



The role of post-disaster public policy responses in housing recovery of tenants



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A B S T R A C T

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This paper examines the post-earthquake public policy responses for housing recovery of tenants in cities of Bhuj in India and Bam in Iran that were affected by earthquakes in 2001 and 2003 respectively. The analysis of these two public policy responses is followed by an investigation of their implications for housing recovery of tenant households. It is argued that both recovery programmes favoured homeowners in their policy provisions while engaging in a trial and error policy development for housing recovery of non-landowners. The implications of the policies were a lack of affordable rental units in these cities and late recovery and displacement of tenants. In particular public policy responses for housing recovery in these two cities failed to adequately address the housing needs of lower-income tenants.

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This paper examines the implications of post-disaster public policy responses for housing recovery of tenants in cities of Bhuj in India and Bam in Iran that were affected by earthquakes in 2001 and 2003 respectively. In this paper we argue that in the two cities these policies failed to address the housing needs of lower-income tenants. A tenant, in this paper, encompasses a wide range of residents, from those paying – formally or informally – prearranged rent, to those with non-commercial arrangements for occupation or sharing of all or part of a dwelling (UN-Habitat, 2003).

In major urban disasters – in particular earthquakes – low-cost rental housing constitutes a substantial portion of the affected housing stock. In Mexico City, Kobe (Japan), Düzce (Turkey), and Lorna Prieta (The United States) earthquakes, the damage was concentrated in low-rent areas with old and poorly maintained buildings (Arslan & Johnson, 2010; Comerio, 1997, 1998; Edgington, 2010; Hirayama, 2000). While housing recovery of tenants might be considered a simple process, since these families are often more mobile than homeowners, a pre-existing scarcity of housing and the competition for rental options after major urban disasters makes the housing recovery of these groups a very complex challenge (Gould, 2009).

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Rental housing constitutes a large component of the housing stock in many cities in developing countries (UN-Habitat, 2003). But, little is known about the methods and policies for addressing post-disaster housing recovery of tenants, especially in the context of the developing countries (UN/OCHA, 2010). Given rapid urbanization in these countries and the concomitant concentration of risk in their urban settlements, this issue requires more attention.

This paper seeks to address this gap in knowledge about post-disaster housing recovery of tenants in urban reconstructions in the developing countries. For this purpose, the paper first reviews the precursors to, and the present practices of tenants housing recovery in urban settlements during the ‘permanent housing’ phase after a disaster, as well as the existing knowledge about this issue. The paper then focuses on post-earthquake urban reconstruction programmes in Bhuj and Bam. The analysis of these two public policy responses is followed by an investigation of the impacts of these programs upon the housing recovery of tenants. With two caveats, housing recovery, in this paper is defined as achieving a housing condition equal or preferable to the ex-ante condition in terms of housing quality, tenure, location and affordability. The first caveat is that when tenants are provided with financial assistance, they might prioritise livelihood or other opportunities. In effect, housing recovery cannot be assessed without regard to the priorities of tenants. The second caveat, one illustrated below, is that a post-disaster location as close to livelihood opportunities as maintained prior to the disaster is an extremely demanding criterion. There should be some “give” in the application of this criterion.

Urban reconstruction experiences and housing recovery strategies

Housing recovery of tenants after disasters has received scant attention in the hazard literature (Peacock, Dash, & Zhang, 2006). The existing limited studies demonstrate that post-disaster housing aid is often more geared towards reconstruction of owner-occupier housing (e.g. Bolin & Stanford, 1998). The two main factors that affect the reconstruction of the damaged rental housing units are the design of the recovery programmes and the post-disaster housing market dynamics in the affected areas (Comerio, 1997, 1998). These two factors affect landlords' decisions regarding the reconstruction of the lost rental units.

Three major challenges in housing recovery of tenants are identified in the existing literature: the first one is the availability of affordable rental housing. Comerio (1998) argues that housing markets without some assistance from the public sector cannot provide alternative or replacement for lost affordable rental housing stock. The rebuilt rental units are often unaffordable (Comerio, 1997; Peacock, et al., 2006). Secondly, the restitution of rental properties is often lengthier than owner-occupied ones (Lankatilleke, 2010; Peacock, et al., 2006; Quarantelli, 1982; Zhang & Peacock, 2009), which implies a lengthier recovery process for tenants. Thirdly, tenants often cannot return to their pre-disaster neighbourhoods and have to live far from their livelihoods and social networks (Olshansky, 2006). This means that any successful strategy for housing recovery of tenants needs to address the issues of housing quality, tenure, location and affordability.

The majority of the existing studies on this topic take place in the developed economies. Case-studies of post-disaster urban reconstruction can provide some insights into policies and practices that address the housing recovery of tenants in cities of developing countries. A review of these case studies demonstrates that public sector's involvement in the housing recovery of tenants has changed over time. The recovery programme after the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City, for example, represented a large scale public sector intervention in the housing recovery of tenants. A massive supply of affordable housing for low-income tenants, supplemented with the provision of subsidized loans, enabled the pre-earthquake tenants to shift their housing tenure to ownership within their previous districts (Inam, 1999; Kreimer & Echeverria, 1990). In other instances, however, governments often failed to incorporate support for tenants' housing recovery. For example, in Izmit and Marmara (Turkey) after two major earthquakes in 1999, the government-led housing recovery programme was exclusively devised for homeowners and there was no provision for non-homeowner groups (Bibbee, Gonenc, Jacobs, Konvitz, & Price, 2000; Trohanis & Read, 2010). Local and international NGOs intervened to fill this gap in policy by providing land and housing for a limited number of these groups and converting the beneficiaries to

homeowners (Arslan & Johnson, 2010). A similar attitude towards tenants' housing recovery is observed in the reconstruction of Banda Aceh, Indonesia, following the 2004 tsunami. Pre-disaster tenants were initially excluded from most housing recovery projects (Steinberg, 2007). Later and as a result of advocacy by various NGOs, a new package of free land and housing grants were introduced for tenants and other non-homeowner groups (Blunt & Silas, 2010). As in Turkey, the intervention aimed at shifting the tenure status of beneficiaries to home and land ownership (Silva & Batchelor, 2010; Steinberg, 2007).

These examples of post-disaster reconstruction, the forthcoming case studies of Bam and Bhuj demonstrate that in recent post-disaster responses governments and the international aid community have shown little interest in, or understanding of, their role in supporting the housing recovery of tenants (OCHA, 2006; Peacock, et al., 2006). As is shown in Table 1, the main strategy adopted by governmental or non-governmental actors for housing recovery of tenants has been limited to changing their housing tenure to ownership. The focus of international institutions, most notably the World Bank (Jha, Barenstein, Phelps, Pittet, & Sena, 2010), has been on owner-driven reconstruction that involves staged payments to home-owners as reconstruction progresses, accompanied by technical assistance. This focus has been to the exclusion of addressing tenants' housing recovery, suggesting that these groups either can become homeowner or "are dependent on landlords to rebuild" (Jha et al., 2010:102).

A better understanding of the implications of housing recovery strategies for the stricken tenants can help to inform the responses of governments and international organizations to major disasters in urban settlements. For this purpose, the next two sections of this paper investigate in more detail the implications of housing recovery policy responses for tenants in Bhuj and Bam.

Research design and methods of data collection

This paper draws upon field research conducted from November 2010 to February 2011, and September 2012 in Bam and Tehran in Iran, as well as Bhuj, Ahmadabad, and Gandhinagar in Gujarat, India. Data collection methods comprised of archival review, in-depth interviews, observation, onsite mapping, and small-scale surveys. More than 95 semi-structured interviews with people – thirty five in Bam and sixty in Bhuj – and more than twenty interviews with key informants including policy-makers, the chief urban planners of the two cities, city officials, and real estate brokers have been conducted. In both cases, senior officials in the main institutions responsible for reconstruction, the Housing Foundation of Iran for case of Bam and Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority in case of Bhuj, were interviewed. Other key informants were selected based on their role in post-disaster reconstruction. As regards tenants, given that they moved from their former neighbourhoods

Table 1
Housing recovery programmes and strategies for housing recovery of tenants in different urban disasters in developing countries.

	Housing reconstruction programme	Policy for tenants' housing recovery
Mexico City 1985 earthquake	Government-led mass housing construction	Low-interest loans to tenants to buy the subsidized low-cost housing and shift their tenure to ownership
Turkey 1999 earthquake	Government-led mass housing construction for private homeowners	No provision for tenants
Bhuj 2001 earthquake	Limited owner-driven reconstruction	Initially assistance to landlords
Bam 2003 earthquake	Owner- or donor-driven housing reconstruction for owner-occupants	Later shifting their tenure to ownership
Banda Aceh 2004 tsunami	Owner- or donor-driven housing reconstruction for owner-occupants	Initially no provision for tenants
		Later shifting their tenure to ownership

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