



Image credit: Tripureswor, Nepal, June 2015. Jes Aznar/Oxfam.

THE EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY OF INTERVENTIONS SUPPORTING SHELTER SELF-RECOVERY FOLLOWING HUMANITARIAN CRISES

About this evidence brief

This brief provides an overview of *The effectiveness and efficiency of interventions supporting shelter self-recovery following humanitarian crises* – an evidence synthesis published in January 2017 by the Humanitarian Evidence Programme and carried out by a team at Habitat for Humanity and University College London. It summarizes key findings in response to the two main research questions identified, indicates the country contexts from which evidence is drawn, outlines the methodology, highlights research gaps and provides references to the original literature.

The brief aims to assist policy-makers, practitioners and researchers in assessing the available evidence in this field. It does not provide advice on which interventions or approaches are more or less appropriate in any given context. The varied and varying nature of crisis, vulnerability, goals of humanitarian programming, local conditions and quality of available data make the evidence highly contextual. *The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Oxfam, Feinstein or the UK government.*

Objectives of the evidence synthesis

The evidence synthesis represents the first ever attempt to apply systematic review methodology to an assessment of the evidence surrounding humanitarian shelter and settlement interventions in low and middle-income countries. Specifically, it sets out to respond to two main research questions:

- what effects do interventions that support affected populations' own shelter self-recovery processes have on household-level outcomes following humanitarian crises?
- what factors helped or hindered the implementation of interventions supporting populations' own shelter self-recovery processes following humanitarian crises?

About the evidence synthesis

The protocol, full evidence synthesis and executive summary on which this evidence brief is based are available from [Feinstein International Center](#), [Oxfam Policy & Practice](#) and [UK government](#) websites. Citation:

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About the Humanitarian Evidence Programme

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Contents

About this evidence brief	1
Objectives of the evidence synthesis	1
Summary table of findings	2
Findings	3
Methodology	4
Research gaps	4
Further considerations	4
References	5

Figure 1: Summary of evidence synthesis findings. Source: The research team

Q1: What effects do interventions that support affected populations' own shelter self-recovery processes have on household-level outcomes following humanitarian crises?	Consistency[*]	Number of studies[†]	Overall strength of evidence[‡]
1. Household dignity and self-reliance (positive)	Consistent	Medium (7)	Medium
2. Household perception of safety from natural hazards and security from crime and violence (positive)	Consistent	Medium (7)	Medium
3. Household incomes or livelihoods (unclear)	Inconsistent	Medium (4)	Limited
4. Household assets or debts (unclear)	Inconsistent	Small (2)	Limited
5. Household physical and mental health (unclear)	Inconsistent	Small (2)	Limited
6. Household knowledge of safer construction (unclear)	Inconsistent	Small (3)	Limited
Q2: What factors helped or hindered the implementation of interventions supporting populations' own shelter self-recovery processes following humanitarian crises?	Consistency[*]	Number of studies[†]	Overall strength of evidence[‡]
Household factors (helping programme implementation)			
1. The ability of households and communities to contribute skills, labour, materials or finance	Consistent	Large (9)	Strong
Programme factors (helping programme implementation)			
2. Undertaking adequate initial assessments and regular monitoring	Consistent	Medium (8)	Strong
3. Developing a clear and simple plan that is understood by all stakeholders	Consistent	Medium (4)	Medium
4. Designing a programme that meets the changing needs of households and responds to the context	Consistent	Medium (7)	Medium
5. Developing clear and simple beneficiary selection criteria and a transparent selection process	Consistent	Medium (7)	Medium
6. Supporting coordinated community involvement and adequate two-way communication	Consistent	Medium (7)	Medium
7. Delivering adequate financial, technical and material assistance	Consistent	Large (9)	Strong
Contextual factors (helping or hindering programme implementation)			
8. The level of economic recovery and rate of inflation	Consistent	Medium (5)	Medium
9. The level of instability and armed conflict	Consistent	Medium (4)	Medium
10. The level of certainty over government policies	Consistent	Small (1)	Limited
11. The adequate number of programme staff with appropriate skills and experience	Consistent	Medium (4)	Medium
12. The nature and strength of pre-existing relationships	Consistent	Medium (4)	Medium
13. The level of abuse of power for private gain (corruption)	Consistent	Medium (5)	Medium
14. The availability of skilled and unskilled labour	Consistent	Small (3)	Limited
15. The accuracy of land ownership records and the availability of suitable land	Consistent	Medium (5)	Medium
16. The accessibility or remoteness of households	Consistent	Small (3)	Limited

Notes: * Evidence is classified as 'consistent' if all of the findings of the included studies suggest similar conclusions and 'inconsistent' if a range of conclusions is identified. † The number of documents is referred to as 'small' if there are three or fewer studies, 'medium' if there are between four and seven studies, and 'large' if there are more than eight studies. ‡ Overall strength of evidence: A combined assessment, based on the size and consistency of each grouping.

Findings

What effects do interventions that support affected populations' own shelter self-recovery processes have on household-level outcomes following humanitarian crises?

The research team identified six main potential impacts of shelter self-recovery interventions at household level:

- dignity and self-reliance
- perception of safety and security
- income or livelihoods
- assets or debts
- physical and mental health
- knowledge about safer construction.

The majority of studies included in the synthesis note positive effects on 1) dignity and self-reliance, which increased as a result of households living in their own homes and taking ownership of the construction process and 2) perceptions of safety and security, which increased as a result of reduced overcrowding; integration or reintegration into host communities; household awareness of the material and construction quality of their homes; and the incorporation of safer construction techniques.

The evidence on the positive effects on household incomes, livelihoods, assets, debts, physical health, mental health and knowledge of safer construction techniques is either inconsistent or unclear.

What factors helped or hindered the implementation of interventions supporting populations' own shelter self-recovery processes following humanitarian crises?

The research team identified 16 factors that either helped or hindered the implementation of interventions supporting shelter self-recovery:

- at household level
 - the ability of households and communities to contribute skills, labour, materials or finance
- at programme level
 - undertaking adequate assessments and regular monitoring
 - developing a clear and simple plan
 - designing a programme that meets the changing needs of households in different contexts
 - developing clear and simple beneficiary selection criteria and transparent selection processes
 - supporting coordinated community involvement and adequate two-way communication
 - delivering adequate financial, technical and/or material assistance

Definitions

'Supporting shelter self-recovery' has become a frequently used term in humanitarian practice. We use it to refer to material, financial and/or technical assistance provided during the relief and/or recovery phase to enable affected households to repair, build or rebuild their own shelters themselves – either alone or with the assistance of local industry.

Other types of shelter intervention, such as transitional shelter and rental support, were outside the scope of this study. See Section 2 of the full report for further information on definitions used.

- at contextual level
 - the level of certainty over government policies
 - the level of economic recovery and rate of inflation
 - the level of abuse of power for private gain (corruption)
 - the experience and capacity of the implementing agency and partners
 - the level of instability and security
 - the availability of skilled and unskilled labour
 - the availability of suitable land
 - the nature and strength of pre-existing relationships
 - the accessibility or remoteness of the household.

Five of the eleven studies eligible for inclusion in the synthesis identify that vulnerable households are at a greater disadvantage than non-vulnerable households when involved in shelter-self recovery programmes because the standard package of assistance may not meet their needs.

Examples of disadvantages for vulnerable households such as those comprising single elderly people, those with family members with disabilities, female-headed households and those on low incomes include:

- less access to skilled and unskilled labour
- greater vulnerability to inflation
- challenges managing funds.

Specific disadvantages reported for female-headed households include:

- access to tools based on prior ownership
- increased costs associated with paying for additional labour
- poor quality materials and construction
- training is not inclusive of women.

The evidence suggests that household capacity should be assessed (early on in the case of vulnerable households) and should inform programme design in order to avoid the shelter intervention placing an undue burden on the household; where programmes are unable to meet specific and changing household needs, the household has to make up the shortfall itself.

The majority of studies note that these programme factors helped implementation when they were completed adequately and hindered where not.

Each of these contextual factors is identified in around one third of the studies synthesized; however, as they are context-specific, it is not possible to extrapolate or infer generalized trends.

Methodology

Of the 4,613 English language documents initially identified through searching academic databases, humanitarian websites and stakeholder engagement activities, 11 studies were eligible for inclusion following screening and quality appraisal (see Sections 3 and 4 plus appendices of full report for details):

- the research team searched for documents published since 1990; the studies included in the evidence synthesis were all published between 2005 and 2015
- the synthesis includes primary research only – it does not include opinion pieces, commentaries, literature reviews, guidelines and marketing material
- eight of the included studies were identified as mixed methods (triangulation design); the other three were qualitative studies (qualitative descriptive)
- eight of the studies were evaluations, one was an 'impact assessment' and the other two were academic peer-reviewed journal articles
- the 11 interventions were located in: Asia (Indonesia, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka); the Middle East (Afghanistan, Lebanon); Central and South America (Belize, Colombia); and Europe (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
 - none of the studies eligible for inclusion detail interventions in Africa
 - only one intervention took place in a country classified as 'low income' (Afghanistan)
 - just three comment on adaptation to urban or peri-urban contexts
- the majority of interventions assisted between 5,000 and 50,000 households, with a range of between 70 and 600,000 households; overall, they met less than 10 percent of stated needs
 - two notable exceptions are the interventions in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where approximately 220,000 and 600,000 households were assisted respectively and where a significant proportion of shelter assistance needs were met
- interventions ranged in length from three months to more than 10 years; only two of the studies include the exact start and end date of the intervention (month and year)
- intervention costs varied from US\$80,000 to US\$21 million; however, the research team was not able to compare or analyse costs as 1) the value of materials, services and labour varies significantly between countries and 2) only three studies record the cost of the shelter self-recovery programme.

A number of documents were identified that would be suitable for inclusion in a broader 'lessons learned' or literature review focused more on the process of implementing humanitarian interventions supporting shelter self-recovery. This fell outside the scope of the current research but could be useful information for practitioners delivering programmes supporting shelter-self recovery.

Research gaps

Despite increasing demand for evidence, and a substantial volume of documentation, shelter and settlement interventions remain an under-researched aspect of humanitarian response (Peacock, Dash and Zhang, 2007; Twigg, 2002):

- at the end of April 2016, the Shelter Projects database contained 167 case studies and ALNAP's resource library contained 136 'shelter and housing' evaluation reports
- 'evidence' within the shelter sector remains largely based on experience and expert opinion, project or programme evaluations, case studies and academic papers on specific topics – with little evidence on the outcomes or impact of programmes undertaken
- future research should focus on both the effects of humanitarian interventions supporting shelter self-recovery and factors that help or hinder interventions to generate positive effects.

Further considerations

Implementing agencies and donors commissioning or producing evaluation reports are key contributors to knowledge about the effects of humanitarian shelter and settlement interventions. This creates a significant risk of bias but also an opportunity for collaboration to improve the quantity and quality of evidence available within the sector. Further consideration might be given to:

- investigating factors that help or hinder the process of commissioning and learning from humanitarian evaluation
- providing guidance and/or training on applying appropriate study designs, research methods, evaluation frameworks and indicators as well as basic minimum criteria and standards (such as including programme start and end dates, programme costs and methodologies).

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