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2018 Vol.22

International Recovery Forum 2018

~Build Back Better in Urban Resilience~

24 January 2018 (Wed), Kobe, Japan

Introduction

The discussions at the Forum revolved around “Build Back Better for Urban Resilience”, wherein experts, scientists, practitioners, and public and private officials served as resource persons. The outcomes highlighted a forward-looking perspective of “Build Back Better in Recovery” that encourages cities to directly address the challenges they are facing today, as these greatly contribute to vulnerability that will make future recovery efforts difficult. It also pointed that the “people’s process” approach in disaster recovery may take time during the planning phase, but it can offer speedy implementation of activities when properly applied. However, it should not end there. Resilience implies consistent action – always looking forward and not back – to prepare towards the future: to build forward better.

The Forum was opened by **Mr. Stefan Kohler**, Chair of IRP Steering Committee, and followed respectively by the welcome remarks from **Mr. Mamoru Maekawa**, Vice-Minister for Policy Coordination of Cabinet Office Government of Japan, and **Mr. Kazuo Kanazawa**, Vice Governor of Hyogo Prefecture. All the remarks highlighted the important role of IRP in coordinating and sharing knowledge on build back better, including the lessons from the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 and the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995.

Themes and Format of the Forum

The format of the Forum was designed to address the following themes:

- How does “Build Back Better” contribute to urban resilience?
- What does it mean by “Build Back Better” for urban resilience?
- Innovative approaches by learning from past experience and initiatives, and how to measure success of “Build Back Better” in cities?

The first theme was addressed through a **keynote speech** delivered by Professor **Takashi Onishi**, President of Toyohashi University of Technology (TUT). Based on detailed investigation of the recovery efforts from the Great East Japan Earthquake, Prof. Onishi emphasized that *build back better contributes to urban resilience* through context-specific measures that ensure greater safety of communities than before the disaster. He cited for instance, the need for “dual-residence” status of impacted families from the Fukushima nuclear accident as a special measure to support the evacuated people. His speech emphasized five messages on how to *build back better for resilience*: (i) restore damaged communities so as not to be affected by similar disasters, (ii) restore the lives of disaster victims to realize their hopes as much as possible, (iii) restore industries and social activities in the affected communities so as to avoid the influence of the disaster to the rest of the world, (iv) restore in sustainable way and avoid haste, and (v) restore responsibly through a well-considered implementation strategy.

The second theme was addressed through a **panel discussion** moderated by **Mr. Kohler**. The panelists, comprising **Ms. Setsuko Saya**, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan; **Mr. Raj Kumar Srivastava**, Deputy Chief of Embassy of India in Japan; **Mr. Hans Guttman**, Executive Director of Asia Disaster

Preparedness Center; **Mr. Josef Leitmann**, Lead DRM Specialist at the World Bank; and **Mr. Atsushi Koresawa**, Director of UN-Habitat Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, shared their views concerning the following:

- How *build back better for urban resilience* is understood in their respective institutions
- How *build back better* is integrated in their respective programs, initiatives, or activities
- How *build back better activities* are being implemented

The discussions were anchored on the consultative version of the Sendai Framework’s implementation guide by UNISDR: “Words into Action: Build Back Better”. The key messages from the discussions were integrated into the twelve key issues listed in this report.

Finally, the third theme was again addressed through a **panel discussion** moderated by **Mr. Nigel Fisher**, former United Nations Assistant Secretary-General. The panelists, including **Mr. Chiri Babu Maharjan**, Mayor of Lalitpur City, Nepal; **Mr. Huang Sanping**, Vice Mayor of Tangshan Municipality, China; **Mr. Noboru Shimizu**, Manager Planning Crisis Management Office of Kobe City, Japan; and **Mr. Shahbaz Khan**, Director of Jakarta Office and Country Representative of UNESCO in Indonesia, shared their views regarding the following topics:

- What innovative approaches on *build back better* are being introduced based on the lessons from past experiences
- How do these innovative approaches contribute to achieving long-term urban resilience
- How is success of *build back better* measured in cities

The sharing of experiences offered clear examples of what specific recovery approaches can help cities develop their resilience, including the strengthening of capacity to absorb the impact of hazards, protect and preserve human life, and mitigate future damage of public and private assets all while continuing to provide the essential infrastructure and services in the aftermath of a disaster. The specific lessons from these experiences were integrated in the twelve key issues listed below.

12 Key Issues

Overall, twelve key issues regarding what it means to build back better for urban resilience were extracted from all the discussions.

Issue 1: “Build Back Better” Implementation Framework

The basis of the discussions was the consultative version of the Sendai Framework implementation guide: “Words into Action on Build Back Better in Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction” that outlined four major tasks, namely: **Task 1** Develop a National Recovery Framework; **Task 2** Enable Pre-Disaster Recovery Planning; **Task 3** Formalize Systems for Assessment; and **Task 4** Strengthen Policies on Build Back Better. One of the issues about the guide is how to define and measure “better”.

Issue 2: Execution of “Build Back Better” Tasks

It is one thing to define the four tasks, and it is another thing to determine

how these are executed. The latter is a crucial factor in assessing how *Build Back Better* for urban resilience actually performs in reality. Good governance is essential for resilience, as it facilitates good planning, transparency, and clarity of responsibility and accountability. It was self-evident in the discussions that poor planning will lead to inadequate recovery.

Issue 3: Context-Specificity

While it was acknowledged that National Recovery Frameworks and Recovery Plans are essential, to be effective, these must be broken down into local context and location-specific development approaches – recognizing the unique features and characteristics of different locations, their specific vulnerabilities, and risk factors. It was an affirmation that one size does not fit all.

Issue 4: Speed of Recovery

Speed of recovery was constantly mentioned in the discussions, and that to ensure speed, the following were deemed as absolutely necessary:

- establishing good coordination (e.g. setting up a command center or disaster management headquarters within hours)
- starting recovery planning immediately, while still in the emergency response/rescue phase
- starting to implement the recovery plan as quickly as possible following the disaster
- building temporary housing quickly, and restoring lifeline infrastructures
- mobilizing the citizens and uniformed services to protect heritage sites and prevent thefts the disaster

Issue 5: Comprehensiveness

Build Back Better must be comprehensive, ensuring unified planning and response. It was pointed in the discussions that *Build Back Better* ensures integration of ‘disaster risk reduction measures into the restoration of physical infrastructure and societal systems and into the revitalization of livelihoods, economies and the environment’. Additionally, it was emphasized that building resilience demands consideration of ‘the urban system as a whole’. Hence, *Build Back Better* is anticipatory of future risks, and accordingly, adopts mitigation measures in systems, policies, and investment as shown in the case of Kobe City and Tangshan City. Conversely, lack of comprehensiveness and lack of inclusion of disaster risk reduction in preparedness and recovery planning often leads to increased disaster risks.

Issue 6: Consultation and Inclusion

Consultative planning, as pointed out in the discussions, is often overlooked in many recovery processes. The speakers at the Forum affirmed that it is essential to put affected people at the center of recovery efforts. Many options were presented, including: (i) the “People’s Process” approach to recovery as presented by UN-Habitat, emphasized the importance of community mobilization, planning, contracting, implementation and monitoring, which has been proven to be fast, cost-effective, transparent, empowering, and unifying; (ii) the BOKOMI Volunteer Disaster Response Groups of Kobe City engages citizens in restoration plans and projects as well as promoting mutual assistance and disaster drills; and (iii) pre-disaster preparedness planning, in response and recovery, as referenced in Lalitpur, strived for the inclusion of women, people with disabilities, and the elderly population.

Issue 7: Recovery as Healing

Recognizing that there are some long-term traumatic effects of a major disaster, it was pointed that recovery provides the opportunity for healing through psychosocial support. Restoring religious, cultural, and social life as well as economic life can help heal the urban fabric impacted by disaster. When *Build Back Better* focuses on living heritage, community, and social protection, it enables people to put their mental and physical lives back together, which is an important part of trauma recovery. Trauma may not be visible, but that does not mean that it does not exist.

Issue 8: Assessment

These questions prevailed: How to measure *Build Back Better*? How to measure success of *Build Back Better*? What is ‘better’? While many examples of measurement, assessment, evaluation were shared, what was really emphasized is to give special attention to reducing vulnerability in risk-prone areas of formal and informal settlements including slums,

and to reduce the vulnerability of the poorest and most vulnerable citizens. One of the suggested indicators of the success of *Build Back Better*: real improvements in the situation of the bottom 10% of the urban population in terms of their housing and access to social services, social protection, and employment. If the situation of the people at the bottom of the ladder is improving, it indicates that the situation of others who are better off in urban communities is improving too.

Issue 9: Financing

How to pay for it all – the preparedness planning, the mitigation efforts, the recovery and reconstruction efforts? Can poor populations afford to build back better, not worse? The costs of recovery are increasing, and it was pointed that community engagement in recovery process is cost-effective. Recovery financing remains a key issue for local governments, especially in terms of disaster risk financing, insurance, and reinsurance. Moreover, there is a question regarding how cities and municipalities can improve their financial performance and credit worthiness to fund climate-smart infrastructure.

Issue 10: Networking and Learning

The presentations at the Forum reinforced the importance of knowledge exchange. Several examples of international knowledge networking, of online platforms of professionals, and of networks of affected people were reported. Many participants at the Forum called for more networking and knowledge exchange in area of disaster recovery – a manifestation that an event like the International Recovery Forum is a necessity for networking and mutual learning: global knowledge for local action. The Forum stressed the importance of documentation, of recording and making available for posterity what was done to prepare for and recover from disasters. Those facing disasters in the future should not be condemned to learn from the beginning again. They should be able to access records and build on the experience and lessons of those who have gone before.

Issue 11: Science and Technology

Recovery strategies should also be based on scientific analysis. As part of *Build Back Better* efforts, a number of examples of the application of new technologies were presented:

- using new information technology to reach schools and young people, such as creating mobile applications for data collection (Tohoku, Japan)
- deploying vibration isolation technology in schools, hospitals, and kindergartens (Tangshan City, China)
- combining respect for the integrity of traditional heritage construction and new seismic strengthening technologies (Lalitpur, Nepal)
- fostering innovative industries in post-disaster recovery, such as the Kobe Biomedical Innovation Cluster (Kobe, Japan)

These examples show that technological evolution is accelerating in every field, and there is a need to be kept abreast of this rapid evolution in order to take advantage of it in recovery efforts.

Issue 12: Future-Oriented

Can vulnerabilities created by human actions (e.g., uncontrolled urban in-migration, unplanned urban growth, industrialization and development within high-risk zones, and environmental degradation) be undone? In order to move forward, the discussions noted that much of the land projected to become urban in the next few decades have yet to be developed, so there is still time to plan well and not continue the mistakes of the past. In view of this, investment decisions taken now will have huge implications for development trajectories in the future, and will prove critical in preventing cities from being locked into unsustainable development pathways, or being exposed to increasingly intense and frequent urban shocks and stresses.

Closing

At the closing, **Ms. Saya** thanked 119 participants for their active participation and support to the Forum. She stated that the diversity of individuals attending the Forum reflects the essence of IRP as the “network of people”. She further encouraged all participants to remain active in the discussions concerning build back better and resilience not only in the events organized by IRP but also in all other relevant platforms, online discussions, and conferences. The Forum ended with a note that perhaps, “Build Back Better” will be succeeded by “Build Forward Better”.