

Post-tsunami recovery will take about a decade: UN agencies



51 minutes ago

Countries hit by last December's devastating tsunami around the Indian Ocean will take at least five to 10 years to recover with the help of international aid, United Nations agencies warned.

Technical experts underlined after a meeting organised by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) that recovery efforts would also have to tackle problems with poverty, conflicts or land disputes that existed before the tsunami struck, on top of reconstruction.

"You're very rarely talking about a process of less than five years and usually it's more like 10 years," UNDP disaster recovery specialist Andrew Maskrey told journalists on Monday.

The UNDP said that it wanted to "build back better, build back stronger" and warned against rebuilding "the conditions of risk" that existed before the disaster in the Indonesian province of Aceh, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Maldives.

Housing would be improved, protected from recurrent natural disasters, backed by improved health and education services, and the effort would also try to ensure lower levels of malnutrition.

"We have to be careful of the tyranny of rush: trying to get things done quickly can actually put us behind in the long run," said Kathleen Cravero Head of the UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), adding that the process was "well underway".

"Recovery, despite the horrific nature of the disaster, does provide an opportunity to build back better and address the development challenges that had been with these communities for quite some time."

As the experts to stock of the shift from the declining emergency relief operation into the recovery phase, they said local and national authorities would increasingly be at the forefront of an ever more complex effort.

"There was one tsunami in Asia on December 26, but there is not one disaster," said Andrew Maskrey of UNDP.

"We cannot talk about a recovery process in the Indian Ocean, we have to talk about different recovery processes in each of the affected countries, and within these countries," he added.

Other challenges included coordination of all the actors involved, and financial transparency in using the billions of dollars in aid pledges that have been made in areas that were sometimes blighted by corruption.

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