

There is now little money for reconstruction. As the 130,000 transitional shelters built by aid agencies deteriorate (they have a design life of three to five years) they will be up-graded and repaired and made to last longer, or dismantled and new houses built in their place. The housing of Port au Prince will be rebuilt by Haitians, the money will come from remittances and from loans, and the “mason-bosses” will do the construction.

A walk around areas where new construction is under-way shows examples of honey-combed concrete, exposed steel reinforcing, weak concrete blocks and poor workmanship. There is government policy and there are guidelines but in many cases they will not be enforced.

This was entirely predictable. The 2010 WB guidelines *“Safer Homes, Stronger Communities”* says: *“[if training is not provided] ... reconstructed housing will be no less vulnerable to future disasters than what was there before”*. Similarly, the 1982 UNDRO publication *“Shelter after Disaster”* has as its first principle: *“The primary resource ... is the grass-roots motivation of survivors”* (page no?). If experience is anything to go by, it will also be true in the next major disaster that destroys houses on a vast scale.

As a sector, we are currently ill-equipped to engage in the inevitability that the majority of post-disaster reconstruction is undertaken by the people themselves using their own resources. The aspiration to “build back better” has a hollow ring for local builders. The sector, and the donor community, is geared to a product response (the t-shelter), and has neither the resources nor the personnel with engineering and construction experience to tackle this fundamental challenge: how to engender a culture of safe (or safer) domestic construction.

The implication is clear enough: while not disregarding the need to have a broad variety of options including transitional or temporary shelters, we need to be better prepared to support informal rebuilding. The Building Safety workshop held on 5 July 2012 supported this argument and acknowledged the lack of useful resources.

The findings of the workshop:

What is missing?

1. There has to be a change of mindset amongst donors primarily, but also implementing agencies, that investment in improving building standards and practice will support reconstruction as well as help save lives in future disasters. The case has to be made and disseminated that post-disaster reconstruction is both a humanitarian and developmental task. It goes without saying that work done prior to a disaster is repaid ten-fold.
2. Although there are lots of publications on construction (of varying quality) they are not easily accessible. There is also a lack of basic principles of building construction that is pitched at the right level for our purposes. At the workshop we discussed the need for a one-stop, go-to website/publication

that would provide information and simple means to navigate towards already existing best-practice material.

3. Resources on how to communicate principles and techniques of best practice are almost entirely lacking. Some notable exceptions show how simple messages can be communicated in different languages and cultures. There are now many new communication technologies that can be explored and many existing methods have become simpler, cheaper and more accessible.

The response to the July workshop was very positive and the presence of so many agencies shows that there is a growing awareness of a need to shift focus in post-disaster shelter response.

A few comments from the workshop report:

Commitments

- .The group is supportive of going forward with the project. Several expressed their interest to be actively involved in further working groups
- .Practical Action Publishing is committed to releasing a second edition of the books.

Funding. The need for funding was highlighted. The group also agreed that a more united front is beneficial for fundraising and it would be useful to set up a structure that would attract funding. *(NB since writing the report there has been no further progress on funding; the hoped-for funding from Oxford Brookes, that would have helped to maintain the momentum, was not forthcoming)*

Actions:

Develop a concept note with expression of interest, possible areas of support: research, case studies and proposals.

Write a two-page summary of the main themes that can be circulated to RICS, RedR, Architecture for Humanity, Article 25, IFRC and other shelter stakeholders to gather support and momentum of this project.