The urban environment, which includes built elements, social structures, land, and ecology, is becoming progressively more fragile as a result of uncontrolled urbanization. Consequently, urban populations face increasing risks associated with economic, social, and environmental crises. Nowhere is this more evident than in countries where urban in-migration and population growth outpace local governments’ capacity to meet basic needs, plan and finance growth, and address growing vulnerabilities within their villages, towns, and cities.

UN-HABITAT supports national governments, local authorities, and civil society to strengthen their capacity in managing human-made and natural disasters affecting human settlements. This applies to the prevention and mitigation of disasters, as well as rehabilitating human settlements and addressing the needs of displaced populations. UN-HABITAT’s mandate is derived from the Habitat Agenda and resolutions of the agency’s Governing Council and the UN General Assembly.

The normative framework for UN-HABITAT’s work in this arena is its Strategic Policy on Human Settlements in Crisis, together with the Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction Framework. The work is carried out through three primary mechanisms: ‘prospecting’ or undertaking programme formulation initiatives in countries and cities facing or recovering from crisis; ‘programming’ or managing the mainstreaming and oversight of the implementation of the agency’s normative framework and the production of tools, learning materials, and guidelines derived from its work; and ‘promotion’ or engaging in advocacy, outreach, networking, and partnerships within the international aid community.

UN-HABITAT strongly encourages the earliest engagement by local authorities in defining risks, assessing capacities, establishing stakeholder systems, and building financial resources for reducing risk. The failure to do so is often sadly illustrated in the loss of life, property, infrastructure, and social systems during a crisis. Ironically, it is typically only after a disaster that local and national governments wake up to the vulnerabilities of their urban settlements and see opportunities to reduce vulnerability and create resilience. However, “building back better” requires certain key principles: a compact with all stakeholders — including, where applicable, the international aid community and local national governments — to work towards a common purpose; a commitment to analyse previous and future vulnerability and mitigate risk through reconstruction; and finally, an honest appraisal of the capacity to deliver and a commitment to address any limitations to ensure sustainability.

Housing

Promoting stronger housing and holistic reconstruction

UN-HABITAT provides policy and technical advice to governments, humanitarian actors, and communities to support hazard-resistant housing reconstruction. Our approach is based on the following principles:

- Survivors of a crisis are the agents of their own recovery. They should not be treated as liabilities, but as assets to be mobilized and supported.
- Promoting safe return to habitable houses is critical, combined with advice on hazard-resistant reconstruction.
- Traditional building materials and culturally acceptable forms and techniques are the foundation for reconstruction and must be improved, not replaced.
- Housing solutions must be complemented by initiatives to address land use, tenure, livelihoods, and critical infrastructure and services. Experience has shown that temporary solutions have a way of becoming permanent.

UN-HABITAT CRISIS WORK:
EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES WORLDWIDE

Haiti
- Technical advice to local administrations on house reconstruction; land rights, use and planning; Community Resource Centres

Mexico
- Implementation of risk mapping for earthquakes and other hazards; disaster management programming

Colombia
- Support in housing, planning and urban governance, land issues, analysis of national laws on land, capacity building training

Ecuador
- Adaptation to climate change, land use planning

Peru
- Property rights documentation, earthquake-resistant housing techniques

Chile
- Creation of resource centre to support the community in housing reconstruction

South Sudan
- Support to the Land Commission, urban planning and management

Kosovo
- Land conflict mediation and policy development

DRC
- Municipal spatial planning, rebuilding the cadastre, and residential property restitution

Liberia
- Support to the Land Commission on land dispute resolution

From crisis to opportunity:
UN-HABITAT’s response to disaster and conflict

Helping cities and communities reduce risks and transition from crisis to sustainable urban development.
These principles have been proved time and again in a variety of contexts. In Aceh, Indonesia, UN-HABITAT supported the reconstruction of over 4,500 houses, which included planning, land rights, and water and sanitation inputs. In Pakistan, the agency worked with the Government of Pakistan and partners to design and implement a housing reconstruction training and quality control programme for the entire earthquake-affected area. In Mozambique, the agency demonstrated innovative flood-resistant construction techniques for schools and clinics to enable communities to ‘live with risk’.

In recognition of UN-HABITAT’s approach, an agreement was reached with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and UNHCR (Inter-Agency Standing Committee Global Shelter Cluster Leads) to initiate recovery during emergency phases.

**Land**

**Addressing the root causes of conflict worldwide**

Land issues are critical to addressing the root causes of violent conflict and rebuilding communities after natural disasters. Failure to address land issues early and effectively can delay transition from humanitarian assistance, undermine the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, contribute to (renewed) conflict, and prevent stability and recovery.

In Kosovo, UN-HABITAT led the first UN-based residential property restitution programme, resolving over 29,000 claims. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the agency currently operates land conflict mediation centres in the east while supporting the development of new land policy in Kinshasa. After the 2007 earthquake in Peru, the organization assisted households to obtain legal land documents, ensuring that women could also be named as property owners or tenants, and has prepared similar support for the Government of Haiti. In Afghanistan, UN-HABITAT helped Kandahar Municipality provide secure land rights to 10,000 internally displaced persons as part of an informal settlement-upgrading programme. After the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, the agency supported the government to provide land for 14,000 ‘landless’ families. UN-HABITAT worked with communities in Indonesia and Sri Lanka to confirm land rights to enable them to rebuild their homes after the 2004 tsunami. In Liberia, the organization is supporting the land commission to prepare a public land inventory and develop a nationwide land dispute resolution system.

At the global level, UN-HABITAT is mainstreaming land issues in humanitarian response through a variety of mechanisms: the Housing, Land, and Property Working Group within the humanitarian cluster system; collaboration with UNEP and UNDP on land and natural resource conflict; and promotion of land policy and land tool development through the Global Land Tool Network.

**Critical infrastructure and services**

**Protecting basic services and ensuring post-disaster recovery**

Affordable basic services and infrastructure in cities are some of the most important engines of sustainable urbanization. However, dependency on services and infrastructure also represents a key point of vulnerability for urban populations during disasters. UN-HABITAT’s experience in natural or human-made disasters — such as the most recent ones in Haiti, Pakistan, and Madagascar — demonstrate that, while the availability of a reliable and affordable water supply is an essential feature of cities, its sudden disruption creates threats and increases the vulnerability of crisis-affected populations. Urbanization, a changing climate, and social instability add layers of complexity to the challenge, and loss of other service capacity (such as solid or liquid waste management) exacerbates already critical conditions. It is the intersection of all of these vulnerabilities with natural or human-made crises that concerns UN-HABITAT.
UN-HABITAT offers technical support and a network of experts to service global and national counterparts, local communities, and local governments in improving the provision of services to ensure adequate critical infrastructure protection and rehabilitation. This includes strengthening the governance of service provision, the adaptation of specific tools for assessment, and the implementation of indicators for early warning on potential disasters, climate change-induced threats, and other hazards faced by cities throughout the world.

**Planning**

**Building back better**

Strategic spatial planning is a powerful tool to “build back better” in crisis-affected countries. It provides an integrative framework for assistance; puts the focus on building back communities by linking housing with basic services and infrastructure and the essential urban recovery elements of environmental remediation and livelihoods; and enables more equitable and sustainable use of space. This is necessary when emergency response runs the risk of entrenching inequitable land use or legitimizing unjust outcomes of conflict.

UN-HABITAT has provided technical support in Kosovo, Somalia, and Sudan, where spatial planning exercises allowed land redistribution for the durable settlement of over 1,000 long-term displaced families, while providing guidance to urban growth. Its planning expertise facilitated the rebuilding of communities in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, following the tsunami in 2004 and in Pakistan following the earthquake in 2005. The potential to increase the impact of response and mitigate risks in complex urban areas is enormous, as demonstrated in Port-au-Prince following the earthquake in 2010. In Kosovo, the crisis provided an opportunity to put in place more appropriate planning practices derived from the development of a new “national” spatial plan and prepare the ground for sustainable recovery.

Globally, UN-HABITAT plays a key role in putting spatial planning back at the core of the global drive towards sustainable urbanization and development. Country-level experiences are used to further develop planning approaches that facilitate risk mitigation, adaptation, and more equitable access to land. Perhaps more importantly, as noted following the Haiti earthquake in January 2010, they highlight the need for immediate planning measures following crises.

The sustainable functioning of any urban environment is severely compromised when disasters occur, and integrating the key points of vulnerability in a robust sustainable recovery agenda remains a challenge both prior to and after crises. UN-HABITAT is committed to supporting communities, local and national governments, and our partners to make cities more resilient — preferably before crises occur and definitely after they do.

**RESOURCES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Approx. Total Budget (USD)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>2010</td>
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**APPROX. TOTAL BUDGET PER YEAR (USD) AS OF NOV. 2010**

**HIGHLIGHT: ACCESSING LAND INFORMATION AND SUPPORTING CONFLICT RESOLUTION THROUGH LAND MEDIATION CENTRES IN EASTERN CONGO**

After 12 months of operation in the post-conflict eastern Democratic Republic of Congo environment, UN-HABITAT has built a systematic land dispute resolution framework and a political forum for addressing land issues through a land coordination group within the Provincial Ministry of Land Affairs.

Through the permanent deployment of land mediators in the eastern provinces, UN-HABITAT has established a comprehensive database of existing land disputes in order to support conflict resolution. Land has been secured for displaced persons as well as for the indigenous Pygmy and local communities. The establishment of land mediation centres at the lowest administrative level facilitates easy access to land information and supports conflict resolution.

“We feel that the land mediation centre has helped the population considerably,” said Bazinkee Mboneke, a resident of Kitchanga in the eastern provinces. “This centre assists us free of charge, and we have never heard it said that you are corrupt, as is the case in the local customary or judicial bodies in the region. You also don’t leave people out, no matter what their social status, their ethnicity, their tribe. You welcome them without discrimination — and this is an important reason for the success of this centre”. The strong role UN-HABITAT played in raising land as a major issue for sustainable development and the concrete demonstration of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms have generated a solid commitment from the government and the international community to seriously tackle land issues.

Hazards cannot be avoided, but prevention and preparedness are within the reach of city and national governments. For this reason, a key area of work for the agency is ensuring protection and early recovery of basic service provision and critical infrastructure for water, sanitation, and waste management and hygiene systems. In addition, UN-HABITAT provides immediate support for social infrastructure such as community-based institutions and health, education, and governance systems.