



Summary Report on Conditions in Bam

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Summary Report on Bam

I. Current Situation in Bam

Conditions

- People have moved from tents to temporary prefabricated housing¹
 - However, many people have been living in camps since the earthquake under unsanitary conditions
- The Iranian Red Crescent Society's (IRCS) tented field hospital has been replaced with permanent facilities²
 - Reconstruction needs in the health sector are considered well covered
- Many of the citizens of Bam are uncertain about their futures:³
 - People who had rented housing, rather than lived on their own land, before the earthquake
 - Those living in "connexes" (temporary steel housing)
 - Elderly women, and
 - Disabled women, especially those who were unable to register themselves as such with local authorities

Issues⁴

- Educational needs of children are not being met. All of Bam's 93 schools were destroyed and several of them are only beginning to be rebuilt.
- Many NGOs and other aid organizations have encountered delays in obtaining permission for land allocation and building permits for reconstruction projects, especially for healthcare facilities
- IRCS capacities in and around Bam must be rebuilt in order to be able to "meet current and future needs in the disaster prone area" of Bam⁵
- Many projects cannot be undertaken until donors demonstrate that they will come through with their promised contributions.⁶
- The capacity for international cash grants needs to be expanded past the current rate of 50,000 dollars⁷

¹ International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Operations Update, July 2004.

² Ibid

³ Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), Interview with Miloon Kothari, Human Rights Special Rapporteur on adequate housing. August 2005.

⁴ International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Operations Update, July 2004.

⁵ Ibid, 4

⁶ Ibid, 1

⁷ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Report: Workshop of lessons learnt on the national and international response to the Bam earthquake, April 2004.

II. Bam and Beyond

Preparedness

The amount of damage caused by a natural disaster is almost entirely dependent on the preparedness of the area affected, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, "Reducing Disaster Risk: A Challenge for Development."

According to this report, in order to minimize the harm of natural disasters, governments must prepare vulnerable areas as follows:⁸

- Assess disaster risk as part of development planning which was not done sufficiently in Bam
- Make plans and policy decisions supported by systematic risk analysis
- Understand disasters as far as the hazards and vulnerabilities they involve
- Consider disaster risk, especially factors that may increase disaster vulnerability in regulatory procedures⁹

If "there is nothing natural about natural disasters," as an author of the above report claims, adherence to good earthquake safety building codes during the construction of Bam city could have greatly reduced the tragic effects of the earthquake. According to the UNDP, Iran has "one of the best" building codes; however, these codes are not sufficiently enforced in areas at risk.¹⁰

Though Bam lies on a known main earthquake fault line, most of its modern buildings were constructed hurriedly over the last several decades to accommodate a rapidly growing population and did not follow the building guidelines. In the earthquake, both traditional building technologies (e.g., masonry and adobe) and modern steel-framed concrete construction proved dangerous.¹¹

Compliance to earthquake safety codes in vulnerable areas is essential to the survival of buildings and people. The UNDP has made the following suggestions for increasing local compliance to the codes:¹²

- Specific regulations are needed for at-risk areas on what kinds of development are acceptable
- Engineers and architects should be made responsible for the safety of new buildings
- Training sessions for local construction supervisors on earthquake safety may ensure more compliance in the long term

⁸ UNDP Press Release on Landmark Study Reducing Disaster Risk: A Challenge for Development, February 2004.

⁹ Ibid, 3

¹⁰ UNDP Report: Workshop 1 of lessons learnt from past reconstruction programmes, February 2004.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

- Comprehensible manuals and guidelines should be made available to local builders and contractors
- Owner-driven construction should be considered, as it ensures that structures will be socially and culturally appropriate, and increases the community's familiarity with earthquake-proofing technologies

In addition, the UNDP stresses the importance of developing a coordinated national contingency plan that will do the following:¹³

- Provide for request of international assistance when needed
- Include all sectors, and national/regional/local levels, of society, and international actors
- Take into account international responders' capacities
- Educate people in disaster-prone areas on the effects of a disaster and how best to seek help

III. Short Term Response

The Iranian Government (provincial and city-level task forces, hazard-specific committees, and specialized working groups):¹⁴

Successful:

- Provided temporary shelters, which were useful in buying time for building permanent shelter¹⁵
- Established a "zoning system" that facilitated aid organizations' contact and familiarity with the affected population¹⁶
- Evacuated one-third of the approximately 30,000 injured for treatment
- Oversaw provision of assistance from Iranian civil society and from international actors
- Through the effective authority of the main task force, made important and operative policy decisions that suspended some customs and visa rules, allowing foreign relief workers to enter freely, and welcomed international assistance through an official request to the UN.
- This "open doors" policy was beneficial both to the government, which was exposed to the latest search and rescue technology, and to national NGOs, who learned from working alongside international aid agencies

Recommendations of the UNDP Workshop on Disaster Response:¹⁷

- should be aware of the international capacities and arrangements for disaster response, or of general international assistance system

¹³ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Report: Workshop of lessons learnt on the national and international response to the Bam earthquake, April 2004.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ UNDP Report: Workshop 1 of lessons learnt from past reconstruction programmes, February 2004.

¹⁶ Ibid, 17

¹⁷ Ibid

- should obtain “an institutional capacity specifically dedicated to interacting with international actors,”¹⁸ to make sure that requests and refusals of certain kinds of assistance are heeded by responders (there were several cases of unneeded assistance being officially turned down by the government, but being provided anyway)
- should be responsible for providing consolidated information—on assistance being provided, the situation on the ground, needs, etc.—to decision makers, relief workers, the public (national and international), and the affected population. The UNDP Workshop on the international response in Bam concluded that information management is as important as the provision of relief in the short term response.

Local Authorities¹⁹

Recommendations of the UNDP Workshop:²⁰

- should provide training for crisis managers in coordination activities, e.g., simulation exercises of large scale emergencies with significant international response. The UNDP mentioned in their first technical workshop that most of the disaster and reconstruction managers handled their operations in “[a] learning by doing mode.”²¹
- must be in charge of coordination of the disaster response
- should be responsible for informing the local population on the disaster situation
- should encourage maximum involvement of the local population in relief efforts such as search and rescue, as they are usually the most effective and should be involved in decisions that affect them
- should ensure that cultural events and rituals are respected
- should use local staff and volunteers. During the “registration phase,” people’s skills can be collected in a basic inventory²²
- must make efforts to return the situation to normalcy as soon as possible, e.g., by quickly restarting school and marriage ceremonies²³

*Aid Organizations*²⁴

Successful:

- provided swift relief
- helped mobilize international help

Unsuccessful:

- did not sufficiently cover the area of the psycho-social health of those affected

¹⁸ Ibid, 8

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ UNDP Report: Workshop 1 of lessons learnt from past reconstruction programmes, February 2004.

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Report: Workshop of lessons learnt on the national and international response to the Bam earthquake, April 2004.

Recommendations:

- should have a more standardized approach to data collection, in order to ensure that relief programs are relevant to specific needs
- should keep staff rotation to a minimum
- should be respectful of existing international technical standards and operations procedures
- should provide only well trained and well equipped rescue teams, as unprepared rescue teams can be burdensome
- medical and food assistance should be appropriate to the situation and population (medicine too specific or sophisticated for wide use, food that the local population will refuse to eat)

*The Iranian Red Crescent Society*²⁵

- Within the first two hours sent relief personnel from its local and provincial branches
- By the end of the first day had organized a task force and deployed massive resources, including nearly 20,000 relief workers
- Participated in search and rescue
- Distributed relief items
- Administered health services
- Helped coordinate national and international assistance
- Helped implement relief programs

*Local/National Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)*²⁶

- Oversaw large scale water/sanitation efforts
- Distributed much needed non-food items such as clothing, stoves, etc.
- Continue to work on child protection, education, and housing
- Were crucial in final distributions of relief items
- Helped actual implementation of relief programs

Recommendation:

- Should refer to the UN for coordination instead of to local emergency managers; this will keep one focal point for information and organization, rather than several

*International Responders*²⁷

United Nations:

Successful:

- Within the first two days, assessed needs on the ground
- Helped mobilize international support

Deployed:

1. UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination team

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

2. Staff and technical experts from the WHO and UNICEF
3. Relief items from the UN
4. the UNCT (UN Country Team), which issued, in the second month, a “Flash Appeal” for support

Recommendations of the UNDP Workshop:²⁸

- should work more closely with national and local NGOs
- should not interfere with government efforts—the affected country’s government alone should be in charge of coordinating international assistance, and when the UN and other international players (e.g., the European Union) try to share the responsibility, the process becomes disorderly and less effective.
- should make financial and material resources actually available with less delay. Promised donations must materialize; stoves are no longer needed in the hot spring.
- must send UNDAC experts more quickly for disaster response; responders with their own transport capacities arrived earlier
- should include more experts from developing countries in their disaster response teams
- should make information from the disaster’s early stages more detailed and specific, in order to avoid overlaps in assistance
- should proactively share assessment information among themselves, potentially creating an “information sharing center”²⁹
- must be culturally sensitive and self-sufficient

IV. Reconstruction³⁰

Reconstruction of a city after a disaster seeks to accomplish three things:

1. Return the situation to normalcy as quickly as possible
2. Introduce new practices that would increase preparedness for a future disaster, and,
3. If possible, take the opportunity to address preexisting social issues/inequalities

To accomplish this,

1. Sustainability of architecture should be considered
2. Local labor and materials should be used in order to help revitalize the local economy
3. Local authorities must be the main player in recovery and reconstruction. They should be empowered through existing community structures, in order to:
 - a. foster two-way communication with affected families
 - b. make the community less resistant to necessary steps
 - c. ensure that the community’s needs and problems are addressed

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid, 12

³⁰ UNDP Report: Workshop 1 of lessons learnt from past reconstruction programmes, February 2004.

- d. prevent the spreading of false information (in the UNDP's Workshop it was recommended that this be carried out through "local community members" and /or radio broadcasts from 'no batteries' radios, which may be distributed as relief items)³¹

The government should be responsible for addressing any preexisting issues. In the case of Bam, illegal land holdings, unfair distribution of land titles, segregation of poor and/or marginalized sections of society, etc., were addressed with legislation that forbade the buying and selling of land in Bam during its reconstruction

- Communities should be responsible for deciding whether to temporarily, or permanently, relocate, or reconstruct their lives "in-situ" (at the same time)
- An advisory committee can be set up to guide the reconstruction, make regular quality control checks, and monitor benefits.
- Development/reconstruction plans must project into the future at least 25 years, incorporating long term disaster management and other matters.

Sources:

1. International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Operations Update, July 2004.
2. Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), Interview with Miloon Kothari, Human Rights Special Rapporteur on adequate housing. August 2005.
3. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Report: Workshop of lessons learnt on the national and international response to the Bam earthquake, April 2004.
4. UNDP Press Release on Landmark Study Reducing Disaster Risk: A Challenge for Development, February 2004.
5. UNDP Report: Workshop 1 of lessons learnt from past reconstruction programmes, February 2004.

³¹ Ibid, 15