Understanding and supporting the flood recovery process

Research summary

Research project FRS18200
Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management
Research Team
Environment Agency

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Executive summary

- Flood recovery is a long, complex, and personal process better seen as adaptation than simple restoration
- Improved coordination, Flood Re scheme, and Build Back Better initiatives have improved recovery efforts
- Where recovery support works well, it is characterised by clear leadership, visible presence, and accessible support
- Gaps persist in communication, rebuilding support, mental health provision, insurance complexity, and support for vulnerable groups, highlighting the need for strong governance, co-ordination, and financial mechanisms

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Flood recovery challenges

- Climate change is causing more frequent and severe floods, intensifying challenges for affected communities
- Recovery involves emotional, physical, and practical efforts beyond emergency response
- Institutional responses can miss mental health and engagement needs, creating gaps in flood recovery support
- Flood recovery varies due to socio-economic, geographic, and institutional factors across different communities
- Many people struggle to navigate complex recovery systems, including insurance, grants and support services

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Project overview

- **Project aims**: To understand and suggest how to improve the flood recovery process in England and Wales by examining how individuals, communities, and institutions experience and respond to flooding, and identifying opportunities to enhance support and outcomes
- **Research methodology**: A multi-stage approach included evidence review, stakeholder interviews, and case studies across diverse flood locations
- **Main project insights**: Focus on long-term recovery, mental health, community resilience, and institutional coordination

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Research stages

- **Stage 1: Mapping review:** Over 100 published sources were analysed to identify existing knowledge and research gaps in flood recovery
- **Stage 2: Stakeholder interviews:** Interviews included national representatives from government, local authorities, NGOs, and health agencies
- **Stage 3: Case study research:** Case studies in four locations represented different flood types, geographies, and socio-economic contexts
- **Data collection methods:** Desk reviews, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups ensured comprehensive data gathering

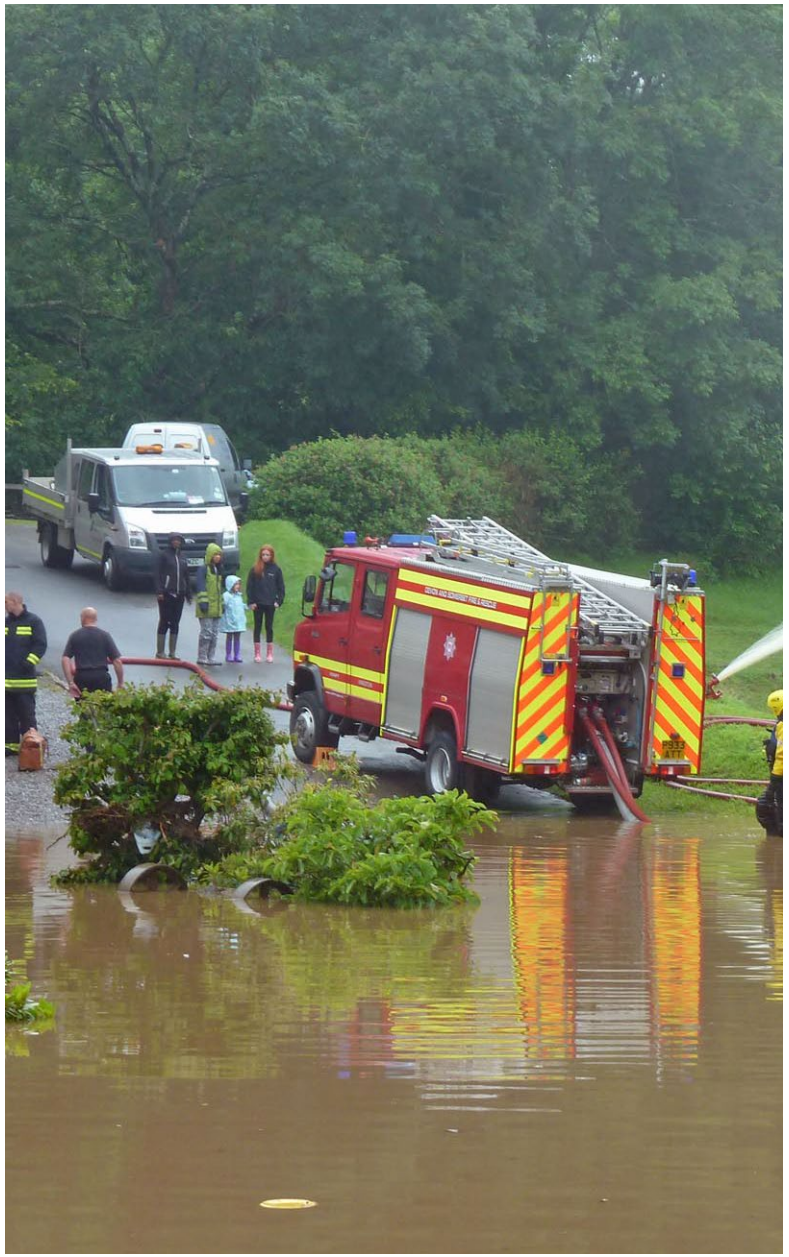
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Insights from case studies

- **Sparkhill,** Birmingham**:** This inner-city area has high deprivation with low awareness and low household resilience to floods
- **Bewdley,** Worcestershire**:** The market town has high levels of flood risk with strong flood preparedness and community support
- **Stockdalewath,** Cumbria**:** This small village experiences delayed flood response due to limited institutional resources in a rural isolated location
- **Looe,** Cornwall: The coastal community exhibits strong resilience and adaptive strategies developed over generations

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1. Project findings

Understanding the recovery process

- Recovery is an adaptive process, not simply restoring pre-flood conditions, involving ongoing effort by individuals and communities
- It includes coping with emotional and psychological effects, requiring long-term social and institutional support
- The recovery journey is not linear, with setbacks and prolonged anxiety triggered by weather and other events
- Recovery involves re-establishing a sense of home and place, which can be deeply altered by the flood experience

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2. Project findings

Institutional support and gaps

- Strong local leadership, partnership working and community engagement were consistently identified as important enablers of effective flood recovery
- Fragmented agency working and inconsistent communication hinder recovery, especially for vulnerable groups
- Complex insurance and grant systems create delays and uneven recovery outcomes, particularly for low-income households
- Effective recovery requires clear governance, better resource allocation, and sustained stakeholder engagement to support all communities equitably

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3. Project findings

Uneven impacts and recovery experiences

- Recovery outcomes vary, with low-income, tenant, and minority groups facing longer displacement and less support
- Differences in insurance coverage, financial resilience, and property ownership lead to uneven abilities to recover and rebuild
- Rural and remote communities face additional barriers, including weaker access to services and slower response
- Prior experience and local capacity influence outcomes with prepared, affluent communities recovering faster than more vulnerable areas

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What's working well

- Flood recovery arrangements are being activated more quickly through stronger multi-agency coordination
- Visible leadership, clear communication and accessible points of contact help communities navigate the recovery process more effectively
- Insurance and resilience initiatives, including Flood Re's Build Back Better scheme, are improving affordability and supporting resilient repair
- Community-based approaches, including local hubs, drop-ins and outreach activities, are improving access to information and support, while helping to build trust within affected communities.

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Areas for improvement

- **Leadership and coordination:** Clearer roles, consistent communication and locally led planning would strengthen flood recovery efforts
- **Health and wellbeing support:** Recovery support should recognise the long-term emotional impacts of flooding and the needs of vulnerable groups
- **Financial recovery:** Access to grants, insurance and other support should be simpler, more equitable and support resilient rebuilding
- **Resilient communities:** Communities should be better equipped to prepare for, respond to and recover from future flood events

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Further information

Research project: FRS18200

Flood and Coastal Risk Management Research Team, Environment Agency

Project Gov.uk page: Understanding and supporting the flood recovery process

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