**After Harnai**

BY N O M A N A H M E D 2021-10-09

THE Harnai earthquake on Thursday caused substantial damage to life and property. Tremors were felt in Quetta, Qila Abdullah, Sanjavi, Sibi, Ziarat, Pishin and Muslim Bagh. In 2013, the deadly Awaran quake took more than 800 lives, destroyed some 46,000 homes and impacted an area of 37,000 square kilometres. After completing rescue and relief efforts in Harnai, the federal and provincial governments are expected to come together to launch a rehabilitation programme.

As earthquakes strike Balochistan frequently, the scale and scope of rehabilitation and redevelopment efforts must be enhanced.

Working in Balochistan presents its own peculiar challenges. There have been tensions in the provincial government. The province is affected by insurgency, terrorist attacks and sectarian strife. But many initiatives of rehabilitation, reconstruction and redevelopment taken after previous quakes offer lessons.

The Housing Reconstruction in Awaran project is an example. It was initiated after the September 2013 quake. The centre and the province jointly prepared a housing reconstruction project for the district. A sum of Rs4 billion was allocated to reconstruct 16,000 houses at an estimated cost of Rs250,000 per house. The project was based on the ownerdriven housing reconstruction works seen after the 2005 Kashmir earthquake.

The project team prepared visual material and brochures for improved construction. A field team was constituted to visit homes under construction and offer technical support. Documentation was explained to homeowners and facilitation extended at different stages of construction. Village development councils were formed to oversee development work in coordination with government officials. Homeowners were given options to decide on the design and material of construction, af ter being extended guidance and support to estimate prospective costs and potential benefits. It was found that the majority opted for cement concrete blocks with steel reinforcement. Masons were trained for enhancing the quality of construction. Inspection visits were carried out.

Another initiative was undertaken by the Urban Resource Centre and Technical Training and Resource Centre. The NGOs launched a low-cost, community-led process to rehabilitate housing and infrastructure and extend technical support to residents of the Awaran and Kech districts. This was a simple but time-tested approach. After surveying the area and meeting various categories of people, four village sites were chosen.

These comprised households impacted by extreme poverty. The built environment included rudimentary mud houses. The people depended on subsistence agriculture andlivestock rearing for a living. As the homes were in an arid landscape, the physical density of the settlements was very low. Drinking water was acquired through wells and handpumps. The wells would dry up seasonally, increasing difficulties. After the earthquake, many water sources were damaged and needed urgent repairs.

The most deserving households were selected for technical support and provision of construction material. The villagers were invited to formulate a committee of elders to identify such households. It was heartening to see every village elect a noted schoolteacher to deal with routine affairs. This showed that the poorest people of Balochistan not only valued education but also respected those who imparted it. The support comprised developing simple designs for damaged walls and roofing structures. Steel beams, bamboos, plastic mats, reef mats and ropes comprised the total outlay of the inventory.

The support team on the site included architects and technicians wanting to servec o m mun it ie s .

They helped train local community members giving them simple tips on construction. In a record three months, 125 houses had been completely recon-structed. Moreover, 18 water supply schemes had been rehabilitated. The project was expanded to surrounding locations.

Harnai and other quake-affected locations can benefit from similar approaches. With small financial resources and appropriate technical guidance, large-scale impact can be achieved. People only need help in technical issues and identification of development choices. This type of help can best be provided by socially responsive professionals who are grounded and rooted in society.

Neither fancy donor-funded projects nor expensive foreign consultants can qualify for such intended change. When the community monitors the development process, it gains collective confidence and an ability to manage other improvement ventures. If low-cost and simple approaches are adopted, the fruits of development can reach many impoverished areas of Balochistan and elsewhere without any burden on the exchequer.

In conclusion, the total cost of repairing/ reconstructing 125 houses and 18 water supply schemes was less than the cost of one staff car purchased for a mid-ranking bureaucrat! The writer is an academic and researcher based in Karachi