

REKANPE TET'W: HAITIAN SELF-RECOVERY



Three and a half years after the 7.0-magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti, what permanent reconstruction is occurring? Self-recovery has emerged as a huge force. UN Habitat estimates that about 70,000 homes are currently in the process of being reconstructed or repaired with a fraction of the funds spent per permanent unit by the international community. However, much of this self-recovery is recreating pre-earthquake vulnerabilities and transforming urban migration and development patterns. My research aims to explore the processes behind this force and to suggest new ways of understanding the effects of shelter humanitarian aid on self-recovery.

My research examines self-recovery through three spatial scales: (1) the city, (2) the neighborhood and (3) the household. While not an exhaustive list, this framing highlights three findings pertinent to the deployment of shelter humanitarian aid: (1) urban migration and development, (2) the reconstruction of exposure to risk, and (3) household vulnerability to shocks.

What is self-recovery?

Self-recovery refers to the local processes that support families and communities to return to their living conditions before the disaster, ideally with improved resilience. Self-recovery therefore describes homeowners reconstructing as well as renters finding the economic means to stably pay rent or find a home of equivalent quality.

Due to the high level of international aid involvement even prior to the earthquake in Haiti, it is impossible to disaggregate the effects of assistance on families' ability to self-recover; therefore this research focuses on the interaction on self-recovery processes and assistance. Self-recovery can also be understood in contrast to coping. Coping describes the considerable effort expended to maintain the status quo; survival mechanisms.

CITY: URBAN MIGRATION PATTERNS

Examining how urban households have started in to recover in Port au Prince necessitates a new understanding of “internally displaced persons” (IDPs). Most households were displaced after the earthquake, though for drastically different reasons. However the same term “IDP” or “IDP camp” has been used to describe an extremely broad range of spatial and temporal characteristics of displacement: from a couple of households sheltering in front of their former home, to the broad urban expansion of tens of thousands of people north of Port au Prince.

Spatial displacement

Three levels of displacement was observed during my research: (1) families that stayed adjacent to their former home; (2) families to moved to a camp or new settlement in the neighborhood; (3) families that moved to new neighborhoods or new urban expansions.

As described in the quote, many families were displaced just adjacent to their former home, either due to their home collapsing or because they were afraid to sleep inside. Many of these families have started to recover in place, either by repair or reconstruction, or by gaining confidence in the structural integrity of their home after the MTPTC tagging.

Families that were displaced to camps have shown greater fracturing. The breakup of household units is problematic as it weakens supportive kinship ties and it increases the number of households displaced, and thus the number of new housing units that need to be (re)constructed. Both NGO camp managers and camp committee leaders suggest that families would try to occupy multiple tents in order to capitalize on greater amounts of aid that were based on a tent-by-tent basis. Families were also incentivized to occupy multiple tents in multiple camps in order to maximize chances of receiving assistance. Furthermore, families would aim to have different tents for different parts of the family – young adults, parents, elders.

[[families moving to new urban expansions – reference Morne Hopital and Canaan research done by Groupe URD and UN Habitat]]

Temporal displacement

The amount of time that a family is displaced has an effect on their ability to cope with trauma¹.

[[describe the timing of rental support programs – host families right after the earthquake compared to rental subsidies 2-3 years later]]

Thus the distance and duration that a family is displaced has a large effect on their ability and means of self-recovering. Greater differentiation in terminology is needed to reflect these different types of urban displacement.

There were people who weren't capable of defending themselves, of finding a place to stay. There were some who stayed at home, but there were also many who were obliged to move to a (IDP) camp... many people went to the camp (about a kilometer away). It was a vast uninhabited space; families went and cut down trees, and set up whatever old iron sheeting they could find to make a shelter. The tarps hadn't even arrived yet; it was only awhile later than an NGO came to distribute tarps. (interview 19; p. 4-5)

Donc ça aussi lieu à cette situation et donc je pense que avec une telle expérience le cote négatif a été ... [la] division de famille, l'idée que chaque personne avec une tente peut recevoir ses propres supports. Des grossesses précoces qui ont donné naissance à des enfants et qui donnent encore une fois la vulnérabilité aigue au sein de la population et la délinquance juvénile à cette liberté de sortir de rentrer sans contrôle familiale. (Yvon Jerome, former Mayor of Carrefour; p. 5)

¹ Cite V. Adams (medical anthropologist)

NEIGHBORHOOD: RECONSTRUCTING RISK

The households that are reconstructing are predominantly recreating similar vulnerabilities to natural hazards through seismically unsound construction and locating new homes or home expansions in hazardous areas. While many NGOs have sought to stem such poor construction practices through messaging and training programs, this reconstruction of exposure to risk is also occurring in such target neighborhoods.

The vernacular construction typology in Port-au-Prince is confined masonry built incrementally; households build one room at a time when finances permit, eventually building second and third stories. Observed self-reconstruction without direct international supervision is not seismically sound; primary construction quality issues are: (1) structural design errors and (2) poor material quality.

How do you think with all of the poor quality construction [prior to the earthquake], the State didn't foresee anything [disaster]? How did they not have an urban development plan that guides where one should or should not construct, how to construct, and what quality of tools and materials we should use to construct? A country threatened like this [by natural hazards]... even though there are people who can build their own home with tin sheets and concrete block, the contractor (bos) himself doesn't even know how to construct safely. And he is responsible for the construction! In what other country of the world would you find something like this? You would never find it. And this is not the only neighborhood where you'll find this; it is for this reason that every person died when the earthquake struck. (entretien 22)



The primary errors in structural design observed in site visits include: (1) lack of ring beam/diaphragm, (2) inadequate stirrups/rebar, (3) soft stories, (4) “short” columns taking more dynamic forces, (5) lack of staggered blocks at columns to properly confine concrete blocks, (6) incremental construction not considered in initial design (or leaving rebar exposed). Furthermore, households predominantly use poor quality materials for reconstruction: (1) poor mix and vibration of concrete, (2) poor component materials in concrete, (3) rusted or un-ribbed rebar.

[[location decisions]]

HOUSEHOLD: SOCIAL VULNERABILITY TO SHOCKS

Interviews and focus groups repeated highlighted that many families were struggling to merely cope, unable to begin to recover. For the families self-recovering, shelter assistance and the spatial stability/security it afforded often proved to be a crucial catalyst.



However, for those vulnerable families still just coping, access to stable income sources and/or to a social support network was the defining characteristic. The most vulnerable households were thus those with unstable incomes and no broader kinship or solidarity ties to draw upon; single mothers with young children predominantly comprised this group.

One female community leader in Delmas, Jenee, describes the common prioritization and tradeoff for the extreme poor and underemployed: shelter and housing are secondary to more vital needs like food, school fees, or transport to work. When a small merchant makes less than US\$4 a day, and must spend approximately US\$1 a day per child for education, little is left for investing in the home.

The implications for shelter practitioners is to: (1) better understand these household level tradeoffs; and (2) consider cross sectoral approaches to ensure families can begin to reconstruct and recover. Rapid qualitative studies were shown to be feasible and effective at informing alternative shelter strategies that included small business grants for small merchants to rebuild stock destroyed in the earthquake. This understanding of basic needs also suggests shelter interventions should consider other sectors like education or health fees.

Mais de nos jours, d'après les enquêtes menées à Simon pelé, les résultats prouvent que plus de 80% de la population ne travaille pas, et ceux qui ont un emploi, on peut dire que c'est une sorte de chômage déguisé. En ce sens, une famille qui soit le père ou la mère qui travaille dans un Factorerie avec un salaire minimum de 200 gdes/jrs, pour payer le transport de la famille pour: aller au travail, à l'école, au marché et autres, payer les frais scolaire, s'assurer de la nutrition de la famille, payer le loyer, s'habiller, Hôpital et autres, Toutes ces dépenses, empêchent les gens de faire de l'économie pour construire sa propre maison. (-Jenee, Delmas)