



Soaring High

Self-recovery through the eyes
of local actors.



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PEER EXCHANGE REPORT

Soaring High

“We are like kites,” said Analita, from Cambuciao in Leyte. “We needed someone to throw us up, so we can get out of the depressing situation we were in and start again”.

After Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) wreaked devastation on their village, the future felt bleak – their houses and sources of income and livelihood were all destroyed. They could not think beyond survival at that point.

Cherry, a single mother who takes care of two small children, felt that things were not under her control and that she was powerless to do anything about it. “I did not know where to get the things we need right after the typhoon,” she said.

Luzviminda, pregnant and feeding six dependents, said that they used to have a small vegetable garden to feed the family. But after the typhoon hit, they lost everything but their lives.

After the typhoon the community rushed to put up makeshift shelters using scattered rubble and local materials like thatch and reeds. Even if they were hastily made, Luzviminda expressed happiness with what they had, saying “it is a lot better than finding comfort under a mango tree.”

One of the CARE Philippines partner organisations supported 52 households in this village as part of the World Habitat Award-winning self-recovery project. Analita had thought that it would be impossible to bring back their old lives before Yolanda. But she now happily shares her new conviction: “We were like kites. Your help has provided us a chance to take off so we can soar high.”

The full blog from which this is adapted can be found here:

<https://resilientphilippines.com/2014/05/the-takeoff-flying-like-kites-after-yolanda/>

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In 2017, CARE Philippines won a World Habitat Award in recognition of its 2013 Typhoon Haiyan shelter self-recovery programme. The programme supported 16,000 families to reconstruct their houses and make a number of important improvements. In 2019 World Habitat funded a peer exchange event in CARE Philippines in Manila to share the key lessons learned. The event shared knowledge and experience on the technical, social and financial aspects of the shelter self-recovery programme. The event was attended by CARE Philippines' local partners, representatives from international organisations, non-governmental organisations and donors. It was facilitated primarily by CARE Philippines local partners, who were instrumental in responding to Typhoon Haiyan as well as a range of other disasters to have affected the country in recent years. This report presents the findings from the World Habitat peer exchange event. The aim is to reflect on the lessons learned and the implications for supporting self-recovery in humanitarian shelter practice.

The key implications that were identified have been summarised into four recommendations or challenges.

1. NEEDS ASSESSMENT OR CONTEXT ANALYSIS

There is a need for a qualitative approach to assessing needs with clear parameters; one that recognises that this analysis is a process on a continuum of shifting circumstance. A context analysis, that includes a more traditional needs assessment, provides a way of capturing the broader factors and the range of stakeholders that shape response and recovery.

2. PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

When defining and implementing self-recovery programmes there is a need to ensure that survivor-agency and choice remain front and centre. However, ensuring accompaniment to families as they reconstruct is also essential to support households in making informed decisions about their recovery process. Flexible and adaptable programmes with realistic timeframes will effectively ensure an ability to respond to changing conditions without imposing the pace of assistance programmes on recovery trajectories. Overall, this suggests a need for shelter practitioners to focus on facilitation of a process rather than on the delivery of a product.

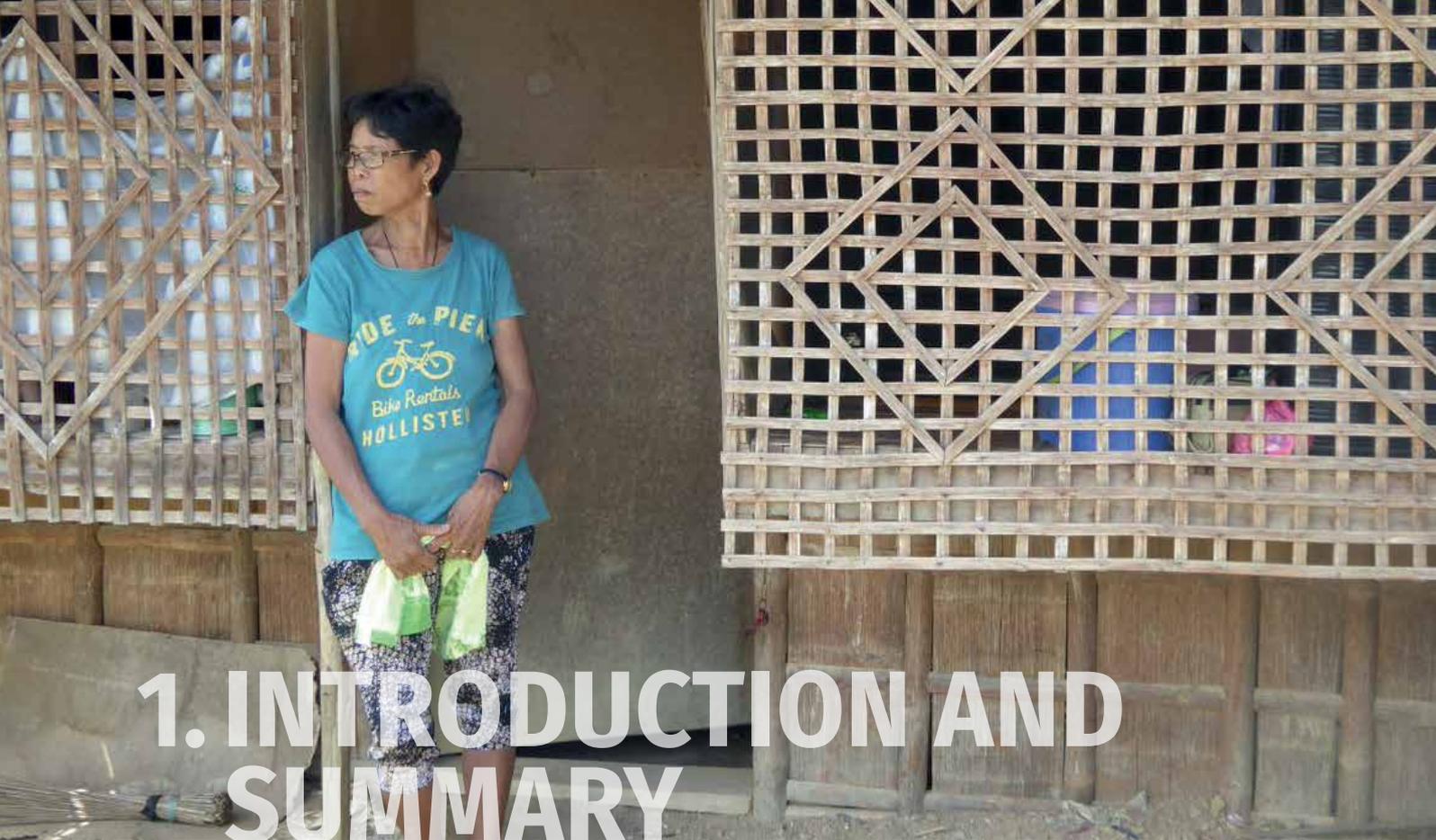
3. MONITORING AND EVALUATION – WHO SETS THE INDICATOR?

Self-recovery projects have typically measured beneficiaries reached, assistance provided and, in some cases, finished houses and uptake of Build Back Safer (BBS) messages. However, doing so comes at the expense of many other factors that may be as, or more, important to the family. There is a need to develop more qualitative assessments which adopt a survivor-led approach and strike a balance between objective measures of safety and subjective family values in the context of the prevailing risk.

4. DISASTER RISK REDUCTION – THE POWER OF COMMUNITY ORGANISING

Prepared communities recover faster and experience fewer losses in the event of a disaster. Strong community organisation and robust DRR strategies were seen as prerequisites for being able to effectively support the self-recovery process with extremely limited resources.





1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

“Self-recovery is what we do anyway”.

In November 2013, large parts of the Philippines were devastated by the strongest typhoon to ever make landfall. Typhoon Haiyan (known locally as Yolanda), displaced more than 4 million people, and damaged or destroyed 1.1 million homes. The disaster resulted in a significant humanitarian response with over 450 international staff deployed to the Philippines within three weeks. With the Global Shelter Cluster¹ identifying support to self-recovery as a strategic objective of its operational framework, the Haiyan response represents the first large-scale prioritisation of support to self-recovery in a major shelter response.

CARE Philippines and their network of local partner organisations responded with extensive shelter and livelihoods programmes, based on supporting self-recovery. They reached almost 16,000 families in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA) across the islands of Leyte and Panay with cash, materials and tools, combined with technical assistance. This helped them rebuild their homes so that they were stronger and better than before. Many of the *barangays* (local administrative units) that received shelter support were also recipients of livelihood support through two cash grants, which families spent on projects as varied as piggeries and rice-mills.

Evaluations found that the new homes were a significant improvement on the pre-Haiyan houses: better built, stronger, often bigger, and families expressing an evident sense of pride, satisfaction and ‘ownership’ of their achievements. The programme was considered better than the contractor-built ‘whole-house’ approach sometimes utilised by agencies, because it reduced costs, allowed for flexibility and choice, as well as potentially leaving a legacy of education in safer building. Despite having to invest their own time and resources into the houses, families recognised that their homes, once finished, were tailored to their needs and resources.

In 2017, CARE Philippines won a World Habitat Award. The award – delivered in partnership with UN Habitat – recognises the overwhelming success and impact of their project and the merits of self-recovery more broadly – a philosophy that puts people, and their own needs and priorities, at the centre. As part of the award, World Habitat

¹ The Global Shelter Cluster is the international coordination mechanism co-led by the International Federation of the Red Cross and the UN High Commission on Refugees. It supports people affected by natural disasters and conflict with the means to live in safe, dignified and appropriate shelter.

commissioned a peer exchange event. These events encourage the dissemination of innovative housing practice around the world, to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and experience and by providing a practical, first-hand and in-depth understanding of the technical, social and financial aspects of award-winning programmes.

The information in this report is a product of the analysis of data gathered from research activities as well as presentations from the peer exchange workshop which took place over three days in Manila, in March 2019. There were 24 participants, the majority representing eight local NGOs from across the Philippines. All were partners of CARE Philippines, the workshop hosts. Other participants included representatives of international organisations, non-government organisations, donors and embassies.

What is self-recovery?

“Self-recovery is what we do anyway” – workshop participant.

Self-recovery is a term that has become common-place within humanitarian shelter discourse. It derives from a recognition that in the aftermath of disasters the majority of families rebuild their homes with little, if any, support from the humanitarian community. Supporting this inevitable process is seen as a powerful tool for recovery, that respects people’s agency, choice and priorities.

For more on self-recovery see:
State of Humanitarian Shelter and Settlement, Chapter 4. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/The%20State%20of%20Humanitarian%20Shelter%20and%20Settlements%202018.pdf>



The World Habitat Awards

Our World Habitat Awards recognise and champion innovative, outstanding and sometimes revolutionary housing ideas, projects and programmes from across the world. The awards provide a unique window on the world, allowing us to see and share how people have solved problems and overcome the challenges facing the modern world.

Since 1985, more than 250 outstanding World Habitat Awards projects have been recognised, demonstrating substantial and lasting improvements in living conditions.

As well as international recognition, a trophy and a prize of £10,000 is made to each of the two winning projects each year (one from the Global North and one from the Global South). The focus of the awards is not only the identification of good housing practice but in the sharing of knowledge and experience to others who can transfer them to their own situations. We work closely with the winners each year to help share their good practice in order to transfer it to where it is needed most.

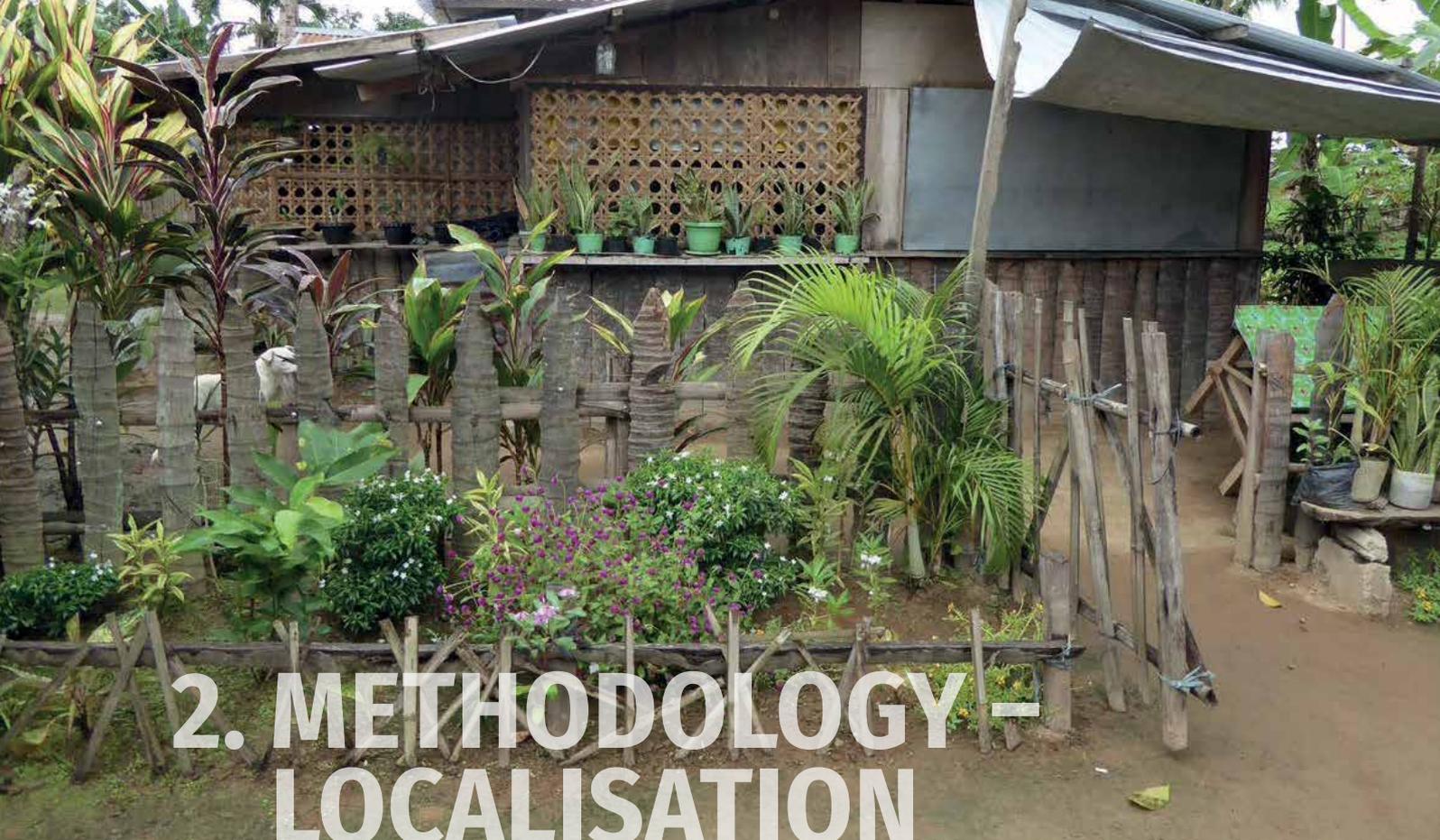
When we visited Tacloban in 2017, we were struck by the resilience and strength of the people we met. In many ways people in the Philippines are used to typhoons, but nothing could have prepared them for the immense destruction of Super-Typhoon Haiyan. Just three years after the typhoon, it was inspiring to see how the communities had bounced back so quickly, despite the challenges and hardship that they faced. With the help of CARE and local partner organisations, communities showed resourcefulness and remarkable levels of collaboration to rebuild their homes more quickly and more effectively than would have been possible with traditional disaster-relief approaches.

We saw first-hand how this project had helped communities develop their livelihoods through, for example, the purchase of mills that add additional value to their rice harvest. Without this project, people would, no doubt, have rebuilt their homes anyway. However, this inspiring project helped them recover more quickly, build stronger and more resilient houses than they previously had, and in many cases were left better off than they were before.

World Habitat believes that 'self-recovery' is an approach that could reach a much greater scale and be used across the globe. In a world that appears to be destined to experience more frequent and more intense 'natural' disasters, it may be the brightest hope to help communities weather the storm.

David Ireland OBE (CEO, World Habitat)





The workshop was intentionally informal to encourage open and frank discussion. In keeping with the spirit of localisation, the only presentations were from local partners. Facilitation was shared among participants and at the end of each day there was a discussion about the agenda for the next, and the timetable was accommodated accordingly.

Day 1: Sharing lessons from humanitarian responses across the Philippines. Reflections from implementing partners.

On day one, implementing partners reflected on the key lessons learned from supporting humanitarian responses to a variety of emergencies that have occurred across the Philippines in recent years. These range from conflict in Mindanao, to typhoons across Leyte and Luzon and volcanic eruptions in Luzon. Participants discussed a diversity of issues including the opportunities and barriers they faced across these very different contexts and made recommendations on how to improve the process. The presentations have been synthesized to inform the discussion in Section 4.

The reflection of one local NGO on the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda

“We lost everything we had saved for 25 years of our existence as an NGO. And at that time, we were left with nothing, except our lives. I thought we couldn’t do anything. I was asking how we could serve other people when we were also destroyed. But then the partners came, they offered support and at that time many NGOs in Leyte were leaving. They were going to Manila or Cebu City because the devastation was so vast. We had no power, no water. Very few clothes left. It was very tempting to leave. But as an organization, it has been our mandate to help the disaster-survivors. That was the ‘acid test’ for us, for me as a member of the NGO, and for my colleagues. We decided to stay. No one left. We served 23,000 families in four months in three of the most devastated provinces.”

Day 2: Diving deep: an exploration of key themes

On the second day of the workshop participants identified topics that stood out in the responses of the previous day. The first step was to map those themes they wanted to discuss in greater detail – to share success stories, seeking solutions to challenging issues or simply increasing knowledge and awareness of a particular area. Participants then voted on priority areas for discussion, and four key themes were identified (see box on page 10).

Day 3: Implications for humanitarian practice: guiding principles for supporting self-recovery.

On day three, stakeholder participation in the workshop was broadened to include representatives of international organisations and donor agencies. Implementing partners presented the prioritised topics from the previous day for discussion with this wider group. This then fed into a discussion on the challenges and opportunities for supporting self-recovery in operational practice at each stage of the programme cycle – from needs assessment through to implementation and monitoring and evaluation, and finally to longer term disaster risk reduction (DRR).

Throughout the three days the research team from CARE UK carried out individual interviews with local partners to discuss certain issues in greater depth. This report presents an analysis of the outcomes of the three days and the range of interviews carried out. The outcomes have all been condensed into initial recommendations for support to self-recovery and reviewed by the local partner organisations that participated in the workshop.



The four key themes that emerged from day 2:

1. SELF-RECOVERY

- ✓ *"We have to understand the context before we can define different levels of vulnerabilities and the varying needs and gaps".*
- ✓ The group discussed the definition of self-recovery, and even, *"what does fully recovered mean? Is it possible?"*
- ✓ The context is critical. Natural disaster, conflict (human-induced), urban and rural.
- ✓ Understanding strategies is seen as important: community coping mechanisms; mainstreaming gender and disaster risk reduction (DRR); partnerships; early warning, early response (EWER).
- ✓ Developing good monitoring and evaluation processes (M&E).

2. GENDER

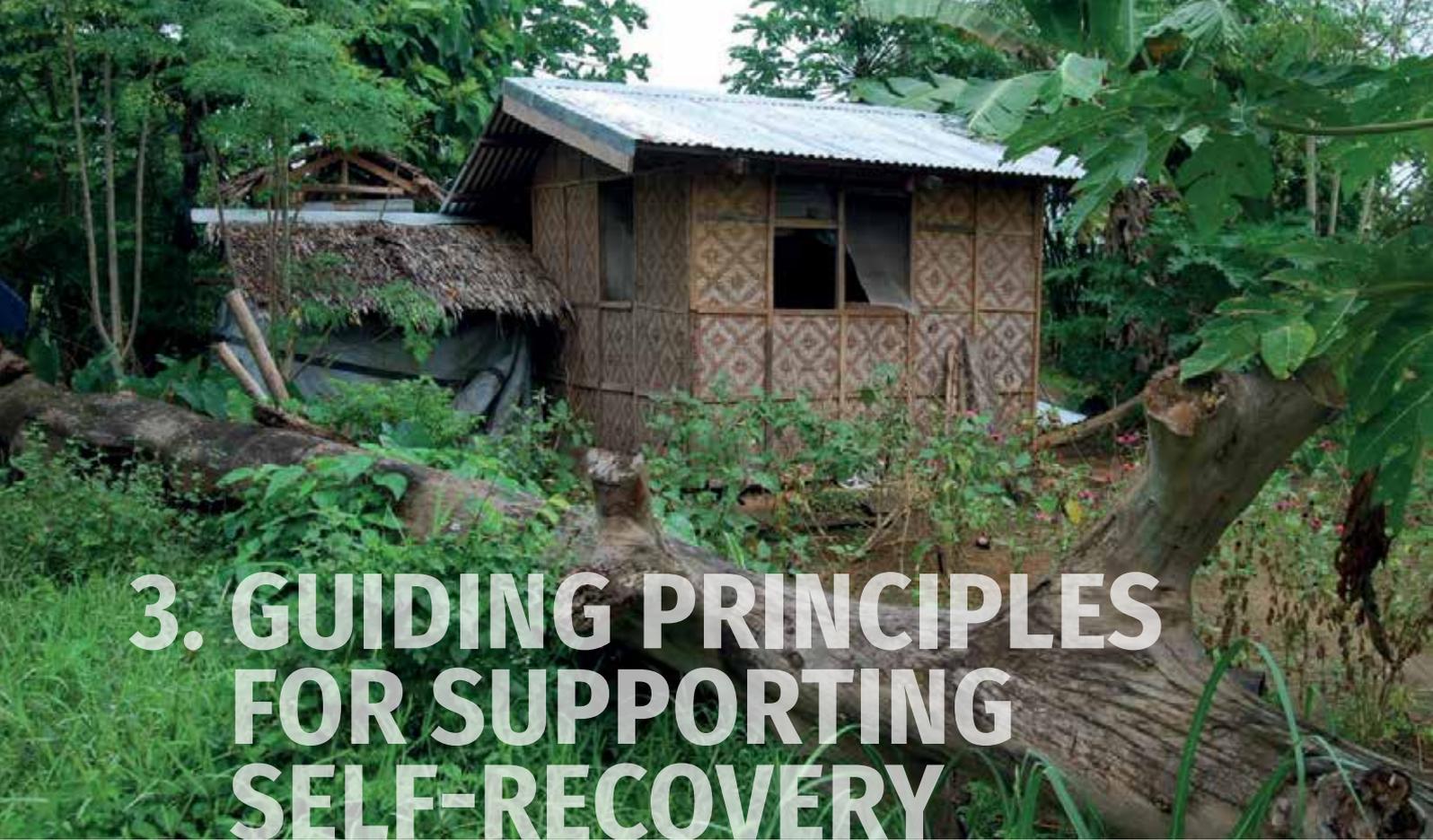
- ✓ This was considered alongside other forms of inclusion. Integration of gender and inclusion in the Disaster Needs and Capacities Assessment (DCNA) process.
- ✓ *"How partners can be meaningfully involved in designing and implementing gender-inclusive humanitarian action. Gender studies often based from external perspectives".*
- ✓ Learning loop. There can be training for national partners on gender and inclusion, but when that training is replicated in the community, it needs to be fed back to the humanitarian partnership network. *"Maybe communities know better than us".*

3. RESOURCE MOBILISATION

- ✓ There is a concern about smaller, 'forgotten' disasters; they get overshadowed by bigger events; for example, Typhoon Karen was overshadowed by Typhoon Lawin in 2016.
- ✓ There is a need for a mechanism for flexible rapid response (EWER – early warning, early response).
- ✓ Emergency response should be directly linked to recovery and indigenous time-scale and knowledge should be respected.
- ✓ There is a need for advocacy communications material that steers well away from 'poverty porn'.
- ✓ There were other concerns: lack of funding continuity and conflicting values; implementation can depend on the requests and policy of the donor; there is a need for technical assistance as well as funding.
- ✓ There is a danger that limited funding can equate with low coverage and low quality.

4. COMMUNITY ORGANISATION AND PARTNERSHIP

- ✓ The first to respond. Household and community organisation. The importance of bayanihan (see box on page 16). *"We have the capacity, but we also have vulnerabilities".*
- ✓ Self-reliance. Reducing reliance on external organisations. But other stakeholders also have value in skill and knowledge exchange.
- ✓ Disaster Preparedness Committees (DPC). *"Plan ahead – avoid being two steps behind".* Support long-term continuity and sustainability.
- ✓ Do no harm. For example, destroying the spirit of volunteerism through 'cash-for-work' schemes; avoid dependence.



3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SUPPORTING SELF-RECOVERY

Throughout the three days, there were rich and broad discussions on self-recovery and its implications for humanitarian shelter practice. The guiding principles below emerged from these discussions. They are interlinked, with one principle frequently having a bearing on another. They have all arisen out of Philippine experience of natural disasters, and so are the product of their context; however, they can inform the first important steps towards a generic approach to supporting self-recovery.

PEOPLE'S AGENCY

People are never passive and self-recovery is an inevitable process. On many occasions during the workshop it was said that self-recovery simply defined a process that was second nature to Filipinos. It takes place whether humanitarian shelter support is received or not.

The survivor's agency and the primacy of their right to choose, underpin any approach to supporting self-recovery. There is no one right pathway to recovery, as everyone's needs and priorities are different.

FACILITATION RATHER THAN DELIVERY

Affected groups face a range of political, social, legal, environmental, economic and technical barriers to recovery, however, they have the opportunity to make improvements to their homes as they rebuild. Many of these barriers cannot be mitigated, or supported, with the provision of in-kind shelter support alone. Adequate shelter support may need to incorporate a broader range of activities that lift barriers and support opportunities. It suggests that there needs to be a focus on facilitation of a process rather than on the delivery of a product.

This indicates the need to define the difference between direct (materials, cash, technical assistance) and indirect support to self-recovery. The latter lifts these barriers and eases the pathway to recovery. Practical examples can be access to markets, infrastructure improvements, legal support for land tenure and more.

INFORMED CHOICE

Recovery processes are subjective. Shelter support should strive to ensure that households are able to make their own informed choices over their recovery pathway. This implies ensuring access to relevant and timely advice and information that may influence their decisions. The role of the humanitarian practitioner shifts from the provider of a product to the provider of appropriate information that allows families to make informed choices – and then to be able to support them along their chosen pathway.

EQUITY AND SCALE

Approaches that are not perceived as fair can disrupt community dynamics. Assistance should not necessarily be equal (everyone getting exactly the same), but it must be equitable, and perceived to be so, with everyone receiving according to need and priority. Generally, ‘pockets of excellence’ should be avoided especially if they are unaffordable and beyond the reach of the majority of the population. Supporting at scale should be the aim of any self-recovery approach. Equity and scale are discussed further below in the section on the implication for the programme cycle.





ADAPTABILITY/FLEXIBILITY

Assistance programmes must recognise that recovery processes are unique, complex and dynamic. Priorities shift according to many social, economic, political, environmental, legal and technical factors. The influencing factors can be as apparent as the agricultural cycle or the approaching monsoon or winter; but it can also relate to the family's own circumstances as they weigh shelter against economic livelihood, or as the fear of after-shocks or repeat disasters abate.

REALISTIC

Self-recovery starts immediately but proceeds at its own pace and this will vary from family to family. The process can take many years as priorities are juggled and resources stretched.

CONTEXT

The local context is everything. No two disasters are ever the same and there is no substitute for a proper context analysis that goes well beyond the normal rapid needs assessment. The variants of hazard, building typology, damage, resource availability (both within the community and available to the assisting organisations), and the circumstances and priorities of the families have to be considered and understood with the support of the affected families themselves.



4. IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN SHELTER PROGRAMMES

The CARE Philippines partner organisations reflected on the implications for humanitarian practice and consider the different stages of the conventional programme cycle. This focused on current practice, how it might change, the issues and solutions.

I. NEEDS ASSESSMENT OR CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Recovery is an inevitable process that begins rapidly after a disaster. However, it is complex, multidimensional and responsive to a range of influencing factors. People's needs and priorities can change rapidly, and this shapes how they engage with shelter programmes.

Current practice struggles to capture these factors. The conventional rapid needs assessment (RNA), while necessary to assess the scale of the humanitarian situation and provide some of the base for strategic planning, only provides a snapshot of the situation. It is not able to capture information that may have an important bearing on the development, or subsequent amendment, of self-recovery programming, in line with changing situations. A needs analysis is unable to make sense of the broader circumstances within which the disaster takes place and unfolds. Thus, the full impact, the diversity of needs, how priorities might change with time and the appropriateness of likely responses, are not fully understood. In focusing on need alone, they cannot capture capacities of the local populations and their potential to drive their recovery process.

There is a need for a qualitative approach with clear parameters; one that recognises that this analysis is a process on a continuum of shifting circumstance.

A context analysis, that includes a needs assessment, provides a way of capturing the broader factors and the range of stakeholders that shape response and recovery. The methods are complementary to the rapid needs assessment (RNA) that gives an overview of people's needs while the contextual analysis provides

'Distributions were planned and carried out, not just for, but more importantly with the beneficiaries...helping themselves and their community, the people were better able to rise to their feet and embark on the journey towards recovery and resilience'

Workshop participant

the qualitative depth, complexity and nuance to the numbers gathered. Analysing these together will yield deeper, richer and more complete insights into the recovery context. To be of value, this work must be done at the earliest opportunity and the results, findings and recommendations fed into the Shelter Cluster coordination system in real time. A final report is of little value if it arrives too late; but drip-feeding the results of an in-depth context analysis can have an immediate impact on response strategy.

A good context analysis can also provide the basis for a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy that reflects the expressed priorities of the affected population.

II. PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Gender and the role of women in the Philippines

"... the Philippines has a strong civil society voice. People are active. The women's role is getting enhanced ... In our experience, organising women is like wildfire. Once they get enlightened on their roles and rights, they become active in community activities. They fight for their rights. They advocate. I think the localisation of advocacy and empowerment of communities and strong presence of NGOs and civil society can be a good practice to other countries. Especially on advocating for women's rights, how the women participate, how the women leaders express themselves." – workshop participant.

Agency

Following a disaster, survivors take action to recover regardless of whether humanitarian assistance reaches them or not. Shelter actors should avoid duplicating the activities best undertaken by affected people themselves. A focus on capacities, as well as vulnerabilities, allows shelter actors to avoid this duplication and will encourage efficient use of resources. Organised communities facilitate a more rapid and efficient recovery and in the Philippines the practice of *bayanihan* (see box on page 16) is seen as a powerful engine for recovery. Shelter actors must identify and work with existing community structures, strengthening them where necessary, rather than create parallel recovery processes. It is crucial to understand the existing socio-cultural context (pre and post-disaster) and care should be taken to ensure that projects do not undermine, nor run parallel to, existing practices of self-help, volunteerism and *bayanihan*.

Support to self-recovery can be both direct and indirect. Direct approaches have typically involved the provision of cash, materials and technical assistance to households. However, many of the barriers to recovery cannot be lifted by this approach alone. Indirect support includes those interventions in the wider recovery context with the goal of facilitating longer-term recovery processes at scale and encouraging investment in shelter over time. Understanding and lifting the range of barriers faced by recovering households may imply the facilitation of a process rather than the delivery of direct shelter assistance. Examples of indirect support could include infrastructure (fixing the road, mending the water supply), market support, micro-finance initiatives, land tenure advice, technical training, mediation and much more.

Cash grants, an example of direct support, can also facilitate the rapid recovery of housing as can clearly be seen in the post-Haiyan projects. The grants were conditional on construction progress and quality. More recently, multi-purpose cash transfer (MPTC) has been introduced to humanitarian response and one that is gaining acceptance and popularity. Small grants are given to each family and there are no conditions attached, leaving the families free to decide how best to use the money. Those local organisations that had used this approach saw it as positive, as people use the money wisely and know their needs and priorities. Some used it to repair and improve their houses. Sometimes the community agreed to pool a small fraction of the grant for collective projects e.g. repairing drinking water or irrigation systems.

Bayanihan and the strength of community

The concept of *bayanihan* can be found across south east Asia and is particularly marked in the Philippines. Although the roots of the practice go back through generations – it originally referred to helping families to move their house – it is now understood to mean a spirit of cooperation within a community. In practice neighbours support each other and especially the elderly and most in need.

“It is your neighbour who will be the first to help you” – from a workshop presentation.

‘I think with self-recovery, one lesson I learned is building the capacity of communities so they themselves pull their resources to do the initial response. The value of Filipinos on bayanihan is a big factor to self-recovery’ – workshop participant.

There was much discussion on the ‘most pro-active’ – those that rebuild very rapidly after a disaster. They may be every bit as in need as other families but are often passed over for shelter assistance as they are perceived to have already recovered. They are also potential role models within the community and advocates of self-recovery.

Volunteerism and ‘do no harm’. There is a strong spirit of volunteerism in the rural Philippine communities, linked to the practice of *bayanihan*. However, with the practice of cash-for-work and newly arrived international NGOs employing local staff, this declined rapidly leaving a concern that it might be permanently eroded.

Maximising choice but ensuring accompaniment

Programmes should always seek to maximise survivors’ agency as well as their choice and ownership over recovery – whilst recognising that they must act within existing political, social, economic environmental, legal and technical boundaries. Maximising beneficiary choice and agency throughout the recovery process increases user satisfaction and the likelihood that reconstructed homes will adequately reflect needs, tastes and priorities. Self-recovery programmes should seek to pursue, value and promote existing practices and add to them, where possible by incorporating other factors which make a ‘good house’. Beyond a focus on structural safety, this implies addressing the range of areas that makes a house a home. Despite the importance of ensuring choice and agency, supervision and accompaniment have important roles to play. Providing accompaniment to self-recovering households as they reconstruct is essential to increase the quality of construction and to ensure households can make informed decisions about the process.

Maximising Choice: AACD Shopping list

During the Build Back Safer training, beneficiaries were given the opportunity to choose the house materials they needed. Every household was provided with a menu of construction materials with corresponding prices and was informed that they had an allocation of 3,200 pesos (£50). Households were able to self-select the materials that most met their shelter repair or reconstruction needs. The collective bulk buying from suppliers ensured lower costs for the materials.

The importance of accompaniment: roving teams

House-to-house monitoring and technical support by ‘roving teams’ – selected by the community and supported by implementing agencies – was an important and successful component of the response to Typhoon Haiyan. These teams, typically formed of two carpenters and a non-technical community member (sometimes called a social mobiliser, and ideally a woman), were valued for their ability to provide families with encouragement and technical advice that reinforced the learning that had taken place via other means.

What is a ‘good house’?

The term Build Back Better became popular after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. An emphasis on the importance of the structural strength of buildings meant that it was soon supplanted by Build Back Safer. However, supporting self-recovery, with its insistence on the right to choice and recognition of varying needs and priorities, suggests that there needs to be a re-definition of ‘better’ that includes safety but not to the exclusion of many other factors. In the Philippines, a family may decide that their home is ‘safe enough’, and prefer to make it bigger, or to incorporate a small sari-sari store (a convenience store), or a space for a sewing machine, or simply to make it a pleasant and attractive place to live. All these factors, and many others, are part of the definition of a good house: however there is never one definition and it will vary enormously depending on context, prevailing risks and the tastes and preferences of each family.

Adaptable and flexible programmes

Although self-recovery begins rapidly after any disaster, a family’s needs and priorities shift over time. As previously mentioned (Section I: Needs assessment or context analysis), these processes are difficult to capture in needs assessments. Contextual analyses may help to capture the range of factors which will shape likely recovery trajectories, but programmes that are adaptable and offer flexible assistance options are necessary to ensure that what is captured in theory is enacted in practice. After a disaster, some people may prioritise housing, whereas others may feel that recovering economic activity is the fastest immediate route to recovery. Assistance programmes should strive to provide support without imposing a single, fixed solution.

‘People wait for the harvest and then borrow some money.’

Workshop participant

Conventional humanitarian practice, with its sectors of shelter, water and sanitation, health and so on, does not favour a flexible approach that responds to families’ diverse needs. However, a recent emphasis on ‘adaptive programming’, which encourages cross-sector work, is very welcome.

Realistic goals and expectations

Self-recovery is a long-term process; whereas emergency recovery assistance programmes can last as little as a few months, and rarely extend into multiple years. Families may take years to finally rebuild their home, perhaps living in makeshift accommodation while they prioritise their economic livelihood, agriculture or other pressing needs. A project of limited duration, which counts success by the number of houses completed, may hinder rather than promote the recovery process if it forces the pace and provides inappropriate assistance at the wrong moment.

To avoid imposing the pace of assistance programmes on recovery trajectories, people should be supported with achievable solutions that reflect their own timeframes. Alternatively, programmes should recognise and support an on-going process: training, for example, can outlive the programme timeframe and continue to aid recovery into the future. Similarly, materials can be stored until the family has amassed the time and money to construct a new house. In certain contexts, it will be valid to define end of programme objectives that can apply to unfinished houses.

Equity and scale

Approaches that are perceived as unequal can cause difficulties and tension within and outside programmes and disrupt community dynamics. Different approaches are often necessary to achieve common objectives, but assistance should remain equitable. Whenever possible, projects should reach the entire community, even if not to the same degree. For example, technical training to carpenters can be of benefit to everyone; the roving teams can give advice to all. While there could well be a need for extra measures for the society's most vulnerable, the creation of 'pockets of excellence', often in the form of whole houses for the most at need, should be avoided. Scale and quality may seem to be in unresolvable conflict: the greater the scale, the lower the quality and vice versa. However, reaching scale is clearly more equitable than privileging a few and can be shown to have more overall benefit than a reduced number of higher quality houses. The decisions, and the decision-making process, must be entirely transparent to minimise tensions within and between communities. Ensuring community participation throughout the programme is the most important facilitating factor.

III. MONITORING AND EVALUATION – WHO SETS THE INDICATOR?

There is currently no agreement on how to evaluate the success of a self-recovery project. Nor is there a consistent set of tools and indicators. Self-recovery projects have measured beneficiaries reached, assistance provided and, in some cases, finished houses and uptake of Build Back Safer (BBS) messages. As self-recovery seeks to achieve scale it is not feasible to assess in any detail the engineering safety among the diversity of non-engineered buildings that result from large programmes. Furthermore, focusing solely on structural safety comes at the expense of many other factors that may be as, or more, important to the family, including architectural values, socio-cultural factors or the wider impacts of shelter including health and livelihood recovery. The completion of contextual analyses as a means of designing shelter self-recovery programmes and the primacy of people's right to exercise choice and agency over their own recovery suggests a need to develop more qualitative assessments that strike a balance between objective measures of safety and subjective family values in the context of the prevailing risks. A people-led approach to M&E would start with the question: who sets the indicator, are indicators appropriate at all and who decides what success looks like?

One of the local NGOs used the KoBo Toolbox for Monitoring & Evaluation after Typhoon Vintna in Mindanao.

When asked questions relating to their self-recovery strategies and the impact that shelter assistance had on them, the community members generated the following responses:

- Make do with **what they have**
- **Pooling of resources** of coalition members
- **Use their linkages/ties** to access assistance
- Community leaders' influence with Local Government Units to provide immediate help
- Appropriateness of shelter materials provided **prompted survivors to act immediately**
- Feeling of security with a **safer home**
- **Able to continue work** knowing that family members and belongings are secured
- **Children continue their studies**
- **Women and girls feel more secure** upon transfer in their own home
- Increased **awareness on preparedness** and **impact of degraded environment**
- **Capacity on house construction enhanced** through the BBS training and provision of printed BBS guide
- Strengthened **collectivism and cohesiveness** among organisations and community members
- **Leveraged additional assistance** from other stakeholders

IV. DISASTER RISK REDUCTION – THE POWER OF COMMUNITY ORGANISING

Time and again during the workshop, participants emphasised the value of having a strong DRR system in place to enable an effective self-recovery process. Prepared communities recover faster and experience fewer losses in the event of a disaster. Partners discussed using the response period as an opportunity to improve disaster risk preparedness, while also recognising that funding for DRR is always a challenge.

The Philippines, typically, experience over a dozen typhoons each year but only the strongest make international headlines. Nonetheless, the cumulative damage and loss caused by the ‘lesser’ storms must be greater than the less frequent headline-grabbing super-typhoons such as Haiyan. They attract less overall funding and less funding per capita. This is where self-recovery becomes even more evident (as a workshop participant said: “this is what we do anyway”) and supporting the process increasingly important. The workshop participants explained how one emergency can overshadow or distract from another. In October 2016, Typhoon Sarika (Karen), for example, became forgotten once Typhoon Haima (Lawin) occurred, later in the same month. Similarly, the international focus on Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) handicapped the simultaneous relief efforts of the earthquake on the island of Bohol (November and October 2013 respectively).

In these unreported disasters the need for a strong community organisation and robust DRR strategies were seen as prerequisites for being able to effectively support the self-recovery process with extremely limited resources. The Philippines is exemplary with its network of Disaster Preparedness Committees (DPCs).

‘Our approach is community-based disaster management that started in the mid 1980s. This is one of the approaches we have done for so many years and we also want others to replicate.’

Workshop participant

Disaster Risk Reduction and the importance of community organisation

With the changing climate and degrading ecosystems, it is imperative that communities not only build back but build back better. Stronger. Together – workshop presentation.

“I think with self-recovery, the focus [should be] on the survivors, their capacities, their resources. One challenge is about organising community members. There is a lot of support given to different sectors but less on organising. Community organising is very essential and critical for self-recovery.” – workshop participant.

“One of the most important things to consider is the local capacities of communities or disaster survivors. We believe that disaster survivors have the capacity to overcome the effects and impact of disaster events and from that they try to rebuild towards recovery ... We should capacitate these community organisations to become the first responders.” – workshop participant.

“That’s what we do, we organise and capacitate communities to have their own people’s organisations which can start from disaster preparedness committees or what we call DPCs. This will ensure that the policies of our project are followed and sustained, and the project doesn’t go to waste. That’s a lesson learned especially on sustainability – to have a strong people’s organisation.” – workshop participant.

“The lens [of gender, protection, resilience and so on] is from an outside point of view Respect local and indigenous strategies.” – workshop participant.



5. SUMMING UP:

What lessons does the World Habitat Award-winning project hold for humanitarian shelter response?

“Self-recovery is what we do anyway”. This was the comment made by an experienced local NGO worker from the north of Luzon, Philippines. By contrast, the shift in humanitarian practice towards supporting the process of self-recovery has only been seen in recent years. It has come about through a recognition that this people-centred, or survivor-led, approach is based on two tenets: first, that it is an inevitable process – *it is what we do anyway*; and the second, related factor, is the primacy of people’s choice in determining the pace, priority and direction of their recovery.

The example of the CARE Philippines approach – in common with many other post-typhoon Haiyan projects that recognised self-recovery – demonstrates that this is an effective and appropriate approach that allows a high degree of choice and is adaptable to the needs and priorities of individual families.

There are few shelter principles that hold true in all cases, but perhaps one is that no two disasters are ever the same and that understanding the unique context is essential. For that reason, there is a need for caution in assuming that the Philippines model would work equally well elsewhere; and certainly in some places, it might be entirely inappropriate. However, its recognition in the Global Shelter Cluster Strategy (2018-2022) and its inclusion in more recent disaster responses would suggest that there is a need to learn from successful practice and develop principles and guidelines that could, with care, be adapted to a diversity of contexts. Since Typhoon Haiyan, self-recovery has been an explicit part of several major post-disaster shelter programmes, notably the Nepal earthquakes (2015), Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu (2015), Cyclone Gita in Tonga (2018) and Cyclone Idai in Mozambique (2019).

Many of the guiding principles that emerged from the World Habitat Peer Exchange workshop in Manila will be commonly applicable if adapted to, and understood within, the specific context. The need for a good contextual analysis, as well as needs assessment, for example, will always be good practice for a programme that aspires to support self-recovery, but it will reveal quite different, unique and nuanced complexities in each set of circumstances. The principles may be valid, but their interpretation will always be unique.

This report is a step towards the articulation of these principles. In time they will be piloted, tested and improved. It should also serve as a reflection on the self-recovery approach from the perspective of local organisations that will stimulate debate amongst practitioners, donors and policy makers. Self-recovery aligns well with recent global development and humanitarian policy that focuses on localisation, sustainable development, and a more self-reliant and resilient community. It is hoped that the example of the World Habitat Award will lead, through example and good practice, to a more humane, people-centred and appropriate approach to post-disaster shelter programming.





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CARE's emergency shelter team is hosted by CARE International UK in London and provides technical support and expertise around emergency shelter to the entire CARE International Confederation. The emergency shelter team can be contacted on emergencysHELTER@careinternational.org.

Front cover: A woman outside her new home, one of the houses self-built through the CARE Philippines post-Typhoon Haiyan programme Marta Llorens Echegaray/CARE 2016

p1: Young girl and destruction in the immediate aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, Panay, Philippines. Bill Flinn 2013

p2: A family outside their new home. Marta Llorens Echegaray/CARE 2016

p3: Destruction in the immediate aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan. Bill Flinn 2013

p4: One of the houses self-built through the CARE Philippines post-Typhoon Haiyan programme Marta Llorens Echegaray/CARE 2016

p5: A woman standing by her woven bamboo lattice-a common feature of these self-recovery houses. Marta Llorens Echegaray/CARE 2016

p6: Pot-plants are another feature of these self-recovery houses that show the evident pride families have in their homes. Marta Llorens Echegaray/CARE 2016

p8: One of the houses self-built through the CARE Philippines post-Typhoon Haiyan programme. Marta Llorens Echegaray/CARE 2016

p9: Mother and child outside their new home. Marta Llorens Echegaray/CARE 2016

p11: One of the houses self-built through the CARE Philippines post-Typhoon Haiyan programme. Bill Flinn /CARE 2016

p12: New houses often incorporate a small convenience store - one of the houses self-built through the CARE Philippines post-Typhoon Haiyan programme. Bill Flinn /CARE 2016

p13: Signs of self-recovery within ten days of Typhoon Haiyan, Panay, Philippines. Bill Flinn 2013

p14: Families will use whatever material is to hand to rapidly re-construct their homes. Bill Flinn /CARE 2016

p20: A beautifully constructed bamboo building. Marta Llorens Echegaray/CARE 2016