

How do communities recover following a major disaster?

Recupera Chile: economic recovery gets a boost from Harvard

January 2-21, 2012

This question was on the minds of three teams of HKS students this January as they approached Dichato, Cobquecura and Peralles, three communities devastated by the Feb 27th 2010 earthquake and tsunami.

In the last two years, Chile has done a remarkable job of repairing infrastructure and developing housing plans, yet economic recovery lags behind. In the refugee camps people who lost everything in the disaster are desperate for permanent housing and opportunities for economic recovery.

HKS Professor Doug Ahlers decided to apply lessons learned in post Katrina New Orleans to address these problems. His January course, Community Recovery: Rebuilding Disaster Damaged Communities in Chile is designed to contribute to the economic recovery process in these three remote towns situated near the earthquake's epicenter. Students arrived in Santiago at dawn on January 2nd and immediately met with experts on Chile's recovery process including Felipe Kast PhD 2003, Chile's head of housing recovery, Luis Valenzuela PhD 2002, Matias Mori MPA 2004, and others for a crash course in Chile recovery efforts. The following day students mounted a bus for a 7-hour ride to Concepcion where they met with regional officials before arriving in the three communities.



The teams conducted interviews, set up project application processes, and met with dozens of community leaders, activists, and citizens. Together with the communities they identified over 200 projects designed to be submitted to the three government funding agencies and corporate donors for approval. Professor of Design, Miho Mazereeuw and Professor of Medicine Judith Palfrey joined Doug in leading each of the teams' efforts. (see Faculty bios) Ivan Cartes, the Regions' director for recovery efforts was instrumental in connecting the program with local volunteers, government officials, and leaders.

Harvard's DRCLAS Regional Office, Professor Ahler's partner in the effort, will provide follow-up and further logistical support to shepherd the programs through the funding process.

At the concluding meeting in Concepcion Professor Ahlers made clear that the program will take place over several years.



A community leader in Dichato meeting the Kennedy School team January 11, 2012

SUP-607M: Community Recovery: Rebuilding Disaster Damaged Communities in Chile

Description

This course presents disaster recovery theory and practices via a January practicum in Chile. Applies community development and disaster recovery skills in field-based team projects that assist the residents of earthquake damaged neighborhoods of Chile. Students will work with the government of Chile and with local communities (the “clients”) to help them recover from their 2010 8.8 magnitude earthquake and tsunami which damaged 370,000 homes. Students are assigned to teams of 4-5, and each team is assigned a project selected by the instructor and the client. The teams travel to Chile where they spend January Term developing project workplans, presentations, and project work-outputs (client deliverables) that are professional quality written documents or reports. The goal of this course is to apply classroom learned skills in a real-world, high-stakes situation. The teams are largely self-directed and self-organizing. Part of the Immersive learning experience is being “dropped” into a strange city with an enormous task and a short timeframe to complete the project. Student travel, modest accommodations in Chile, and most meals will be provided. The course will be conducted in English with translation services available when working in the field with government officials, community leaders and residents.



Professor Doug Ahlers, Ivan Cartes, head of reconstruction from the Regional governor’s office, and Mercela Renteria of the DRCLAs Regional Office in Chile in Cobquecura, the epicenter of the Feb 27, 2010 earthquake.