

## SUPPORTING SELF-RECOVERY EXPLAINED

## UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF SUPPORTING SELF-RECOVERY



### Vision, Aims and Objectives

#### What is self-recovery?

People affected by a crisis are the first responders, initiating their recovery process immediately after the shock; they continue to work on improving their lives regardless of external support. Between 80 to 90 percent of people affected by disaster and displacement seek shelter and start to recover their homes with little to no external or formal assistance. They self-recover.

Shelter self-recovery is a survivor-led process of recovering adequate living conditions and re-establishing a sense of home.

Depending on the level of loss, needs arising from specific personal circumstances and individual capacities and resources available, people rebuild their homes and lives in very different ways, within different timeframes and consequently with very different results.

#### What is supporting shelter self-recovery?

Supporting shelter self-recovery is an approach to assisting people in their self-recovery processes: recovering adequate living conditions and re-establishing a sense of home. The approach takes seriously the Grand Bargain commitment on localisation, offers a bridge over the humanitarian/development nexus and takes a radical look at 'participation'.

Through accompaniment and facilitation of people's self-recovery processes and the provision of additional resources where needed, a self-recovery approach aims to complement, reinforce and accelerate crisis-affected people's efforts to repair and rebuild in ways that can strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerabilities to future crises.

A shelter self-recovery approach has the potential to benefit people at significant scale, maximising positive outcomes and sustainability.

Supporting shelter self-recovery requires a shift in mindset towards more holistic, integrated and people-led humanitarian programming.

#### How to support self-recovery?

The design and implementation of a programme that supports shelter self-recovery rests on **three building blocks**:

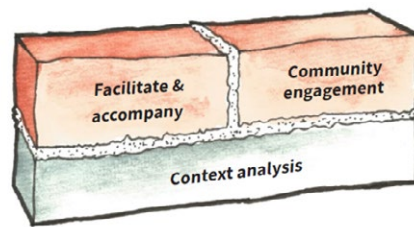
1. A broad and holistic context analysis. >>See page 8 and 9 for more.
2. Facilitation and accompaniment to remove barriers to resources, fill gaps in capacity and foster an enabling environment. There are many options of supporting modalities. >> See pages 10 and 11 for more.
3. A process of community mobilisation and engagement. >> See page 11 for more.

These building blocks are embedded in the 'mortar' of a flexible process of adaptive programming.

See Chapter 1  
Self-recovery  
explained from  
page 21

**Supporting  
self-recovery  
requires a shift  
in mindset  
from 'product'  
to 'process'**

See section 1.2  
Why support  
shelter self-  
recovery from  
page 23



See section 1.3  
How to support  
shelter self-  
recovery from  
page 23

The central principles that initially encouraged an exploration of self-recovery, and emerged from practice and field research, are not unique to a supporting self-recovery approach, but are valuable for all shelter programmes.

See Chapter 2  
from page 26

**People affected by crisis are leaders of their own recovery process.**

- Significance of people's capacities and resources
- Respect for choice and control
- Consideration of different needs and speeds
- Women and girls at the centre

**Humanitarian agencies can complement affected people's strengths and capacities.**

- Locally-led responses
- Complementing and accompanying existing efforts and plans
- Facilitating recovery processes
- Management of risk
- Support people to make informed choices

**Disaster response to leave societies improved, not just restored.**

- 'Better' should be considered in its most holistic sense. It does not just mean 'safer'
- 'Better' outcomes include improved access to water, sanitation, livelihoods, protection, health and DRR in all contexts

**For households with limited resources, it is probable that there will be building quality compromises and standards may be missed.**

- Recognise the primary role and responsibilities of the affected population
- We should strive to go from 'good enough' to 'as good as possible'
- Judgement will be needed to determine what will be 'good enough' in any given context

**Too many examples of reconstruction projects remain unoccupied** for socio-cultural reasons, because they were rebuilt in the wrong location, they did not include basic facilities, or for other reasons that were not anticipated.

- People are most likely to build houses that are appropriate and suited to their needs if they are the main drivers of their choices and decisions
- Additional support can be offered to people who do not have capacities to self-recover so that no one is left behind
- Consider sheltering as a multi-faceted and holistic discipline

**"Self-recovery  
is what we do  
anyway"**

**At the heart of  
supporting  
self-recovery  
is the  
recognition of  
the agency of  
people**



### ...and some challenges

#### Barriers to holistic humanitarian programming

Recovery is a holistic and multi-faceted process, and its definition will vary from household to household and between communities. Humanitarian assistance is organised in sectors (sometimes criticised for being silos and failing to integrate) and, as a result, it can be difficult to implement holistic programming that is integrated between sectors.

#### Restrictive mechanisms within the humanitarian system

Emergency response funding is often limited to one year, or less. However, shelter assistance needs to include a medium to long term perspective. Moreover, MEAL processes often focus on quantitative indicators. These may fail to capture people's actual self-recovery progress and success which would be better monitored and evaluated by qualitative indicators and outcomes.

#### Agency constraints and limitations

International agencies may lack experience in the housing sector and be concerned about legal liabilities. Perceptions of supporting shelter self-recovery may be considered too complex and risky. Accepting that some risk and liability must remain with the survivors and respective authorities and therefore creating partnership with local actors, will help overcome this concern as well as facilitating "localisation" and other Grand Bargain aspirations.

#### Marginalised and vulnerable groups cannot self-recover.

People with compound vulnerabilities may not be able to recover with only self-recovery support and may need additional shelter support.

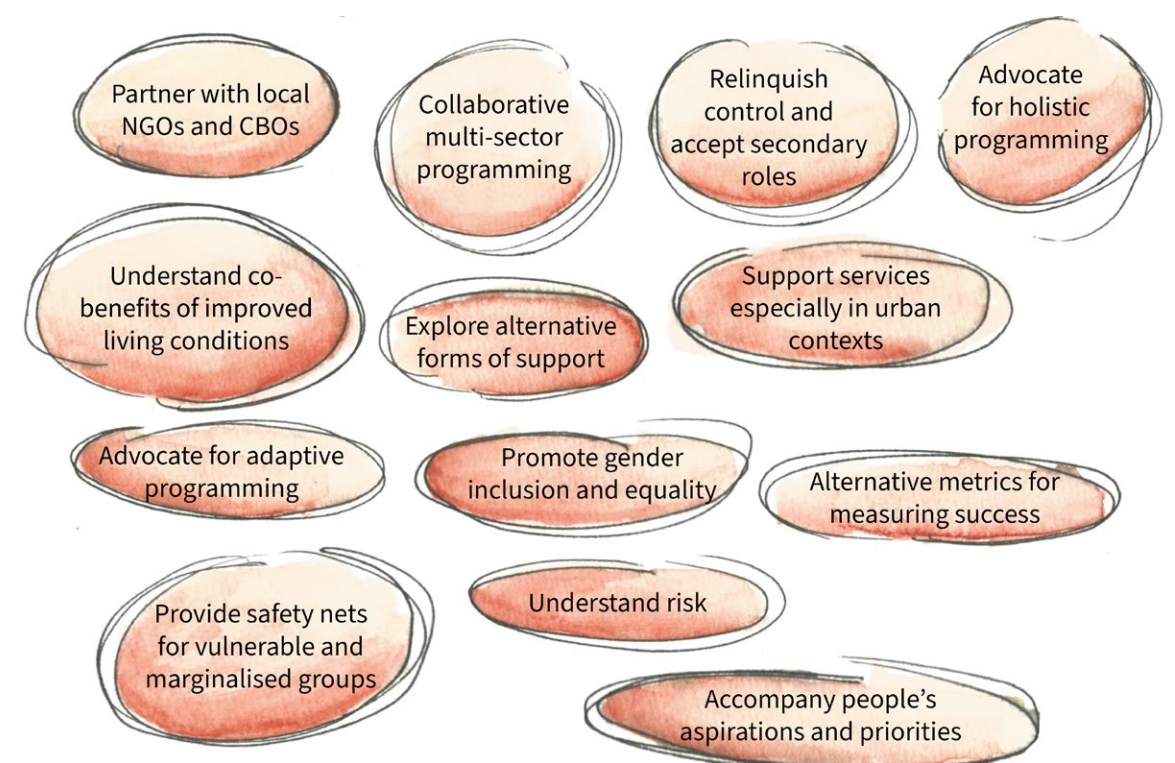
#### Urban contexts, relocation and displacement

Urban contexts are more complex than rural settings with more to be considered and more actors involved. Urban experts and planners may help to understand existing self-recovery, and to develop adequate strategies to support these local dynamics.

#### Refugees and displacement

Finding shelter will always be a priority for refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) and only a minority are provided with shelter by INGOs or government. Supporting self-recovery, aiming at helping both affected and host communities, may help those in informal settlements, abandoned buildings or even sleeping rough.

#### And some way to mitigate challenges ....



### Potential benefits of supporting shelter self-recovery...

#### Reaching scale and increasing cost effectiveness

Product-based approaches often fail to reach a significant percentage of the affected population. Supported by enabling strategies, self-recovery approaches will benefit a range of people and the broader community, reaching significant scale and value for money.

#### Allowing for flexibly timed support

Self-recovery begins within days of a disaster. But not everyone will start that process at the same time, and same speed. A self-recovery approach will respect priorities and allow for flexible timing of support.

#### Improving living conditions by informed choice

Informed decision-making can improve living conditions through better choices regarding: rebuilding locations; safer buildings; disaster risk reduction; healthier homes; improved security; reduced fire risk. Achieving a good understanding of local building practices and people's aspirations will be a critical part of this process.

#### Laying the foundations for an integrated recovery

Wider impacts, or multiplier effects, of adequate housing - including physical and mental health, livelihoods, protection, importance of home and home-making - are recognised as being essential to recovery. Supporting self-recovery lets people manage their recovery process according to their needs, priorities and plans.

#### Acting as a catalyst for psychosocial recovery, well-being and social cohesion

Supporting shelter self-recovery promotes people's mental health and psychosocial well-being. Ownership and engagement in the active process of home-making can give purpose and hope, allow a restoration of a sense of pride, self-worth and dignity, and reduce helplessness. Additionally, self-recovery relies on collective action that enhances social cohesion and sense of community and belonging.

#### Strengthening capacities, resilience and disaster risk reduction

Supporting shelter self-recovery is an opportunity to generate long-term capacities in adequate, durable and affordable housing that are locally-relevant, resulting in better prepared communities. It is closely linked to the discourse on the humanitarian-development nexus.

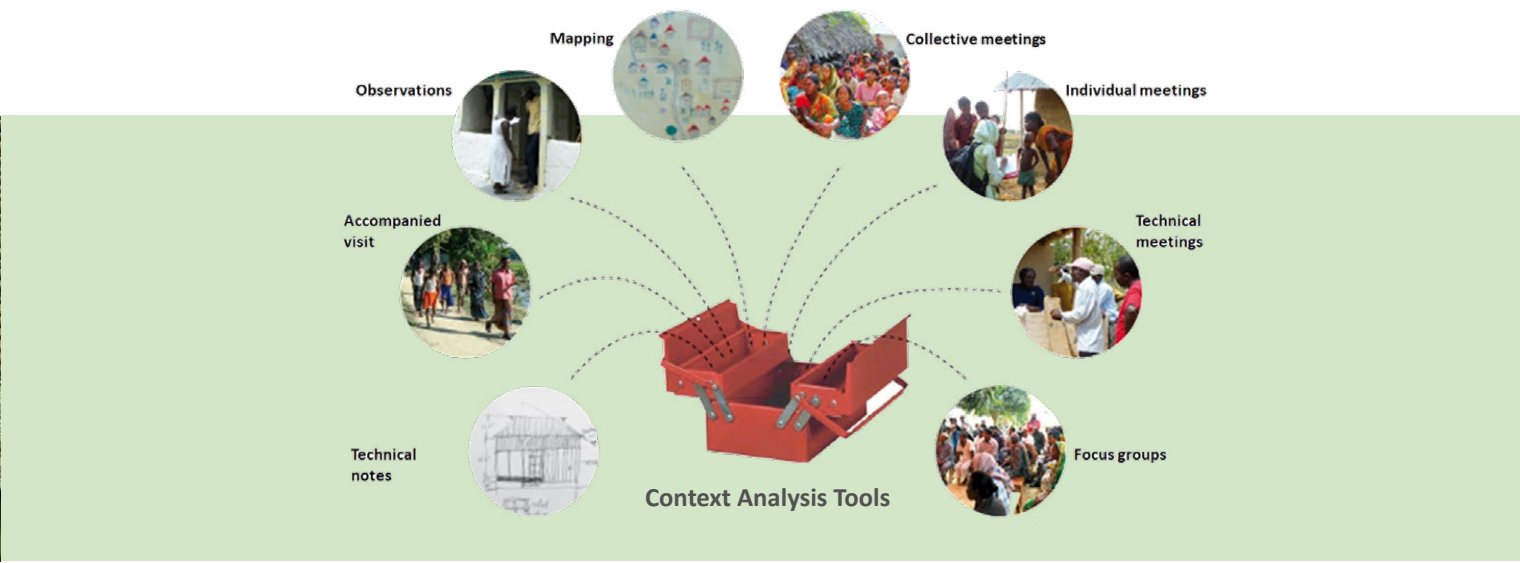
**A people-led  
approach  
to shelter  
recovery  
benefits  
affected  
populations  
through cost  
effectiveness,  
reaching scale,  
strengthening  
capacities,  
and reducing  
further risks.**

See section 3.2  
from page 48

See section 3.2  
and Part B of  
Pathways Home  
for further  
elaboration of  
ways to overcome  
the challenges of  
supporting  
self-recovery



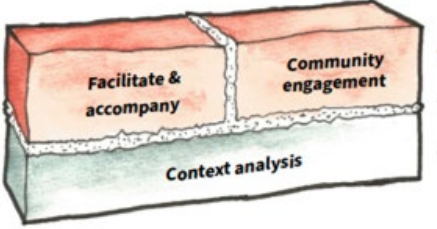
ANALYSING THE CONTEXT: A CONTINUOUS AND HOLISTIC PROCESS



How to do a context analysis

People affected by a crisis are the first responders, initiating their recovery process immediately. A good analysis of the context is the first building block of supporting shelter self-recovery. It will learn from the past and understand what is currently being done and people's plans for the immediate future; why are some choices made and not others. This is much more than a needs assessment that counts damaged houses. It analyses how to support a community as a whole to self-recover. It will also help to be a baseline for future MEAL activities.

>> See [«Guide for the contextual analysis of local habitat: Simplified version suitable for urban settlements and rural areas»](#)



Initial orientation

Immediately after the crisis, gain a background understanding of the context and first orientation about the scale, main barriers to and gaps for self-recovery. Explore possible funding options and understand whether a supporting self-recovery approach is feasible.

Rapid context analysis

As soon as possible, validate initial assumptions and explore how best to address them to inform fundraising proposals. This can be done through discussions, interviews, transect walks, knowledge attitude and practice surveys.

Detailed context analysis

Once funding is secured, through working with the affected population, fill in the details of the programme strategy and confirm activities.

Specific assessments

At the different steps of the programme, as needed, conduct assessments on a particular topic of interest in order to provide necessary evidence to inform programming. For example, a market assessment or a study of HLP issues.

Iterative Analysis and Monitoring and Evaluation

Continuously throughout the programme, through regular assessment, establish how people's priorities are changing over time and ensure that the programme adapts to new circumstances, priorities and plans.

Impact evaluation

After the project is complete, and if possible some years later, assess the impact of the project using innovative and community-led evaluation methods.

>> See [pages 11](#) for more.

See Chapter 5 from Page 59 for more on the elements of iterative context

A thorough understanding of the context is a prerequisite for self-recovery support to be meaningful and effective.

See 5.2 CONTEXT ANALYSIS: IN PRACTICE from Page 63

ACCOMPANYING SELF-RECOVERY SUPPORT OPTIONS AND MODALITIES

Facilitation and accompaniment: support options

'Doing more with less' need not be restricted to a single support option. A three-pronged approach of cash, materials and technical assistance can be successful in many contexts. Other forms of accompaniment that may target community and local government levels are equally important and may take the form of advocacy, training, legal support, infrastructure works and more.

See Chapter 6 from Page 81

How to address barriers

The role that humanitarian organisations can play in advocating for and promoting an **enabling environment for self-recovery** should not be underestimated. Whether it is advocacy for changes in policy at national level, liaison between local institutions and communities, facilitation of community mobilisation or providing legal support to households, organisations can be key influencers in removing institutional barriers.

- Institutional barriers include complex and restrictive legislation, policies or guidelines. Legal support can solve land ownership and mediate disputes.
- Access to finance is a clear barrier. Cash programming, market interventions, microfinance and other options can lift this barrier.
- Reestablishing access to services and functioning infrastructure can speed recovery and mitigate risks.
- **Leave no one behind.** Ensure that all marginalised and minority groups are included and build on existing community networks and methods of social cohesion.
- Women, young girls and small children spend a disproportionate amount of time in the home. A **gendered approach** is essential for all good shelter programming.

A shift of mindset from providing goods to enabling communities

How to fill gaps in capacity

- **Awareness raising and advocacy.** Information, Education, Communication (IEC) is one way to raise awareness through a variety of media: posters, leaflets, banners, radio and television slots, drama and many more.
- **Training** and two-way exchange of knowledge. There is much to learn from vernacular domestic architecture and indigenous construction practice. Local training centres, local trainers, 'training of trainers', or 'cascade training' should all be considered.
- Accompaniment through technical experts and roving teams. **'Roving team'**, typically a small mixed-gender team from the neighbourhood itself, will regularly visit each household to ensure understanding of necessary compliance and key messages.
- **Model houses.** Building model or demonstration houses is an efficient support option in several ways. It bridges awareness raising, training and direct support as well as technical assistance.

How to facilitate access to resources

Access to resources - and these can be materials, labour, finance or knowledge - is essential for successful self-recovery.

**In-kind provision of materials**

In contexts where physical access to markets is difficult, direct in-kind provision of materials or tools may be appropriate. Expensive or hard to access materials, such as corrugated roof sheets, fixings or hurricane straps, will encourage safer construction.

**Access to markets**

Facilitating transport links and access to markets can support self-recovery. Bulk buying of some materials - sand, gravel, timber etc - can bring down costs.

Do more with less

What are we searching for?

Before and during programmes aiming to support self-recovery, many aspects of the context need to be understood. These include:

**Understanding existing self-recovery**

A critical aspect is to focus on people's strengths and capacities first, while also analysing the barriers to their recovery. It is important to understand the dynamics of what people are doing, and plan to do, as they cope with immediate and long-term needs and priorities.

**Economic factors**

Understanding economic dynamics at different scales will help identify bottlenecks, gaps and priorities in accessing markets, labour and financial resources for self-recovery, and how these can be addressed through good programming.

**Political, legal and institutional factors**

Political and legal factors have a significant influence on shelter self-recovery and often present systemic barriers that can be difficult to overcome. And for advocacy strategies, it is important to understand the layers of political and institutional complexity, the power structures, and related interdependence.

**Socio-cultural and knowledge factors**

Social structures and cultural factors have a significant influence on people's behaviour and the choices open to them. Understanding people's knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) towards housing, their strengths, weaknesses and ambitions, is critical to determine how best to support.

**Hazards and the physical environment**

Alterations to the physical landscape, hazard risk and access to resources can influence resilience and ability to recover.

**Local building practices**

People construct their homes according to their needs, interests, preferences, ability, and environments, often making use of easily available local materials. Observing local building cultures, traditional house design, materials, labour for construction and maintenance and any preparedness undertaken as a hazard is approaching, will inform shelter self-recovery programming.

**Partners and other stakeholders**

Mapping stakeholders, their interests and influences at different levels, can help identify potential support and where communications and advocacy efforts can best be targeted.

**Communication channels**

Which are the best engagement pathways to establish collaboration? There may be varied methods of engagement and to ensure reaching the most important groups, it is important to know the preferred communication methods and channels that are used and trusted.

**Access to finance and cash programming**

Direct provision of cash (cash transfer programming) or vouchers are straightforward ways of providing financial support. Note that these are often modest sums, less than the cost of rebuilding, but they help to 'leverage' other available resources, for example savings, loans or remittances from the diaspora. Rental support can be very appropriate especially in the case of displacement to urban contexts.

**Access to grants, loans, subsidies and microfinance**

Further support to access grants, fair loans, subsidies and micro-finance is also valuable. Village savings and loans associations (VSLA) is an established mechanism for accessing finance in a fair and equitable manner.

See case study 6.18 on page 101

The community leads

Support for shelter self-recovery focuses on supportive engagement and emphasises a shift in perspective from externally led implementation of projects to accompaniment and facilitation of community-led responses.

**Community-led context analysis and assessment**

The community is best placed to lead on assessing strengths and vulnerabilities and the likely success of different approaches. Some assessments, such as building damage and safety, may need specialist expertise.

**Community-led programming**

Community-led programming provides opportunities for affected people to engage, learn and retain ownership and responsibility. It can strengthen social cohesion and resilience. It leaves a legacy of skills and knowledge. There will be a need to plan for sufficient time and human resource. Training, advice and technical accompaniment will be needed.

**Leaving no one behind and targeting support**

A self-recovery approach should aim to support the majority, if not all, of the population. However strengths, needs, priorities and choices will vary and consequently support should be tailored accordingly. Awareness training could be for whole community; construction training for carpenters and masons. Families and groups that do not have the capacity to self-recover will need extra support.

**Community-led implementation**

The role of external organisations is to facilitate and support families and communities along their own recovery pathways. A 'community action plan' will identify priorities and needs and define the most appropriate external support. Recovery will proceed at the community's pace and will flex and alter as time goes by. Assisting organisations need to be able to adapt accordingly.

**Learning together - what does success look like?**

Conventional MEAL (monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning) processes - beyond the need for donor reporting - have limited value in a approach that supports self-recovery. Evaluation and monitoring needs to be community-led and continuous, constantly allowing for iterative improvements. There are innovative tools that facilitate learning and participation such as Community Score Cards, Outcome Mapping, Most significant Change and Participatory learning.

Recognising and building upon the collective and individual strengths, actions and plans of crisis-affected populations is fundamental to the process

See Chapter 7 from Page 112

Iterative process

A supporting shelter self-recovery programme requires a different approach to needs assessments than a conventional shelter programme. The intent is to inform programme activities through iterative and continuous context analysis, which builds on the strengths and capacities of affected people and takes into account their plans and priorities in order to identify gaps and barriers to recovery.

Through this holistic process, agencies will be well equipped to adapt to changes in the environment or to people's circumstances, and responses will be more relevant and effective as a result. A shift in mindset, the ability to capture both quantitative and qualitative data and the use of iterative monitoring processes underpin a successful context analysis process.

