

URBAN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

UN-HABITAT IN DISASTER
& CONFLICT CONTEXTS

Mathare slums, Kenya 2010. © Julius Mwelu/UN-HABITAT



UN HABITAT URBAN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN DISASTER & CONFLICT

With global urbanisation more crises are occurring in cities. There is an increasing recognition that preventing and responding to urban crises is fundamentally different from rural contexts.

Cities, with their concentration of people, buildings, infrastructure and hazards, are much more complex operating environment than rural areas.

Cities present new challenges, such as coordination of multiple stakeholders, relating to national and local authorities, safety and security, etc. At the same time, cities also present opportunities for increased efficiency and effectiveness, building on the capacities of local authorities, organised communities and the private sector.

Recent humanitarian operations in Pakistan, Philippines, Afghanistan and Haiti highlight the need to adapt humanitarian approach tools, knowledge, expertise and partnerships to urban contexts.

10 principles for resilient cities

- 1 Put in place organization and coordination to understand and reduce disaster risk
- 2 Assign a budget for disaster risk reduction and provide incentives
- 3 Maintain up-to-date data on hazards and vulnerabilities, prepare risk assessments and use these as the basis for urban development plans and decisions
- 4 Invest in and maintain critical infrastructure that reduces risk
- 5 Assess the safety of all schools and health facilities and upgrade these
- 6 Apply and enforce realistic, risk-compliant building regulations and land use planning principles
- 7 Ensure education programmes and training on disaster risk reduction are in place
- 8 Protect ecosystems and natural buffers to mitigate hazards
- 9 Install early warning systems and emergency management capacities
- 10 After any disaster, ensure that the needs of the survivors are placed at the centre of reconstruction

Making Cities Resilient Campaign where UN-HABITAT is a member
www.unisdr.org/english/campaigns/campaign2010-2011



Issues

Vulnerability and Crisis

In urban settings, it is often difficult to distinguish between chronic vulnerability and crisis. Conventional approaches to needs assessment, beneficiary identification and the provision of humanitarian assistance become extremely complicated. A holistic, community approach is proving more effective.

Density and Lack of Space

Access to certain parts of a city – particularly dense informal settlements – can be challenging even in a non-crisis environment. In a crisis context, debris, human remains, toxic substances and engineered structures complicate humanitarian action.

Coordination with Multiple Stakeholders

Government authorities (national and local), service providers (public and private) and civil society organisations make coordination for preparedness and response extremely challenging. Building on the knowledge and networks of local actors, however, can improve the quality of crisis response. Capacity-building is critical.

Predominance of Informal and Customary Land Tenure

Land records and information exist in urban areas, but tend to be out of date or subject to fraud. Moreover, informal settlement residents often do not have legally recognized forms of evidence of their land rights, which can complicate efforts to reduce risks or respond to crises.

Violence and Insecurity

In some contexts, the State may not have effective control over some parts of the city or security concerns may impede humanitarian access. Dealing with informal or 'criminal' authorities presents challenges for urban preparedness and response.

Cash Economy

Vulnerability assessments and response programmes must take into account the fact that the urban poor pay for goods and services: food, water, rent, health care, school, etc. Cash-based programming is proving an important tool in urban response.

Approach

Addressing the root causes of urban risk

Combining urban preparedness plans with efforts to address the root causes of vulnerability: chronic urban poverty. Without addressing the root causes, cities will be trapped in repeated cycles of humanitarian crisis.

Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction

Risk reduction and mitigation measures should be incorporated in all sectoral interventions before and after a crisis. A multi-dimensional approach to urban vulnerability should be adopted.

Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction

The cornerstone of UN-HABITAT's strategy is to leverage investment in the emergency and recovery phases into the longer term development of cities. The process of long-term reconstruction and economic recovery should begin at the earliest stages of humanitarian response.

Empowering Local Authorities and Government

Local authorities represent the front line of emergency response and the institution that will be left behind once international actors leave. Strengthening the capacities of local authorities and Governments is critical to breaking the cycle of repeated humanitarian crises.

Coordination

Creating cross-sectoral coordination mechanism to bring together all the stakeholders and resources to improve effectiveness and efficiency of preparedness and response.

People Centred Approach

Working with organised urban communities as the foundation for local governance and programming; ensuring linkages to city and national authorities.

Examples of UN-HABITAT urban preparedness and crisis response activities

- Mexico
Urban risk assessments in Tijuana
- Ecuador
Risk mapping for floods and landslides; updating of cadastre
- Peru
Reconstruction plans incorporating risk reduction in Ica province 2007

Haiti
Development of urban reconstruction plans and safe return strategy for Port au Prince

Mozambique
National DRR, city adaptation and mitigation plan

Kenya
Urban preparedness and coordination with OCHA

Madagascar
Developing pilot urban early warning systems and improving urban preparedness for disasters in Antananrivo (2011)

Pakistan
Pakistan urban recovery interventions in post 2005 Earthquake

Nepal
Developing pilot urban early warning systems and improving urban preparedness for disasters in Antananrivo (2011)

Myanmar
Improving community water supply and urban sanitation in post Nargis recovery

Lao
Emergency Shelter provision for populations affected by Typhoon Ketsana (2009)

Philippines
City DRR and adaptation and mitigation plans

South Pacific
Urban risk reduction and contingency planning on climate change impacts



Urban risk reduction and climate change: risk assessment and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Urban reconstructions plans: technical and policy advice

Coordination and convening of urban stakeholders

Human settlements planning: spatial and strategic planning support

Housing, land and property rights

Shelter and housing reconstruction

Critical infrastructure rehabilitation and recovery, including water and sanitation

Women and youth

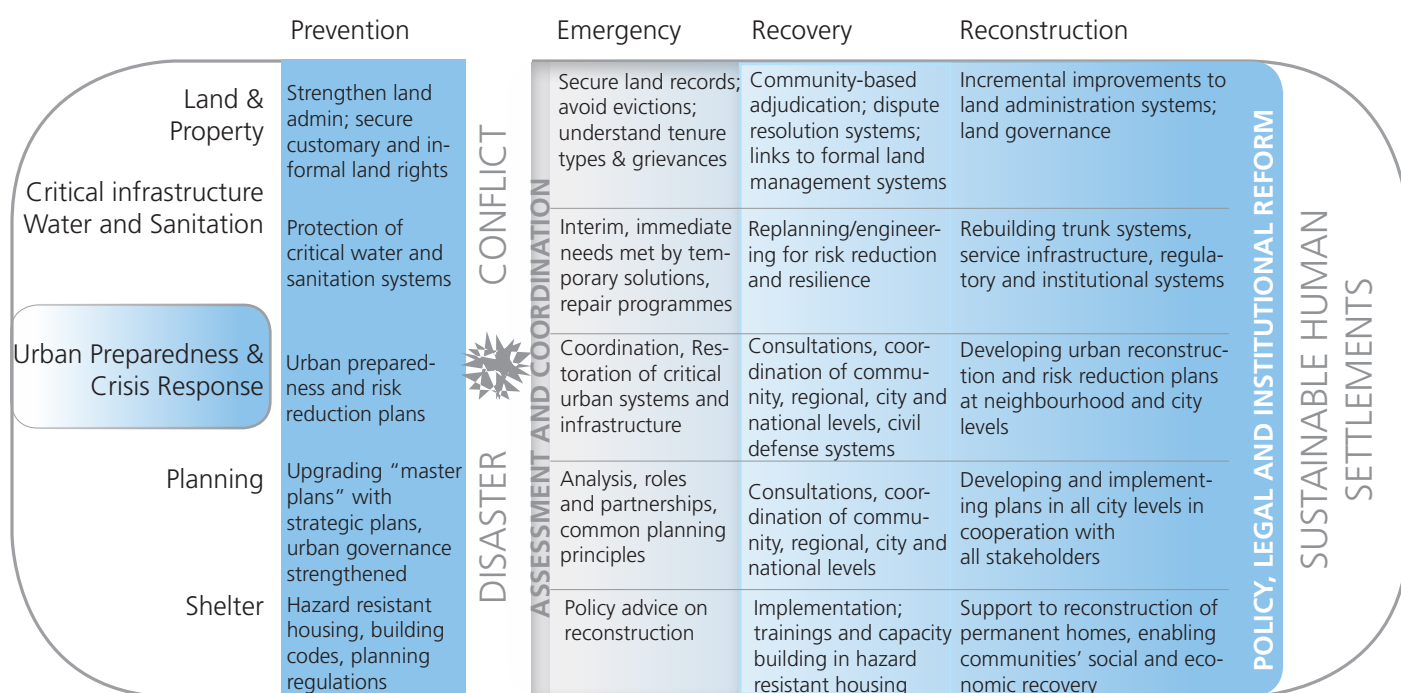
Promoting leadership and participation of women in preparedness and crisis response through local recovery committees. Involving woman and youth in decision-making and reconstruction implementation at neighbourhood level.

Governance

Using emergencies to strengthen governance as part of an overall institution and capacity building strategy.

Environment

Linking vulnerability reduction to risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation.



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Networks and Partners

IASC Reference Group on Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas
Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (APDC)
ISDR Making Cities Resilient Campaign
Cities and Climate Change Initiative
Earthquakes and Mega-Cities Initiative
Cities, Conflict and State Fragility - London School of Economics
Urban Food Security Network
National Disaster Coordination Committees
International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC)
Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction

Publications and Resources

Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction (SRR)
Strategic Policy on Human Settlements in Crisis
Disaster Assessment Portal
Hyogo Framework for Action
IASC strategy on Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas
Post disaster and post conflict needs assessment tools
Local Estimate of Needs for Shelter and Settlement, LENSS
RADIUS: Urban Risk Assessment Tools
Planning Sustainable Cities - UN-HABITAT practices 2010
Quick guide to post-crisis urban planning, forthcoming
Global report on human settlements, 2007 and 2009
Urban Risk Assessment, World Bank