



Towards a national policy framework for post-disaster reconstruction in New Zealand

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Introduction

The vulnerability of New Zealand to most forms of natural disaster demands its proactive engagement in management programmes that will not only reduce these impacts but increase its resilience to future events as well. The need for post-disaster reconstruction policy guidelines that will address these objectives cannot be overstated.

In spite of a well acclaimed capacity for response and recovery, New Zealand has a relatively low experience in the management of large scale catastrophes. The character of recent natural events have been confined to rural communities, are of low-magnitude and with relatively low scope of impact on the physical environment. Several major natural disaster scenario and exercises have indicated that there will be considerable physical, economic and social challenges on the task of reconstruction and recovery if, and when such disasters occur.

The study on which this paper is based explores improvement on the existing legislative and regulatory framework so as to allow for the implementation of large-scale reconstruction programmes in New Zealand. It seeks to address the following pertinent questions:

- *How will the existing legislation and regulatory provisions be made to facilitate the implementation of large scale reconstruction programmes?*
- *How can a balance be achieved between the needs for speedy reconstruction programmes and the specific requirements for regulatory compliances?*

Motivation

Motivation for the current study came from a stakeholder workshop held in Wellington, 2006, where implementation problems that may be experienced during post-disaster reconstruction were highlighted (Full report is available on www.resorgs.org.nz/pubs.htm). Some other commissioned studies (MWH, 2004; Page, 2005; AELG, 2005; and Messrs Anthony Harper, 2006) report on potential gaps and inconsistencies in recovery

legislation; and the possibility of procedural constraints in the implementation of current policy guidelines.

There are therefore opportunities for improving the existing legislation and regulatory provisions so as to guide the performance of reconstruction works in achieving resilience in New Zealand. The study believes that without appropriate policy guidelines, there could be loss of vital momentum of action resulting from delays caused by restrictive provisions; loss of commitment to the reconstruction process by disaster practitioners who are unable to apply pragmatic solutions to real-time reconstruction problems; inability to introduce measures for risk and vulnerability reduction; and finally an overall impairment of community recovery and quality of life.

The Research

The study involved a documentary analysis of past reconstruction programmes both locally and internationally so as to record the set of policy approaches pursued during the reinstatement of built facilities. Focus is made on the adjustments made to subsisting legislations to allow for reconstruction programmes to be progressed. These set of information provided relevant benchmarks for suggested improvements to New Zealand reconstruction policies.

Following this was an evaluative study of three regulatory policy documents; Civil Defense and Emergency Management Act (2002), Building Act (2004) and the Resource Management Act (1991), with the aid of an online survey of disaster management practitioners within New Zealand. The questionnaire was designed to provide a synthesis of views for improving post-disaster reconstruction processes within a regime of supportive regulatory provisions and implementation guidelines.

Conclusion

The need for a national policy framework for post-disaster reconstruction cannot be overemphasized. Putting a robust reconstruction framework in place before the 'major one', would demonstrate a conscious approach to achieving the desired objectives for building resilience in New Zealand communities.

References

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Lead Author's Biography



James is a Doctoral research student in the Department of Civil and Natural Resources Engineering, University of Canterbury. His background is in Construction Management and he has had various construction related experience including an associate role in a quantity-surveying consultancy practice in Nigeria. James is a professional member of the Nigerian Institute of Building and the Institute of Management Consultants, Nigeria. He currently lectures in the Diploma and Bachelor of Construction programmes at UNITEC, New Zealand.

James research is within the ambit of Objective 3 – Resilient Organisations research programme. He is evaluating the provisions of the Building, Resource Management and the Civil Defence and Emergency Management Acts to determine if they are in tandem with the likely demands for the reconstruction of physical facilities in the event of a major natural disaster in New Zealand. His evaluative study should proffer suggestions towards a policy framework for post-disaster reconstruction in New Zealand.