The implementation of this project has clearly demonstrated the value of providing shelters rather than carrying out distributions of shelter materials without further inputs into the building phase.

Emergency Shelter: Together Helping Others

UN-HABITAT advocated for culturally and environmentally appropriate earthquake resistant transitional shelters made from materials that are portable and reusable for permanent structures. The timber used in the shelter was salvaged from destroyed houses. UN-HABITAT provided the polystyrene blocks, the roof materials and tools at an average cost of US$ 360 per shelter. This is the same price as a tent that has a much shorter lifespan. The shelter design has not only proven to be popular but durable in the harsh mountain conditions. The shelters have easily withstood the winter and severe monsoon rains and remain habitable for at least a few more years, if necessary. When no longer needed for human habitation, it can easily be converted into animal shelter or storage for fodder, crops or other commodities. The design can be easily adapted for use in similar geographical settings in post disaster or post conflict situations. Community committees assisted in the identification of beneficiaries, targeting the most vulnerable members of the community for the provision of shelters. House owners assisted by local carpenters and laborers built the shelters. The average floor dimensions of the shelter are 15ft in length and 11ft 6in in width, and takes 15 person days to construct.

Providing building assistance is not only important in providing durable shelters for people, but it has proven to be an effective way to disseminate information on earthquake resistant building techniques and to explain why damage in the earthquake affected area was severe. Any visual materials on earthquake resistant techniques should be immediately developed and distributed in conjunction with shelter assistance. The provision of qualified staff to address questions regarding damage and safer construction immediately post disaster cannot be underestimated.

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n the 8th of October 2005, an earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale devastated 30,000 sq kilometers of mountainous Northern Pakistan in two provinces, Pakistan Administered Kashmir and North West Frontier Province (NWFP). In its wake it left over 70,000 people dead, almost 70,000 people injured and 3.5 million homeless. In 4,000 villages it destroyed or seriously damaged 600,000 houses. This represents the destruction of 76% percent of the entire housing stock. In addition, local forms of livelihood were destroyed and services disrupted. The rapid response from the Government and the humanitarian community brought essential relief to affected families. The inaccessibility of some of worst hit areas and harsh winter conditions complicated the relief operation.

UN-HABITAT’s immediate response to the disaster was to build a total of 1,782 culturally and environmentally friendly shelters in Machiara in Kashmir, as well as Siran, Palas and Pattan Valleys in NWFP. The one-room, socially acceptable shelter was designed by UN-HABITAT in collaboration with WWF-Pakistan and the Emergency Architects and funded by UNR. It is constructed from locally available materials using local technology. All the materials can be reused for permanent reconstruction of housing.

Experience has shown that it is essential to mobilize affected people for recovery and reconstruction in order to ensure a seamless transition between relief to reconstruction.

Supporting Owner-driven Approach

UN-HABITAT currently provides the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) of the Government of Pakistan technical support in the housing sector and issues related to landless due to the earthquake with funds provided by CIDA, Sida and DFID.

ERRA has adopted an owner-driven approach for rebuilding housing. This is the first time that an owner-driven, pro-poor policy, ensuring equity has been uniformly applied across an entire disaster affected area. Individual families rebuild their housing assisted by Government financial assistance: 2,800 US$ for a destroyed and 1,250 US$ for a damaged house. The money is disbursed in installments according to compliance with earthquake resistant building standards. To ensure the success of such an approach, UN-HABITAT plays a lead role together with Pakistani and International civil society organizations in developing the skills and capacities of those involved in rebuilding to understand and apply earthquake resistant housing reconstruction policies, principles and techniques. The National Society for Earthquake Technology Nepal (NSET) has been instrumental in providing the necessary technical and on-site assistance to enable this to take place in Pakistan. National NGOs, Strengthening Partner Organizations, National Rural Support Programme-PRM and Rural Support Programmes Network have been providing training in social mobilization in support of rural housing reconstruction.

People affected by disaster need to be at the center of the process of recovery and reconstruction. In Pakistan the focus in shift from building houses for people, to supporting people re-build safer housing themselves, aided by financial and technical assistance, has made effective use of limited financial resources and enabled the remarkable levels of progress of people rebuilding safer homes.