

Kennedy, J., J. Ashmore, E. Babister, and I. Kelman. 2008. "The Meaning of 'Build Back Better': Evidence from Post-tsunami Aceh and Sri Lanka". Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 24-36.

Paper abstract:

The 26 December 2004 tsunami disaster around the Indian Ocean provided an opportunity to see if decades of knowledge and experience on post-disaster settlement and shelter could be applied to match the tagline which many groups gave to the post-tsunami reconstruction: "build back better" (or "building back better"). This paper uses evidence from field work completed on implementing settlement and shelter in post-tsunami Aceh and Sri Lanka to examine whether or not the theory and practice of "build back better" were witnessed. Focusing on settlement and shelter, four areas are examined: (i) safety, security, and livelihoods; (ii) how post-disaster settlement and shelter could have an improved connection with permanent housing and communities (the "transition to what?" question); (iii) fairness and equity; and (iv) connecting relief and development by tackling root causes of vulnerability. Based on the field work, addressing these four areas is suggested as how "build back better" could be implemented. Recommendations are:

1. Community involvement is essential, but that does not necessarily mean community control.
2. Organisations involved in implementing transitional settlement and shelter need to consider their capacity and links to other sectors.
3. Thinking ahead is necessary by integrating relief and development through long-term planning and disaster risk reduction.

Overall, "building back safer" might be a preferable tagline to "building back better" because "better" has multiple interpretations, many of which caused further problems, whereas "safer" provides a clearer goal on which to focus for post-disaster settlement and shelter.

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