

## **Preventing post-disaster destructions and forced evictions: integrating risk reduction, urban planning and housing in El Salvador**

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### **Abstract**

When so-called natural disasters strike in cities, the effects can be worse than in other environments, and it is the communities of the poor and the marginalised in the developing world, that face the greatest risks. Urban poor communities are caught in a complexity of factors that aggravate their poverty, with the occurrence of disasters rather intensifying, than equalising, the differences of status and the patterns of social inequality. In order to avoid post-disaster destructions and forced evictions of these communities, proactive and preventive planning in a pre-disaster context is needed.

The Asian tsunami at the end of 2004 is a recent example of the correlation between the occurrence of disasters and forced evictions. Too many governments continue to view evictions as an acceptable policy tool during broader efforts of urban and economic development – and disasters can help to push such evictions through.<sup>1</sup> Barring very exceptional circumstances, informal settlements must be protected from forced evictions. Integrating risk reduction in urban planning and housing is one possible way to prevent such post-disaster evictions.

Increasingly, attention has been given to the need to mainstream risk reduction in development work in order to reduce the vulnerability of the urban poor. Taking El Salvador as a case study, the paper analyses how the existing separation between the disciplines of risk reduction, urban planning and housing can be overcome and integration achieved.

Since Hurricane Mitch in 1998, and especially after the 2001 earthquakes, not only relief and development organisations, but also social housing organisations have initiated a shift to include risk reduction in their fields of action in order to address the underlying causes of urban vulnerability. However, required additional knowledge and institutional capacities were mainly built up independently and internally by each organisation, and not through the creation of co-operative partnerships, thus duplicating efforts and increasing ineffective competition.

Whilst positive experience has been gained through the implementation of more integral projects, the creation of adequate operational, organisational, institutional and legal frameworks is still in its initial stage. Unfortunately, four years after the 2001 earthquakes, emergency relief funding for post-disaster risk reduction is coming to an end without the allocation of resources for following up and consolidating the initial process. Based on the findings, an integral model is proposed which shows how integrating risk reduction in urban planning and housing could be dealt with in such a way that it becomes more integrated, inclusive and sustainable within a developmental context.

The next stage of this research will focus on developing an operational framework with performance targets being utilised as a tool for providing guidance for social housing organisations.

**NOTE: The paper is based on an article which will be published in “Open House International” (OHI) in December 2005.**

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1 See <http://www.cohre.org/> and <http://www.id21.org/insights/insights48/insights-iss48-art06.html>. In an unpublished COHRE document called “Human Rights and Post-Tsunami Reconstruction” (2005:3-5) it is stated: “The manner in which ‘hospitality business premises’ (tourist hotels and restaurants) within the buffer zone have been exempted from the prohibition on reconstruction is also a sore point among those who are being forbidden to rebuild their homes along the beaches. The fact that many of the bigger tourist hotels that had semi permanent structures on the beach have re-commenced operations with those structures in place contributes to heightening tension among the poor communities that lived on the beach and serves the purpose of the hotel owners. (...) we have reports of people erecting temporary shelter within the 100 meter zone due to the lack of any other option being made available to them and then being subject to arrest, detention and assault by the Police”.