

The Development from Disasters Network (DFDN)

In the aftermath of the Tsunami disaster in December 2004, the British public raised unprecedented funds for humanitarian relief. At the same time, fifty people from British universities, NGOs, consultancy practices, professional associations and the media met to discuss ways of ensuring that professional responses were effective in protecting the interests of local communities and helping them rebuild their lives and settlements. The result of this meeting was the creation of the Tsunami Recovery Network and its website www.tsunami-recovery.net.

It was apparent that whilst resources are often readily available for immediate relief, the challenge of meeting longer term reconstruction and rebuilding needs were less well addressed. This issue was addressed by members of the Network in a report entitled 'Mind the Gap' for the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS).

Subsequent disasters such as the Pakistan and Indonesian earthquakes and the Katrina hurricane provide an opportunity to avoid repeating the errors of previous post-disaster relief and reconstruction and contribute to the strategic aims of poverty reduction. Disasters will continue to occur. These events make it even more clear that a concerted multi-disciplinary approach is needed to address the medium and long term challenges of rebuilding lives and settlements. Accordingly, in August 2006, the Steering Group approved the creation of the Development from Disasters Network. As before, the Network addresses concerns that the funds, so generously contributed to the relief of various disasters, should be expended in ways that do not prejudice the real needs and rights of the people affected.

The Network proposes to provide members with a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on medium/long term recovery and rehabilitation of affected communities and settlements. Our work is based on three main principles:

- Development should be driven by the wishes and needs of local communities affected by the tsunami, including the right to return.
- The development process should be transparent and ensure financial accountability, with funds distributed to the lowest practical level.
- Development should be comprehensive and long-term and rebuild lives, not just houses and infrastructure.

We propose to offer the following range of resources for those actively engaged on reconstruction, so that disasters can be turned into developmental opportunities to 'build back better'. It is proposed that the network offer the following:

1. A re-launched and expanded website (www.development-from-disasters.net) providing up-to-date information on what is happening, links to various groups involved in medium and long term reconstruction and development; reports on case studies, conferences and other activities and a forum for exchanging information for architects, planners, surveyors, engineers and other interested groups.
2. Curriculum development advice on rebuilding after disasters for educational institutions in affected countries organising courses dealing with the built environment. The aim of this is to enhance longer term professional capability.
3. Training courses, such as CPD courses, for British professionals working, or expecting to work, in post-disaster situations. These are to help improve professional capability among existing professionals.
4. Commissioning or undertaking studies of selected post-disaster programmes to identify lessons learned and options for improvement.
5. Holding a workshop or conference to exchange information and options for strengthening inter-professional collaboration.

As a member of the core group within the Steering Group of the network, Geoff is actively promoting the new network with colleagues. We would welcome discussions to explore ways of realising the objectives of the network in practice.