objectives and priorities for early recovery. Consider not only what interventions plan to achieve, but also on how to achieve such objectives – including the choice of modalities for implementation, the selection of partners and staff, and the timeline.
- Ground early recovery interventions on a thorough understanding of the context in which they take place.
- Ensure national ownership of the early recovery process and that external technical assistance complements rather than replaces existing capacities, and is supportive rather than directive. Appropriate expertise through South-South and regional cooperation should be the preferred mechanism for deployment of civilian expertise wherever possible, and should be supplemented by other international civilian expertise wherever necessary.
- Develop capacities for building constructive and inclusive working relationships between civil society organizations and government institutions and build capacity to strengthen accountability systems.
- Maximize synergies among different actors through efficient coordination of stakeholders in the early recovery process, including the coordination of international support for the long-term recovery.
- Strengthen capacities for disaster risk management and disaster risk reduction, including the formulation/revision of national disaster preparedness plans which include recovery planning arrangements, hazard and risk mapping, human resource development, training, and simulation exercises.
- Ensure integration of other cross-cutting issues such as gender, environment, security, human rights, and HIV/AIDS through the use of appropriate expertise and tools. Promote equality by assessing particular needs and vulnerabilities of different groups, including women.
- Monitor, evaluate and learn through appropriate participatory techniques and mechanisms.

2. Approaches to technical assistance

GSDRC, 2009, 'Changing Approaches to Technical Assistance', Helpdesk Research Report, GSDRC, Birmingham <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HD586.pdf>

This GSDRC helpdesk report provides an overview of changing approaches to technical assistance. According to the report the most common grounds for criticism of TA include:

- Supply-driven: Activities tend to be driven by donors rather than provided in response to developing countries' priorities.
- Country ownership: There is often a low level of ownership and involvement on the part of partner countries. This may in some cases be due to insufficient country-level capacity,

political will, leadership or initiative, but can also be due to donor controls and the use of parallel management structures. Technical assistance personnel are often more accountable to donors than to the countries they are working in.

- Parallel implementation units (PIUs): The use of management systems created outside the national civil service has been common, but they tend to undermine national capacity development, distort public-sector salaries and diffuse accountability.
- Planning and design of interventions: Weak procedures for identifying needs and for planning and designing technical cooperation support, including lack of clarity about roles and results expected.
- Contextual analysis: Insufficient analysis of national contexts and underlying capacity constraints.
- Cost: Technical cooperation is seen as relatively expensive, and this has been exacerbated by tied aid. It is often said that reliance on Western providers results in high costs, but some studies have noted that local providers are not always significantly cheaper, particularly in Africa.
- Selection of personnel: Insufficient attention is given to ensuring that TA personnel have the necessary skills and profiles (including interpersonal skills and the ability to transfer knowledge as well as technical skills) to be able to engage effectively in demanding change processes.
- Weak integration and coordination: Technical cooperation initiatives are often not well integrated with national development strategies, or are poorly coordinated with other activities taking place in countries.
- Lack of consideration of alternatives: In many cases, the provision of TA personnel and the use of parallel implementation units is taken as a given, without questioning their appropriateness, and there is limited experience in the use of alternative forms of provision

The report notes, however, that donors are changing their approaches to technical cooperation in response to criticisms, although change has been slow. Trends include: increasing country ownership, increasing use of national consultants, improving coordination and integration, pooling technical assistance funds, focusing on shorter interventions and capacity building, and untying aid.

Land, T., 2007, 'Joint Evaluation Study of Provision of Technical Assistance Personnel: What can we learn from promising experiences? Synthesis Report', European Centre for Development Policy Management, Discussion Paper 78. <http://www.ecdpm.org/dp78>

This study focuses on the provision of technical assistance personnel, drawing on country studies conducted in Mozambique, Solomon Islands and Vietnam. The study's key conclusions are:

- Development agencies need to let go of technical assistance management in order to empower country partners.
- Country management of TA personnel is a key determinant of effectiveness. This includes decisions about recruitment and deployment, and once deployed, TA personnel should be unambiguously accountable to the host organisations they serve. Some countries may lack sufficient management capacity, in which case progressive or interim support measures may be needed.
- A more informed understanding of how TA can support capacity development and change is the other key determinant of effectiveness. Having an explicit theory of action with an understanding of how different models of change can contribute to capacity development should increase the chances of success.
- Good design is important, including proper diagnosis of need, a flexible mix of approaches including iterative approaches, and monitoring and evaluation systems that address accountability and learning and provide the right incentives.

- Country partners need to come to grips with human resources planning and management and think strategically about the use of TA personnel. TA provision can never be a substitute for reforming the public service.

Specifically with regard to demand for TA, the paper finds that:

- Partner country demand for TA personnel remains strong. There tend not to be formal policies or strategies on TA, nor is there necessarily a focal point for channelling demand. The issue does not feature prominently in strategic thinking and planning processes, and is usually addressed at an operational level, programme by programme.
- Countries that exercise strong leadership, have well-defined development strategies, or are serious about improving the performance of public services are better placed to articulate needs, and can engage more easily on the topic. National and sector development plans can offer a more solid base upon which to consider TA; yet, in practice, the deployment of TA remains ad hoc and poorly coordinated.
- Assessing the demand for TA personnel is complicated because it is viewed by partner countries as a 'free' good. This discourages critical appraisal of potential costs and benefits. The absence of transparency on the part of development partners regarding TA costs, and the lack of opportunity for host governments to compare alternatives, constrains informed decision-making on the part of the host country.
- Demands for TA personnel are extremely varied and situation specific. For development partners, they are perceived as a flexible instrument that can address a number of objectives and perform a variety of functions. For partner countries, TA can help perform functions and provide services that cannot be provided by the local labour market. This includes gap filling, advice giving, capacity development and project management.
- Patterns of demand differ, particularly at the sub-national level where capacity challenges may call for a different use of TA. There is also increasing interest in sourcing expertise locally and regionally, rather than relying on international experts. Not only are there clear advantages in doing this, but more generally, the Vietnam and Mozambique studies noted the value of complementary inputs from these various sources.
- The implications of global security and of safeguarding global public goods, such as the environment, have created a new imperative for more direct engagement by development partners in fragile states in order to ensure at least a minimum level of functionality. In middle-income countries, a more focused and selective pattern of demand is emerging.

2. The implications of early recovery guidance for the delivery of technical assistance

Cluster Working Group on Early Recovery (CWGER), 2008, 'Guidance Note on Early Recovery', Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, UNDP, Geneva

http://www.undp.org/bcpr/iasc/content/docs/CWGER_Tools/Doc1.pdf

This guidance note identifies the following steps which should be adopted throughout the needs assessment, planning, programming, and monitoring and evaluation stages of early recovery. Many of these may have relevance to how technical assistance and capacity building might be delivered:

- Ensure national ownership of the early recovery process through the fullest possible engagement of national and local authorities in the planning, execution, and monitoring of recovery actions.
- Promote local and national capacities by ensuring that external technical assistance complements rather than replaces existing capacities, and is seen by national actors as supportive rather than directive.
- Use and promote participatory practices to identify needs, build capacities for empowering communities and create the foundations of a sustained, free, active and meaningful participation throughout all phases of the early recovery process. This lays

important groundwork, helps ensure that local initiatives, resources and capacities are fully understood and utilized, and builds capacity for comprehensive post-crisis needs assessment led by national partners in the recovery period.

- Develop capacities for building constructive and inclusive working relationships between civil society organizations and government institutions.
- Influence how humanitarian and early recovery assistance is provided to ensure that interventions 'first, do no harm', as well as take account of longer-term development considerations. External assistance is not neutral, but becomes part of the context in which it is delivered. Thinking not only about what interventions plan to achieve, but also on how to achieve such objectives – including the choice of modalities for implementation, the selection of partners and staff, the time line for implementation – can help to ensure that early recovery efforts 'do no harm'.
- Maximize synergies among different actors through efficient coordination of stakeholders in the early recovery process. This can be achieved by sharing information and promoting integration to avoid duplication and gaps, optimizing the resources available for sustainable recovery.
- Include risk reduction and conflict prevention measures in the early recovery process by ensuring that key decisions are based on risk assessment. Assessments of hazard, vulnerability, and capacity will inform efforts to reduce risk.
- Build capacity to strengthen accountability systems so that the population can hold governments and local authorities to account in the implementation of early recovery plans and programmes as well as seek redress if a grievance or a legitimate claim goes unfulfilled.
- Ground early recovery interventions in a thorough understanding of the context in which they take place, including in terms of conflict dynamics that may be unintentionally reinforced by such interventions
- Ensure integration of other cross-cutting issues such as gender, environment, security, human rights, and HIV/AIDS in assessment, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation through the use of appropriate expertise and tools.
- Promote equality and develop local capacities to prevent discrimination of any kind such as race, colour, sex, ethnicity, age, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, disability, property, birth or other status.
- Promote gender equality by assessing particular needs and vulnerabilities in gender analysis. Women's roles in transition and development are profoundly affected by how far early recovery efforts include them and their needs in assessment, planning and programming.
- Conduct effective assessments of need and capacity to determine objectives and priorities for early recovery.
- Monitor, evaluate and learn through appropriate participatory techniques and mechanisms that allow timely identification of corrective measures, and capture the experiences and voices of the target population.
- Build on and/or reorient ongoing development initiatives to ensure they contribute to building resilience and capacity in affected communities. As a minimum, review ongoing initiatives to ensure they do not contribute to the further accumulation of vulnerability.

Early Recovery Policy Forum, 2008 'Joint Action for Strengthening International Support to Early Recovery', Policy Statement, Copenhagen, 1-3 October

<http://www.missionfnnewyork.um.dk/en/menu/dkandtheUN/news/EarlyRecoveryPolicyForum.htm>

This statement, produced at the 'Joint Action for Strengthening International Support to Early Recovery' conference, calls for strategic planning for early recovery to be initiated at the earliest stages of a crisis, to be informed by needs assessments, to involve broad local involvement and ownership. The section entitled: 'Towards Stronger Early Recovery Capacities', outlines the following objectives:

- “Existing national capacities and networks should be identified through capacity assessments, and fully integrated into programming and early capacity development efforts. Where capacity gaps exist, the strengthening of national capacities following a crisis needs to be supported as soon as possible. Appropriate strategies to address national and local capacity gaps are required to ensure that such efforts are adequately planned and funded.
- When national capacity has been severely challenged by the crisis, the imperative to act in early recovery might require recourse to supplementary (external) capacity. This can include the use and strengthening of existing implementation capacities of operational actors on the ground, and, where appropriate and requested, the use of stand-by pools of civilian experts for deployment at short notice, in order to augment national capacity to the extent possible and following realistic assessments of actual human resources. External capacity will work with and build national and local capacity wherever possible and should be informed by a strong understanding of structures, capacities and programmes that were in operation and effective prior to and during the crisis.
- Appropriate expertise identified through South-South and regional cooperation should be the preferred mechanism for deployment of civilian expertise wherever possible, and should be supplemented by other international civilian expertise wherever necessary. [...]
- A coordinated approach to recruitment and remuneration by international actors of local staff is needed to ensure that national capacities are not depleted. Also, temporary funding of civil service salaries and modernization of the civil service should be supported as necessary.”

UNDP, 2008, ‘UNDP Policy on Early Recovery’, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, UNDP <http://www.undp.org/bcpr/iasc/content/docs/TBWMarch08/Doc1.pdf>

This policy document is designed to explain UNDP’s position on early recovery. It outlines the key principles of early recovery as: national ownership; capacity utilisation and support; and peoples’ participation.

The document presents a menu of possible activities for UNDP at the country level. Those elements with a strong emphasis on technical assistance and capacity building include (but are not limited to):

- National policy formulation: UNDP will help lay the groundwork for full-scale, crisis sensitive strategic planning for recovery. This planning process will eventually link with an overall assessment, such as post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA), that places assets and vulnerability at the centre of its analysis, and promotes integrated and comprehensive approaches in support of local capacities.
- Capacity assessment and support: UNDP will assist in an objective assessment of the national capacities available to meet recovery needs, to be undertaken as an early step to guide the formulation of a capacity support plan. However ‘quick and dirty’ it may have to be in the first instance, such an assessment can help analyse and recommend areas of intervention, through strategic capacity support initiatives and targeted quick impact actions. This will include strategies to support the role of non-state actors, including NGOs, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the media and local business.
- Reinforcing local administration capacity including augmenting critical human resources (staff support where there may be technical knowledge and staffing gaps in foundational areas for recovery such as information management, aid coordination, financial management, participatory planning, etc)

Cluster Working Group on Early Recovery (CWGER), 2006, 'Implementing Early Recovery', Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)
[http://reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/LTIO-6SCLD2/\\$file/iasc-earlyrecovery-jul2006.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/LTIO-6SCLD2/$file/iasc-earlyrecovery-jul2006.pdf)

This document defines early recovery as: "recovery that begins early in a humanitarian setting. It is a multi-dimensional process, guided by development principles. It aims to generate self-sustaining, nationally-owned, and resilient processes for post-crisis recovery. Early Recovery encompasses governance, livelihoods, shelter, environment and social dimensions, including the reintegration of displaced populations. It stabilizes human security and addresses underlying risks that contributed to the crisis. Early recovery is a responsibility for both the development and the humanitarian agencies working in post-crisis countries."

Given that natural disasters can weaken the capacity of governments and local communities to assess, plan, and implement early recovery initiatives in a proactive and timely manner, the international community has a collective obligation to support and strengthen the capacity of those affected by crises, at national and local levels. Thus far, early recovery issues have been dealt with by a relatively small number of actors, with scarce resources and on an ad hoc basis. Interventions have often been unpredictable.

In this context, the Cluster Working Group on Early Recovery (CWGER) was established to enhance global-level capacity to support country level early recovery planning at the very early stages of emergencies. Based on a mapping and analysis of existing capacities for early recovery among CWGER members, the following areas were identified as gaps at global level that need to be addressed on a priority basis:

- Development of tools and methodologies for early recovery planning and programming;
- Fast, predictable mobilization of technical expertise through rapid deployment capacity;
- Integrated programming of humanitarian and recovery-related interventions;
- Knowledge management;
- Inter-agency agreements for CWGER members.

UNDP, n.d., 'Post Disaster Recovery Guidelines', Version 1, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery-Disaster Reduction Unit, UNDP
http://www.undp.org/cpr/disred/documents/publications/regions/america/recovery_guidelines_eng.pdf

This document provides guiding principles and approaches for the immediate post-disaster recovery phase, based on experiences and lessons learnt by UNDP in recovery operations over the past five years. It also outlines an institutional framework for recovery.

Principle 6, "Building local and national capacities for increased resilience, risk management and sustainable development", is particularly relevant here. It states that: "[a]chieving the goal of building local and national capacities implies that external technical assistance must complement existing capacities, be conceived as supportive and not directive, and must entail transfer of technology, know-how and capacities for increased resilience, risk management and sustainable development. (p 7)

The paper highlights the following areas for targeted capacity building activities:

- Strengthening local level capacities for disaster risk management, including the formulation/revision of national disaster preparedness plans which include recovery planning arrangements, hazard and risk mapping, training and simulation exercises.
- The development of early warning capacities, particularly at the local level, integrated with national and regional monitoring and weather forecasting systems.

- Risk, vulnerability and capacity assessment tools for incorporation into the decision making process.
- General training and human resource development activities for risk reduction.

4. Case studies

Willets-King, B., 2009, 'The role of the affected state in humanitarian action: A case study on Indonesia', HPG working paper, ODI, London
<http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/3068.pdf>

This report investigates the experience of Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami as a good example of how international agencies might interact with emerging, middle-income countries in responding to natural disasters. Specifically, chapter 3 (pp 20-22) outlines four areas where Indonesian actors highlighted examples of the international community adding value through technical assistance – bringing additional external capacity, financial management and funding, building capacity, and linking different actors.

- External capacity – technical, policy, coordination and response: International capacity has been valuable in a number of areas covering a wide range of inputs for both preparedness and response – both the intellectual and physical assets required. Of particular relevance here are support for:
 - developing policy frameworks for better disaster preparedness, management and risk reduction
 - post-disaster damage and loss assessments
 - creating space to discuss policy and bring in innovative ideas relating to implementing the Hyogo framework.
- Financial management and funding: While funding is not generally the most important role of international actors, it has its place where the scale of the challenge overwhelms national capacities to respond, whether due to absolute levels of financing required, or because Government budget mechanisms are not suitably flexible to move funds to where they are needed in a timely way. Indonesia officials interviewed noted examples of specific technical inputs or capital investments – such as the sharing of costs of the tsunami early warning system between GOI and international donors who contributed both cash, equipment and technical expertise. Another useful role is providing the interface for the Government to access international funds through assisting in preparing appeals such as emergency Flash Appeals, and in preparing appropriate documentation that can be used by the international community to mobilise resources (e.g. Post-Disaster Needs Assessment).
- Capacity building: Capacity building for Indonesian staff to undertake specific technical tasks often involves the short-term deployment of international expertise. However, there is a specific need to build up Indonesian technical capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters in future over the long-term. The challenge is to avoid substituting for indigenous technical capacity while delivering what is needed in the immediate term in those areas where there are capacity shortages.
- Linking role: UNDP and INGOs such as Mercy Corps have been effective in linking actors together in Indonesia effectively in Indonesia. The issue here is that in a large and complex country, there are gaps in making fruitful linkages between different parts of Government and between civil society on one hand and Government and international agencies on the other.

The report concludes that the international aid community has a positive relationship on disaster management with the Government of Indonesia, particularly when government capacity is respected and supported. International agencies have much to offer, particularly non-financial inputs – their role in supporting the Disaster Management law has been significant – and particularly when they are appropriate, build capacity, and are not tied to other agendas.

However, it also emphasises that while in many cases lip service is paid to country ownership, this can often still mean international agencies or consultants developing plans or strategies which are published in the government's name and officially endorsed but not properly bought into as government policy to be actively implemented. This balance of substitution of government capacity to developing genuine capacity is a huge challenge.

Finally the report offers the following recommendations for donors engaging with post-disaster middle-income countries:

- Align and harmonise with national priorities on response and support to DRR, avoiding cherry picking specific projects.
- Tailor response to the local context.
- Work with others in the region to look at the role of regional bodies and networks that could strengthen disaster management learning and systems.
- Examine how international actors can support local capacity and provide funds for emergencies in ways that are not seen as demeaning

United Nations and World Bank, 2006, 'Tsunami Thailand: One Year Later. National Response and Contribution of International Partners', UN Country Team and the World Bank, Bangkok

<http://www.unisdr.org/asiapacific/ap-publications/docs/un-tsunami-thailand-one-year-later.pdf>

This report makes the point that, recognising Thailand's status as a middle-income country and its capacity to respond to natural disasters on its own, the international community played a relatively small, but strategic role in the country's tsunami recovery. Thailand did not appeal for international financial assistance, but in view of the sheer magnitude of the disaster the Government very much welcomed support from international partners in the form of technical support, equipment, and direct support to the affected communities.

Specifically, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), bilateral development agencies and international NGOs contributed structured support to the government's recovery efforts, providing technical support in various sectors, including child protection, psycho-social support, livelihood recovery, support to migrant workers, environmental rehabilitation, disaster preparedness, and support to coordination. The UNCT also provided strategic support to the Thai government in its efforts to coordinate the inflow of international support for the longer-term recovery.

5. Further information

Author:

This report was prepared by Andrew McDevitt, andrew@gsdrc.org

Contributors:

Maria Alexandra, Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR)

Claire Rubin, Claire B. Rubin & Associates

Gonzalo Lizarralde, University of Montreal

Joseph Ashmore, Independent consultant

Catherine Fisher, IDS

Jo Glyde, IDS

Websites visited include:

GFDRR, CADRI, PreventionWeb, Disaster recovery resources, UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, World bank capacity development resource centre, i-Rec information and research for reconstruction, capacity.org, InterWorks, LenCD - Learning Network on Capacity Development, Center for Rebuilding Sustainable Communities after Disasters (CRSCAD), International recovery platform, prevention consortium, humanitarian practice network, RedR, Humanitarian outcomes, ALNAP, Journal of humanitarian assistance

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