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## The Role of Humanitarian Agencies in Reconstruction and Development of Disaster Affected Communities in Japan and the Philippines

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### Abstract

Post-disaster reconstruction is a complex process engaging various stakeholders who typically respond to the policies and implementation strategies developed by governments and coordination bodies governing affected countries. Among the stakeholders, humanitarian organizations have actively participated in the process of community support and reconstruction, and their role has been widely recognized since they focused their efforts in different events over the last two decades. This study is focused on projects carried out by humanitarian agencies in the aftermath of major disasters in Japan and the Philippines. The aim of this research is to analyse the approaches for recovery and reconstruction adopted in each country and to compare the advantages and constraints for the development and implementation of agency-driven projects.

This study found that the government controlled reconstruction efforts in Japan limited the agencies' involvement in the recovery phase, especially in early stages of housing repair and reconstruction. This led to some agencies circumventing the Japanese Government's precarious coordination mechanisms to simplify their independently implemented projects. By contrast the Philippines Government promoted the active participation of agencies through close partnerships to coordinate and support community recovery. These differences in policy have directly impacted the implementation of humanitarian projects by local and international organizations. This paper demonstrates that the establishment of local contacts is crucial for the implementation of reconstruction projects. However NGOs projects are influenced by national post-disaster recovery systems limiting their independency. Additionally communities are often excluded from the process of recovery by the paternalistic approach of NGOs and governments which exacerbates the risk of dependency and restricts possibilities for community resilience and development.

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## 1. Introduction

Global trends reveal an increasing number of disastrous events whose intensity and impact is causing massive losses [1, 2], and challenge the normal development of affected communities. In the last decade over 700 thousand people have been killed, over 1.4 million have been injured and approximately 23 million have been displaced as a result of disasters [3]. In the aftermath of disasters the chaos resulting from the destruction of physical, economic, social and institutional frameworks challenges the capacities of governments to manage the complex processes of reconstruction and the relationships between multiple stakeholders [4]. This process requires extensive coordination between the locally based stakeholders working with the internationally based humanitarian agencies<sup>1</sup>.

This research observes the changes in the coordination mechanisms and the challenges faced by humanitarian agencies in the aftermath of major disasters in Japan and the Philippines. The aim is to identify the limitations of the two approaches and to see how the strengths might be highlighted in order to help frame more successful agency based programs into the future. This study will analyse the established procedures in these two countries to identify any advantages or limitations for the implementation of agency-driven projects. It also highlights the alternate procedures developed by organizations to actively participate in the recovery of the built-environment. The analysis of the case studies has been based on the information obtained through government reports as well as interviews with government and NGOs' officials during field visits to the disaster affected sites and temporary relocation sites in Japan between September 2011 and August 2014.

## 2. Roles of Humanitarian Agencies in the Aftermath of a Disaster

Humanitarian organizations have been seen as alternative actors for the democratization of community development and humanitarian aid since traditional government-to-government aid has been described as bureaucratic and elite-centred [5]. The involvement of different kinds of agencies and non-profit groups has been observed as a result of the rise of the civil society and private sector engagement as non-traditional actors in the context of post-disaster reconstruction – particularly in Asia [6]. The most evident benefits of the increasing participation of humanitarian agencies in the reconstruction context are the resources they contribute to the process of reconstruction. Agencies mobilizing their capacities and expertise to respond to disasters, are seen as efficient government partners for the collaboration in the implementation of reconstruction projects [7, 8, 9].

### 2.1. Non-profits challenges: Beyond the implementation of reconstruction projects

Despite the global efforts and the experience achieved by humanitarian organizations, shelter and housing sectors are seen by some as delivering the “least successful form of aid compared to other humanitarian intervention sectors” [10]. Behind the physical evidence of a successful project there are explicit and implicit challenges that agencies need to face in order to avoid criticism and controversies. Humanitarian organizations need to be aware that despite “good intentions” their intervention can also cause more harm than the disaster itself [11, 12]. There are diverse factors that challenge the appropriateness of humanitarian interventions in the context of post-disaster reconstruction. This paper identifies five issues for agencies working on the reconstruction of the built-environment.

- *1. Lack of communication and poor coordination*

In the aftermath of a disaster humanitarian agencies are willing to attend to the emerging needs, but each have their own agenda and approach to provide assistance to the affected communities. However only a coordinated and coherent assistance enables most efficient use of available resources and most appropriate delivery of aid [13, 14]. Although coordination may be seen as a constraint for each organization's autonomy, it can promote partnership and dialogue among stakeholders and reduce the risks that occur when groups miss opportunities to build upon each other's skills.

<sup>1</sup> In this paper humanitarian agencies refer to different types of non-profits, including UN agencies, international organizations such as International and National NGOs, volunteer groups, faith-based organizations, and other organizations from the private sector.

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