

# EXPERIENCES FROM NICARAGUA AND GUATEMALA EARTHQUAKE RECOVERY

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Core houses and the incremental process may be appropriate for rebuilding In Haiti --depending how it is done.

Examples In the early and mid 1970s, construction of core houses was financed by the World Bank (and others) in the aftermath of Nicaragua's and Guatemala's earthquakes. Among the lessons in both cases were:

Housing construction of any kind is extremely difficult in the emergency (immediately after the disaster) -it needs lead time for good planning, land assembly and a functioning construction capacity -even for simple core units.

In the two examples the donor agencies saw the housing need as a opportunity to revise national policies on the production and delivery of housing, seeking to convince governments to focus on the poor and poorest (which had not been done prior to the earthquakes). There was push back from the governments and ultimately the houses produced were largely (politically) allocated to higher income groups. Policy reform is best not done in the emergency stage.

At the same time the funding institutions were only testing the services sites and incremental approach -and had much to learn about how best to support those concepts.

Land, quickly available and easily developed is key. In the two cases, land assembly was politically manipulated, difficult to transact and poorly located. Basic utilities and services were scarce and not well planed.

Responding to the urgency of housing so many in need and the felt need to build to the highest seismic safety standards led to experiments with pre-fabricated construction system, which, for core houses, were found to be costly and inflexible for adding on and future expansions. Ironically some core units built with convent methods and materials were cheaper, faster and more user friendly to the incremental owner-builder. Better designs that would fit the incremental strategy would have led to faster, cheaper and more appropriate starting points of the families.

Under the pressure of producing large numbers of core houses, many details of how to support the incremental process -for example construction materials credits to families allocated a core, technical assistance, help with making materials available, etc. were not introduced as part of the program. The poorer households were marginalized and the process stagnated. This eventually added to the stigma and reluctance governments had towards lower in groups.

However, many families did, over time, manage to expand and improve their homes.

Conclusion: A well designed core house and long-term follow-up support program is a very appropriate response to reconstruction needs.