



Cash in a housing context: Transitional shelter and recovery in Japan



Joanna Faure Walker^a, Catherine Anna Crawford^{b,*},¹

^a UCL Institute for Risk and Disaster Reduction, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, United Kingdom

^b Centre for Urban Sustainability and Resilience, Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering, University College London, Chadwick Building, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Japan
Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami
Transitional shelter
Mass customised housing

ABSTRACT

This paper presents city dwellers and local authorities with questions that international humanitarian organisations (IHOs) may not ask after massive housing destruction. We examine Japan's transitional shelter strategy following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami (GEJET) against these questions: who decides when and where to build housing; what is built, how and by whom; who finances, owns or rents; and how might such conditions affect disaster response?

The analysis puts strategy in context by combining data on housing, subsidies and insurance, rather than presenting shelter delivery in isolation. In Japan, systemic housing-related vulnerabilities preceded the GEJET; shelter was a time-limited accommodation service; and cash hand-outs were not a cultural norm, not intended to be sufficient and never equivalent to the cost of temporary housing units.

We argue that such analysis is needed to challenge IHO thinking and uncover specific historical, regulatory and personal housing trajectories following a disaster.

1. Introduction

The controversial role of international humanitarian organisations (IHOs) in meeting post-disaster shelter needs has been described as “intractable” [33]. We argue this diagnosis stems from, and is reinforced by, the framing of IHO decision-making dilemmas. This framing forces a focus on unit costs, delivery speed and family shelters. These indicators are then compared between IHOs or between countries without an examination of prior housing processes and the systemic context that give them meaning.

We argue that these indicators do not allow scrutiny of decisions or nuance in understanding vulnerability and relegate accountability to post-hoc checklists against which aid beneficiaries might hold IHOs to account on procedural or technical grounds. We argue that a fair challenge to the strategic prescriptions of IHOs by local authorities and city-dwellers, requires that decisions be framed by an analysis of prior housing processes. We propose a series of questions that might underpin such an analysis: who decides when and where to build housing; what is built, how and by whom; who finances, owns or rents; and how might all this be relevant to disaster response?

We apply these questions to analysis of the government of Japan's transitional shelter strategy following the Great East Japan Earthquake

and Tsunami (GEJET). These questions allow the strategy and data to be placed in the context of ‘normal’ housing and ‘normal’ temporary housing processes in Japan.

The GEJET destroyed or damaged 620,802 homes and 561 square kilometres of land along the Tohoku² coastline [11,21]. It caused direct economic losses of USD 210bn and - as of 2012 - 19,000 fatalities [57,76]. However, it is easy for an IHO audience to dismiss this case as irrelevant on the basis of unit costs or delivery speeds of temporary houses. The relevance of the case study is that it places the GoJ strategy in context which, we argue, should be an approach in any setting and, particularly, where there has been massive destruction of housing in urbanising areas. The paper sets out to give meaning to the relief effort by examining prior housing processes, the intention of transitional shelter (an in-kind, time limited service), other household support and other recovery activities. The GEJET case study is possible because data on housing conditions and attitudes before and after the disaster have been documented. This allows household shelter choices to be examined in light of both what was normally expected of government and what was publicly assumed to be possible. It is valid to suggest that the regulatory power, institutional knowledge and data available in Japan may not be available in the same format (in English, online) in other contexts. This knowledge is often held in different parts of government,

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: j.faure-walker@ucl.ac.uk (J. Faure Walker), c.a.crawford.96@cantab.net (C. Anna Crawford).

¹ Present address: Clayton Mackenzie, London.

² Refers to region of six prefectures (ken): Akita, Aomori, Fukushima, Iwate, Miyagi and Yamagata.

amongst construction professionals and by municipal leaders. This certainly makes it harder – certainly for IHOs working in isolation – to answer the questions posed in the paper but it does not mean they should not be posed.

We focus on three prefectures where 102,345 homes were completely destroyed: Iwate (20,998), Miyagi (65,462) and Fukushima (15,885). We draw on a variety of publicly available data and literature (limited to resources available in English) from before and after the GEJET, key informant interviews during the May 2013 EEFIT mission and early findings from a November 2014 Sasakawa Foundation-funded research trip. In order to evaluate the real economic costs of transitional shelter relative to housing and other aspects of recovery, the GoJ's transitional shelter strategy is placed in the context of Japan's housing policies, housing industry, previous experience of disasters and the role of the state in disaster recovery. We also look at differences between what was expected and planned by government and accepted and chosen by households during the response.

The government originally planned support for 116,000 affected households: 52,000 (46%) temporary housing units and rental subsidies for what was expected to be up to 63,000 (54%) publicly owned housing units. Our analysis shows that, as the response unfolded, 136,000 households received support: 52,000 (38%) moved into temporary housing, only 18,000 (13%) into public rented housing but the majority, 66,000 (48%) households, opted to use the subsidy to rent private accommodation. These proportions varied significantly between prefectures and we argue that this was a result of specific, local housing processes.

The government subsidised rental accommodation using conditional cash transfers. Our analysis shows that cash subsidies must also be seen in the context of prior norms, other public and private spending and with an understanding of shelter-related vulnerability. These data are rarely combined in the analysis of post-disaster shelter projects. In this instance, conditional cash transfers were not set by making them equivalent to the amount spent on temporary housing units. This was to avoid rent inflation, overspend and inequitable outcomes for different households in different places.

The paper closes with the key points of analysis aimed at those who wish to challenge shelter plans put forward by IHOs. We argue that the questions put forward underpin a better understanding of post-disaster shelter decisions than conventional evaluations focused only on shelter delivery. In cities at risk of a massive destruction of housing, these questions will support local authorities, universities and technical professional bodies in their encounters with IHOs and in articulating the housing processes that were “in train before, and continue after, humanitarian history begins at the moment of disaster” [66]. We conclude that only by exposing the specific historical, regulatory and local housing processes that unfold after a disaster, can deliberation around an event be properly interrogated and decision-makers held to account.

A note on terminology: The term transitional shelter is used to describe the overall policy approach in Japan because this is the terminology adopted by the Government of Japan in sharing lessons learned from the GEJET [87]. The temporary, collective shelters where people initially sought refuge are called evacuation centres³ and pre-fabricated housing units are called temporary housing or temporary houses.

2. Context-free dilemmas: the international framing in the debate on shelter and housing after disasters

2.1. IHO dilemmas

To make a case for our questions, it is important to understand how

³ Evacuation structures and evacuation centres are not covered here. Chapter 10 and Section 11.1.5 of the 2011 EEFIT Report deal with this issue as do other recent articles [21,75]013).

IHOs frame the problems they face in responding to a shelter crisis. We characterize this framing as a set of dilemmas over material ‘stuff’ [53]. By using the term ‘stuff’, after Miller, we want to provoke a shift away from the notion of shelter as a man-made object and towards the idea that the stuff of homes is not just made by people but also shapes us. The repeated representation of shelter as a generic shed-shaped object means that what is discussed, designed and delivered remains nothing more imaginative than a glorified (and imported) garden shed. This is not a playful point: if cities are the setting of future disasters, shelter as ‘just a bunch of stuff’ – when its full importance is not acknowledged – is a completely mismatched and inadequate conception vis-a-vis homes and how they shape us.

The dilemmas are framed: what stuff, how is stuff delivered, who should deliver stuff, what is the appropriate value of the stuff? The dilemmas are illustrated in Fig. 1 to exaggerate the problem of a visual framing of shelter [69] – as symbol, icon and focus – since this serves to reinforce IHO decisions that are:

- Context free, in that the dilemmas apply regardless of where the humanitarian system deploys
- Focused on the shed-shaped shelter object as something independent of people, place and history
- Can be adjusted only in terms of unit cost, number, size and timing
- Measurable only by whether these parameters are harmonised across organisations or comparable from one disaster to the next

The effects of this framing are that:

- The dilemmas that are identified and best documented are technical (design) and organisational (coordination). For example, providing shelter after disasters is described as: “one of the most intractable problems in international humanitarian response” because “arguments between experts over design, quality and cost can slow the process, and weak coordination in the sector often leads to a wide variance in what is provided” [33]
- The unit cost of the shelter product comes to be regarded as a logical indicator for monitoring and evaluating the performance and equivalence of IHOs and as an informative indicator, even when it is reported in isolation [2–5]. This feeds back to reinforce a focus on the technical dilemma: designing a household aid bundle – often a pre-fabricated shelter kit – within this unit cost constraint [15].
- Any outstanding ‘intractability’ is framed either as a bureaucratic dilemma common across sectors, whereby money for an emergency is governed separately from money for longer term recovery and reconstruction, or as a humanitarian dilemma, specific to shelter response, whereby the minimum bundle of shelter that might ‘save lives and alleviate suffering’ may amount to a high value per household [86] or may be hard to target to the most vulnerable ([77], p. 18).

We contend that this masks underlying questions about context: what might be valuable to whom, when and why.

2.1.1. Cash: theoretically resolving technical and organisational dilemmas

In a number of settings, IHOs have used working groups to resolve technical and organisational dilemmas by making collective decisions on what should be provided and how it should be delivered in the immediate aftermath of a disaster [29]. IHOs are also exploring cash transfers in humanitarian settings. In theory, cash might resolve the technical dilemma by forestalling arguments about design since cash is fungible – meaning that it can easily be exchanged by a household for designs, goods or services of their own choosing – rather than limited to a shelter product. It might also resolve the organisational dilemma because it is easy to achieve and report parity between IHOs by fixing the cash amount. The evidence on the merits of cash versus other forms of aid delivery in the shelter sector is limited [86] but the IHO discourse

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5116030>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5116030>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)