



Disaster Rebuilding: Environmentally Responsible Design Principles



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When planning, designing, and implementing disaster recovery and reconstruction programs, it is important for agencies to consider the environment to build back safer.

Design principles include:

“Do No Harm” to the environment and communities

The “do no harm” principle aims to get humanitarian practitioners to examine their programs to ensure that no unintentional negative impacts occur because of an intervention. This principle means that all programs should be examined for unintentional negative impacts on the environment or communities.

Multiple benefits of addressing the environment

With the demands placed on staff responding to disasters environmental issues may seem like a lower priority, but considering environmental issues has multiple benefits. These can include:

- Recognizing and addressing the underlying environmental issues that may have contributed to causing the disaster risk in the first place.
- Improving the affected population’s health, safety, and well-being through reduction of air and water pollution (management of debris, liquid and solid wastes).
- Protecting and managing natural assets that support fisheries, tourism, shelter, and water-related needs and employment opportunities.
- Protect people and the natural resources upon which they depend, from future risk.

Environmental issues cannot always be subcontracted — they require action on everyone’s part

Humanitarians must recognize that environmental issues are integral to solutions to mitigate the effect of future risk. This is not an area that can be considered

outside the remit of, for example, a water engineer or a health worker. Everyone must take a part in understanding how a program may affect the environment and ensuring that programs build back safer and do no harm.

Build back safer and greener

The post-disaster situation allows humanitarian actors and communities an opportunity to undertake projects that have an integrated environmental component to build back safer. This may be, for example, rebuilding with clean energy systems, or reducing development in flood-prone areas.

Be solution-oriented

Examples of reconstruction and development degrading the environment are easy to find, but it is important that we look to solutions to ensure that this trend is changed. Cities and urban areas around the world are becoming leaders in innovative approaches to stormwater management, green building, and resilient infrastructure. A learning approach to rebuilding can support a more durable and resilient future for the communities recovering from disaster.

Emphasize the use of local knowledge and problem solving

Community leadership and active participation in program design and development is essential. This is to ensure that we are meeting the real needs of communities and individuals, and not those perceived by us, as well as to ensure that local capacity is utilized fully. Particularly in urban areas, community groups may be diverse and include homeowners, renters, business owners, and civic organizations.



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