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An experience of addressing collectively defined priorities related to DRR and Housing in a low socially-cohesive urban environment

First author, affiliation: David Dalgado, formerly Construction Engineer on British Red Cross Haiti Earthquake Recovery Programme

Email: david.dalgado@gmail.com

Abstract

The British Red Cross (BRC) undertook an integrated neighbourhood recovery programme in a mainly informal densely populated urban area of Delmas 19, Port-au-Prince, Haiti following the 2010 Earthquake. As part of this integrated programme the PASSA (Participatory Approach for Safer Shelter Awareness) tool was used in August 2011 and the community identified 3 priorities:

1. Flooding and drainage
2. Lighting and crime risk
3. Safer housing

The author was present during the final year of the BRC programme from July 2014 during parts of the implementation stage of the reconstruction process. Significant urban risk reduction through reconstruction was achieved in all 3 of the priority areas, however the risk reduction benefit was not maximised due to a number of factors.

The factors that reduced the risk reduction benefit achieved relate both to the context of a low income informal urban area in Port-au-Prince, but also how the BRC programme developed. As an example, All members of a sub-area (10 to 20 families) were asked to sign up to a cross-plot master plan (generally produced in a participative process) which would have allowed all families to win more space internally in their houses and externally in the passageways. One or two families withdrawing from the process would often force all houses to be built entirely within their plots leading to smaller new houses but also less regular forms of groups of houses with associated reduced seismic risk reduction benefit.

A number of risk reduction priorities identified by the beneficiaries in the PASSA group were also interlinked meaning that a compromise on one activity led to a reduced risk reduction on another activity. As an example, the lack of complete agreement for new housing from all families within one of the worst affected target areas coupled with a lack of programme activity funds forced some new houses to have floor levels set at a lower level to be able to retain their low-lying neighbours existing access. This reduced the flood risk reduction benefit that could have been achieved.

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Finally although it is evident that significant urban disaster risk reduction has been achieved at end of the programme it is unlikely that the community infrastructure will be adequately maintained except in times of crisis (for example, clearing of trash in the drain culverts if flooding starts to occur). Nevertheless, the option of not undertaking community infrastructure would have severely limited any urban risk reduction benefits.

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