

Only Resilient Recovery Can Provide Long-Term Protection from Climate Shocks and Stresses

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For many communities around the world, climate-induced disasters are now an inevitable part of life – with devastating impacts on lives and livelihoods, assets and infrastructure, ecosystem and water resources. When recovering from such events, it is senseless to rebuild structures – both physical and social – that are incapable of resisting the hazards that will inevitably follow.

Why resilient recovery is needed

The recovery stage of the disaster risk management cycle is essential for not only restoring stability after a disaster but also achieving sustainable development goals in the long term – however, it is all too often overlooked. Crucial decisions are made in the tumultuous post-disaster period, rather than being agreed in advance, and opportunities to build back better go unseized.

The aftermath of the 2015 Gorkha earthquake was a signal, not just to Nepal but to the entire world, that more needs to be done to pre-plan disaster recovery efforts.

Recovery planning pays off

Lessons have been learned, and progress is being made – some of which has been evident in the country's ongoing response to the 3 November earthquake in Nepal's Jajarkot region. Swifter and greater engagement have been observed at all levels of government, with all seven provincial governments involved in the response.

Legislation passed since the Gorkha earthquake, including the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2017, has facilitated recovery planning, including the unprecedented mobilizing of internal resources.

However, looking at the global picture – including increasingly frequent and intense climate-induced hazards – it is clear that significant gaps remain. Now more than ever, governments of at-risk countries must get robust, properly funded plans and strategies in place before the next disaster arrives.

What makes recovery resilient?

The Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance, of which Practical Action is a member, has analyzed several major flood events over the last decade, and their impact on communities.

A new report consolidates the key learnings from these events, and identifies ways in which communities can ensure ‘build back better’ goes from buzzword to reality:

Firstly, recovery efforts must be risk-informed, with comprehensive management strategies put in place that acknowledge concurrent threats. This includes translating climate projections and real-time scientific data into forward-looking recovery efforts so that communities have the knowledge and tools needed to face present and evolving climate hazards.

They must also be multi-dimensional, encompassing social, human, natural, financial, and physical factors that collectively enhance resilience to climate threats. Recognizing the interconnectedness of these factors is essential for a truly effective resilient recovery.

Finally, they must take an inclusive approach that addresses the needs of all women, men, and children affected, particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable, and empowers them to actively participate in locally-led recovery decision-making.

Three recommendations for resilient recovery

Resilient recovery can be transformational, but these gains will not happen without commitment and concerted efforts from national governments, strongly supported by the international community. To achieve this, we have three key recommendations:

At the national level, the importance of pre-planning cannot be overstated. Roles and responsibilities for all national and regional actors must be clarified in advance, with pre-planned finance available to access swiftly. Governments must also establish a framework for resilient recovery, containing legal provisions, policies, and plans that encompass all levels of decision-making. Specific considerations must be made for the local level, in particular, to ensure recovery efforts are context-specific and locally led.

Bilateral donors, humanitarian and development organizations, international financial institutions, and the private sector all have their part to play – primarily by improving both the quality and quantity of climate finance. Commitments to this end must be made at the upcoming COP28 summit in Dubai.

An increase in the use of grants and other finance mechanisms designed to limit growing debt levels will ensure that recovery efforts are not hindered by avoidable debt crises. Furthermore, supporting countries with technical assistance and improved data can deliver recovery plans designed to be as future-proof as possible.

Resilient recovery must be prioritized

In the era of Loss and Damage, resilient recovery must become a top priority to protect all communities vulnerable to climate risks. Only by taking a comprehensive, people-centered approach – one that represents all voices and goes far beyond merely rebuilding physical infrastructure – can the long-term recovery needs of women, men, and children be met.