



Building Urban Resilience in the Face of Crisis

A Focus on People and Systems

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Working Group 4 is led by



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COVER PHOTO

Mar Elias Palestinian Camp in Beirut. Civil society organizations are leveraging the presence of refugees to contribute to the community.

Photo: Jacob Russell, IRC.

About the Global Alliance

The Global Alliance for Urban Crises (the 'Alliance') is a global, multi-disciplinary and collaborative community of practice. The Alliance acts as an inclusive platform bringing together local governments, built environment professionals, academics, humanitarian and development actors, working to arrive at systemic change in the way we enable cities and urban communities to prevent, prepare for, and respond to urban crisis.

Launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, the Alliance is guided by the Urban Crisis Charter, which outlines four main commitments made by its members: 1) Prioritize local municipal leadership in determining response to urban crisis that is aligned with development trajectories and promotes the active participation of affected people – with special attention to the participation of women – and other key urban stakeholders; 2) Adopt urban resilience as a common framework to align human rights, humanitarian and development goals; 3) Manage urban displacement as a combined human rights, development and humanitarian concern; and 4) Build partnerships between city, national, regional and global levels across disciplines and professions, as well as ensure the involvement of local government and professional associations.

About this Document

This document is part of a series of knowledge products produced through the Alliance Working Groups, with financial support from EU Humanitarian Aid. The series are key steps in driving an agenda of change, when it comes to: 1) developing a better shared understanding of the complexities of urban crises; 2) strengthening engagement between local governments and humanitarian and development actors in particular; 3) developing a systems approach to protracted urban displacement; and 4) building urban resilience in the face of crisis. In addition, the Alliance also supported the development of an Urban Competency Framework, an HPN Good Practice Review, and a case study on urban disaster response in the Philippines.

Members of all Alliance constituencies in different geographic regions and a broad range of experts, have been engaged through joint consultations, and directly informed and contributed to the content of the Knowledge Products. Visit www.urbancrises.org to access the entire series.

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About this paper

This paper represents an understanding of urban resilience in relation to urban crises from the perspective of the members of the Global Alliance for Urban Crises (GAUC), all of which have different mandates, responsibilities and areas of focus. Constituencies span across civil society, local authorities, academia, and the built environment, as well as humanitarian and development agencies. What unites this diverse group is the pursuit of building urban resilience before, during, and after crises, be they naturally-triggered or human-induced, localized or widespread across cities or towns. With this diversity of the audience in mind, the purpose of this paper is to provide high-level guidance on resilience building to better link short-term, life-saving responses to longer-term, more sustainable programming throughout a crisis.

Methodology

The methodology comprises primary and secondary data collection and analysis. A desk review of recent academic and gray literature was used with a particular focus on reports, frameworks, assessments and evaluations. Three focus group discussions (FGDs) were held to understand activities undertaken by various stakeholders to build the resilience of people and the urban services that serve. The first FGD was conducted online with members from the Alliance; the latter two took place at a GAUC Regional Consultation in Kampala, Uganda, which included local authorities, INGOs, and civil society organizations from Uganda, Kenya, and Somalia. A questionnaire was used to collect data from 12 local authorities from six countries at the United Cities and Local Governments conference in Surabaya, Indonesia.

Summary

This paper begins with an explanation of the value of resilience in relation to crisis response. It then discusses how towns and cities can be viewed as systems (interconnected components), and how a focus on the interconnectedness of people and systems such as water, power, housing and healthcare, for example, may provide a more relevant and appropriate response to urban crises. The aim of focusing on resilient urban systems and people before and after a crisis is to bring about a more sustainable urban future in line with global frameworks, such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the New Urban Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

To this end, the paper presents five priorities for building resilient urban systems and people before, during and after a naturally-triggered or human-induced crisis.

Priority 1: Respond to today's needs while planning for the future

Priority 2: Develop a common understanding of the situation through urban analysis tools

Priority 3: Prioritize essential services as a starting point in crisis response

Priority 4: Support local actors to re-imagine and re-design urban systems

Priority 5: Understand and act on the pledge to leave no one behind

Lack of sufficient infrastructure is a chronic problem in Kampala's low income informal settlements where many refugees reside.
Photo: Samer Saliba, IRC



Resilience

Resilience as a lens for crisis response has convening power. It can rally a diverse range of stakeholders around the same goal of building capacity to survive, recover, adapt and transform in the face of shocks and stresses.

Resilience re-asserts fundamental principles that have been tested over decades – that humanitarian action is most effective when it is people-centred and accompanied by preparedness and mitigation¹. Crucially, resilience is about the need for protection and vulnerability reduction, key components of the Humanitarian Charter² for disaster and conflict response. It is an investment in longer-term outcomes referred to as ‘resilience dividends’.

While there are many definitions of resilience, this paper draws from the Rockefeller Foundation’s articulation of urban resilience as “...**the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses and systems within a city to survive, adapt and thrive no matter what kinds of chronic stresses or acute shocks they encounter**”³. In order to protect and enhance people’s lives, a resilient city engages those within its jurisdiction to conduct assessments, make plans and act in ways that protect development gains that foster a positive environment for investment⁴.

Practically speaking, urban resilience building occurs before a disaster strikes through preparedness, mitigation and prevention activities. It also occurs after a disaster through recovery activities that allow for adaptation and positive transformation. In many ways, a disaster is a test of urban resilience.

Resilient urban systems and people

Urban resilience may be more readily understood through systems thinking. Systems thinking reframes the way we understand a city and likens it to a human body, where, when one part is affected, it will have implications on the body as a whole⁵. Systems are “an interconnected collection of components (e.g. people, institutions, infrastructure, societal norms, economy or ecosystems), organized in a pattern or structure that changes frequently”⁶. A systems thinking approach recognizes interconnections between components in the knowledge that a part of something influences the whole. An urban system is comprised of complex networks and elements. Individual components relate to one another with intended and unintended results. For example, a road intended for cars might become host to ad hoc food and drink stalls, creating a link between mobility, income generation and social interaction.

When working effectively, individual components of a city interact to create an overall sense of productivity, liveability and resilience. For example, in 2018, the world’s top three most liveable cities were listed as Vienna (Austria), Melbourne (Australia), and Osaka (Japan)⁷. The cities were described as one entity, but in fact, they consist of many diverse parts, such as neighborhoods, schools, hospitals, roads and parks, ranging in the ways they meet people’s needs – from not well to very good. When towns and cities are not managed well, systems begin to create inequality, giving way to irreversible environmental damage, urban fragility, violence, crime, terrorism and unmanaged waves of migration that can have ripple effects right across the urban-rural spectrum.

A systems approach differs from other resilience approaches because it looks at the city as a system in itself, instead of addressing the work of individual government departments or humanitarian sectors⁸. For the humanitarian sector in particular, traditional ways of responding to crises require a fundamental rethink that includes three key notions: 1) recognition of municipal leadership and responsibility for service provision; 2) the diverse forms of private sector partnerships that enable service provision; and 3) the urban connectedness that comes from

UN-Habitat's eight urban systems

1. Built environment (urban form; land tenure; housing; built assets)
2. Supply chain and logistics (water resources; energy resources; food supply; logistics/freight movement)
3. Basic infrastructure (energy; water; solid waste; telecommunications)
4. Mobility (urban mobility; inter-regional mobility)
5. Municipal public services (cemeteries and crematoriums; civil registration; criminal justice and law enforcement; cultural heritage and activities; emergency and rescue services; food inspection and monitoring institutions; communicable diseases surveillance and response system; municipal taxes and fines; public lighting)
6. Social inclusion and protection (social accountability; access to social protection; access to basic social services)
7. Economy (local economic structure; fiscal stability and municipal finance; market connectivity)
8. Ecology (ecosystem services; ecological footprint; biodiversity and green areas; environmental quality)

Figure 1. UN-Habitat's City Resilience Profiling Programme uses the eight systems above to identify ways to better support local governments and other relevant stakeholders to make urban areas safer, more disaster resilient, and sustainable places to live. Source: UN-Habitat. (2018). *City Resilience Profiling Tool*. Barcelona: UN-Habitat.

centralizing essential goods and services, and the associated challenges with access due to centralization.

Systems thinking can be a useful approach to pair with urban resilience because it offers crisis responders a way to understand how numerous interlinked city processes respond to people's basic needs and well-being. It reveals that problems cannot be fixed with a single solution and that instead, multiple entry points must be found to transform vulnerability and improve urban capacities.

A resilient systems response, as it applies to urban crises, can be used in sudden or slow onset disasters that are naturally-triggered or human-induced, localized within one part of a city or widespread throughout. It can be a helpful way to address shocks such as earthquakes, floods, civil unrest or conflict, as well as stresses such as chronic poverty, high unemployment rates, food or water shortages, inefficient transportation, or strain from hosting large numbers of displaced people.

A systems thinking approach offers crisis responders three key opportunities: **1)** a means of building a common understanding of the ways in which people and the built environment influence each other; **2)** an examination of the processes that connect urban services in order to understand what is happening; and **3)** an approach to problem solving that treats the problem as part of a larger interconnected structure, requiring multiple entry points to influence the problem and the larger structure itself⁹.

As in Figure 1, UN-Habitat's City Resilience Profiling Tool¹⁰ contains eight systems, with sub-systems listed in brackets. Information is gathered about each system and sub-system while analysis maps out the connections that then visually represent the overarching way a town or city functions. For example, in the 'social inclusion and protection' system, there are strong links

between activities related to social accountability, access to social protection, and access to basic social services that then impact how a city or town functions as a whole.

Crisis response priorities for building resilient urban systems and people

A focus on resilience stems from the growing recognition that a long-term lens is critical in crisis response, especially in urban contexts. This is because of the inherently interconnected nature of cities and their systems – as illustrated above – as well as the typically more protracted nature of urban crises, wherein humanitarian action increasingly shifts between interventions that save lives and those that tackle the root causes of vulnerability. The Alliance’s five priorities for building resilient systems and people are presented in this paper.

Priority 1: Respond to today’s needs while planning for years into the future

Crisis responders know that what works in one place may not work in another due to variables in context, relationships, assumptions, coordination mechanisms, capacities, and attitudes¹¹. Responses also vary based on the locations and the types of shocks and stresses that manifest. One overarching priority penetrates these differences and unites actors in a common goal: respond to today’s needs while planning for years into the future.

In towns and cities, short- and long-term needs are intertwined; there is no clear point where humanitarian action stops and development activities start¹². For example, cities like Tripoli in Lebanon and Mafraq in Jordan – each experiencing city-wide stress from mass displacement – require activities that address both short- and long-term needs. In informal settlements, where unmanaged urbanization occurred before the mass displacement, the displacement is creating an even deeper stress on host populations and systems. Such situations demonstrate clear and inextricable links between meeting immediate and basic needs for shelter and food, for example, in addition to the longer-term needs of providing power, water and health care to urban areas that have grown exponentially in a short amount of time.

In order to respond to today’s needs and plan for tomorrow, four key factors come into play:

- 1. When functional and willing, municipalities and local actors are best placed to design legitimate and sustainable responses.** The networked nature of towns and cities means that outsiders can do harm if they impact one part of a network without fully understanding the others, such as serving one population without recognizing the potential tensions this may cause with others. At any stage in a crisis, municipalities have the responsibility to protect those within their jurisdiction. The legitimacy and sustainability of humanitarian responses depends on buy-in from local authorities¹³. Where conflict is present within an urban centre, it is still critical to create links with local authorities. These links can be made by hiring or coordinating with local staff with technical and historical knowledge to develop better access, increase acceptance, and develop systems that will remain in place when humanitarian actors leave¹⁴.
- 2. Urban planning marries the notions of self-recovery and state responsibility while addressing rapid unmanaged urbanization and the impacts of a disaster at the same time.** At its essence, urban planning considers the interconnections between people and places.

It is an appropriate tool that can help identify and protect vulnerable areas, reduce risk, and improve resilience – as much for localized crises, such as the 2015 floods in Chennai, India, or the complete destruction of an urban centre, such as Mosul, Iraq¹⁵. Gender-, age- and disability-responsive urban planning and budgeting produce inclusive service delivery, promotion of health and nutrition, mental well-being and increased opportunities for social cohesion through parks and public spaces, for example. A recent study found that urban planning can empower communities and governments to manage their own recovery, but that, in addition to government and neighborhoods, international support may be required from those with specialist knowledge, experience, time, resources and tools¹⁶.

- 3. Two way communication between affected urban populations and responders is critical to building trust and accountability now and in the future.** The density of urban areas means that two-way communication between disaster-affected people and those meeting their needs should be central before, during, and after a crisis. Urban centres are generally ‘noisy’ due to different stakeholders issuing messages that often conflict and compete for people’s attention¹⁷. When a crisis occurs in towns and cities, rumors may spread quickly due to population density and a vast array of communication technologies. There may also be mistrust in media, government or NGOs by different urban population groups¹⁸. Two-way communication in urban contexts is best achieved through multiple approaches that include working at different scales with local authorities, civil society and professional associations.
- 4. Multi-year funding is required to invest in innovation and research.** When the social, economic, political, and physical fabric of an urban area is dramatically changed by a crisis, recovery can take a long time. Therefore, access to multi-year funding allows towns and cities to adapt or transform the multiple urban systems and networks that need attention to adequately and effectively serve people¹⁹. Moreover, multi-year responses allow actors to analyze past responses in order to generate evidence about good practice for investing in technical capacity, partnerships, innovation and new ways of working together. United Cities and Local Government (UCLG), a global network of local and regional authorities, supports the shift to multi-year funding in order to create a more meaningful balance between immediate humanitarian responses and longer-term structural recovery through guidance by local authorities²⁰.

Priority 2: Develop a common understanding of the situation through urban analysis tools

Urban density and diversity requires resilience practitioners to grapple with ‘wicked problems’ – highly complex and difficult issues that are tangled together with governance, economics, the environment and power, and therefore cannot be solved in isolation²¹. A wicked problem is one that stakeholders have difficulty defining. With wicked problems, such as poverty or a crisis, there is no simple solution. Instead, an approach that prods at the multiple components (e.g. the built environment, the economy or supply chains) that create the wicked problem is required.

To this end, one of the key priorities in urban crisis preparedness and response is to gain a common understanding of the ways in which people and the built environment influence one another. Joint data collection and analysis that include numerous perspectives, empirical facts and figures make for a credible, sound and valid evidence base from which to make decisions. Data analysis can be challenging when a diverse range of stakeholders seeks to agree on trends and patterns within a town or city. Yet, the value in doing so comes not only from the results, but also from the process of negotiating the results. Developing a common understanding of an urban context can be a political exercise that tacitly identifies different stakeholders values,

visions, power and influence. For instance, the sprawl of informal settlements might be influenced by the state of the housing market, unemployment rates, the presence or absence of climate-related hazards, powerful politicians and access to public transport. Analyzing why people in informal settlements are increasingly exposed to more hazards requires robust discussion by people who live in and design the city.

An urban situation analysis (before or after a crisis) should seek to answer²²:

- What is happening?
- Where?
- Who has needs and what are they?
- Why?

Four common approaches related to understanding needs (including potential needs) and context are shared below.

- 1. Preparedness planning.** Preparedness planning can help a wide range of urban actors understand the context and potential needs of a town or city before a crisis occurs. Disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change adaptation and resilience-building tools and frameworks are commonly used in preparedness planning. A systems-based approach to climate change is taken by the Institute for Social and Environmental Transition (ISET) in its *Climate Resilience Framework and Training Materials*²³. A systems-based approach to resilience is also used in the Child-Centred Urban Resilience Framework developed by Plan International and Arup²⁴. Numerous other preparedness and contingency plans within government departments, organizations and communities that seek to answer what could happen, where and to whom, are helpful approaches to crisis preparedness. Plans that seek to create a baseline understanding amongst key actors of what is 'normal' in order to prevent, prepare and manage agreed upon risks are particularly helpful.
- 2. Context analysis.** A context analysis aims to uncover the underlying social, political, economic and spatial factors that may affect humanitarian interventions²⁵. Conducting a context analysis with multiple actors helps develop a common understanding of what is taking place in a town or city in order to make decisions based on evidence.

Due to the high degree of urban connectivity, tools for conducting an urban context analysis tend to focus on the city or neighborhood level rather than households or individuals²⁶. An example of a context analysis tool that uses urban systems thinking is the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) *Urban Context Analysis Toolkit*, which focuses on five themes: 1) politics and governance, 2) social and cultural, 3) economics, 4) service delivery and infrastructure, and settlements. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has developed *Guidelines for Resilience Systems Analysis*²⁷ that enable multiple stakeholders to conduct analysis in order to design a road map to inform both short- and long-term programming. Mercy Corps also has a systems-focused situation analysis tool called STRESS, which assists to "understand the resilience capacities people, households, communities and systems need to prepare for, manage and recover from shocks and stresses and reducing vulnerability over time"²⁸.

- 3. Needs assessment; vulnerability and capacity analysis (VCA).** A needs assessment seeks to understand what humanitarian assistance is needed, often factoring in vulnerabilities and capacities as well. In situations of conflict, humanitarians are increasingly likely to include an assessment of both displaced and host populations²⁹. Needs assessments are carried out with the goal of: 1) protecting human life; 2) responding in a way that is proportionate to the scale and nature of the unmet humanitarian needs; and 3) alleviating suffering – all in a timely manner³⁰. A needs assessment seeks to be a process that is a 'good enough' analysis of the



Children affected by conflict in Bangui, Central African Republic. Understanding the unique needs of certain populations is critical to building urban resilience. Photo: Simoné Giovetti, UCLG.

situation at hand to allow decision makers to come up with a practical and simple approach rather than a complicated one³¹. In an urban crisis, the numerous aid agencies conducting needs assessments often overwhelm local authorities with different information requests that once analyzed, may not circle back to local government to use. One way of overcoming the challenge of multiple assessments is to use a joint needs assessment tool that involves ownership from the local government. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has a multi-stakeholder tool called *Post Disaster Needs Assessment*³², which aims to produce an overall picture of needs in the immediate weeks after a crisis and is conducted under leadership of the affected country government and its sub-divisions.

In regard to a vulnerability and capacity analysis of people and urban systems, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) offers a tool called the *City-wide Risk Assessment: Do-It-Together Toolkit for Building Urban Community Resilience*³³. This tool provides a way to identify the core urban systems people rely on, including food, water, shelter, sanitation, energy, transportation, health care, or communication, in order to analyze the vulnerabilities and capacities.

- 4. Profiling.** Profiling is used to protect and assist people at any stage of a crisis by generating agreement on a common understanding of the 'big picture', through identifying what is happening and why. Analysis is conducted by drawing links between urban services, people and their quality of life³⁴. Profiling seeks to generate data about different population groups (such as refugees, economic migrants, poorer urban people or displaced persons from different origins of location) in a particular area in order to understand who is less well off and why.

The approaches described above seek to coordinate with others to collect and analyze disaggregated data in a timely manner, engage a wide number of urban stakeholders who formally and informally shape urban environments at different scales (individual, household, neighborhood, city, nation), assess the nature of a situation in addition to community capacities and vulnerabilities, and make information publicly available.

Priority 3: Prioritize essential services as a starting point in crisis response

Essential services are elements that sustain lives and livelihoods and ensure protection of affected groups in an urban crisis, including water, power, solid waste management, transportation, telecommunications, and waste removal. In urban areas, meeting basic needs through the provision of essential urban services can be the foundation for realizing human and child rights as is highlighted in the *Child-Centred Urban Resilience Framework*³⁵.

When prioritizing essential services, systems thinking deliberately draws out the interdependencies between systems, and how a problem with one system might lead to a problem in another system. For example, the International Committee of the Red Cross observes “damage to an electrical transformer can immediately shut down the water supply to an entire neighborhood or hospital, which will in turn negatively impact public health”³⁶. Furthermore, the agency notes, “the sustainability of urban services is essential as people’s means of survival and involves technical capacity of unprecedented sophistication... System continuity involves maintaining supplies, staffing and repairs over years”³⁷.

Municipal governments have primary responsibility for taking care of the people within their jurisdiction³⁸. Other actors – humanitarian and development agencies, academics, civil society, built environment professionals – all have a supporting role to play. When prioritizing essential services, four observations that may strengthen essential service provision in a more inclusive manner are provided below.

- 1. Gender, age and disability may require users to engage with services differently.** For example, women travelling on a bus may face issues of harassment, while older people may find it a struggle to take public transport without a bench to sit on while waiting. Mapping access to essential services from perspectives such as these can help identify how to supplement actions taken by governments, the private sector or NGOs³⁹. This is particularly important given that women, children, and other vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected by crisis, and so pre-existing vulnerabilities may be compounded during or after a disaster.
- 2. Actively and thoughtfully engage with the links between basic services and informality.** For example, the right to work and the need for ‘decent work’⁴⁰ requires a policy response as well as a spatial one. Urban planning measures can be used to develop access to roads and other infrastructure that connect low-income settlements to the rest of the city⁴¹. Consider the ways in which tenure affects access to services. A continuum of land rights approaches exists, such as land readjustment (land owners voluntarily contribute their land to urban development), land pooling (pooling rights into a single partnership), or land sharing (for example when a land owner transfers part of the land occupied by an informal settlement to the informal occupants)⁴².
- 3. Consider taking a place-based approach to urban crisis response in recognition of “the totality of people’s lives that goes beyond immediate post-disaster needs”⁴³.** Place-based approaches isolate a geographical area of the city, based on formal or informal boundaries of a neighborhood, settlement or area in order to strengthen the full range of essential services that people need to survive and thrive. When engaging in place-based approaches, consider the ways in which access to essential services promotes social mixing, encourages inclusion, generates income, and impacts on health and safety.
- 4. Offer technical support to local authorities to support urban planning and design-related recovery activities.** Examples of hiring local technical staff to support ongoing work in municipal departments are provided by UN-Habitat in the Philippines, where local urban planners were hired to provide additional support after Typhoon Haiyan⁴⁴. Municipalities may also find it useful to deploy staff from other cities within the country to support during a crisis, particularly in regard to coordination with humanitarian and other agencies. An example of the promotion of technical assistance is that of UCLG’s Task Force for Prevention and Management of Territorial Crises⁴⁵, whereby vulnerable local governments, especially those in disaster-prone regions, are provided peer support for managing funds and planning activities related to disaster preparedness and response.

Priority 4: Support local actors to re-imagine and re-design urban systems

Revisiting the metaphor at the beginning of this paper, if the city is like a body, then local actors are the lifeblood that flows through the body. Whatever happens to the city affects its local actors, and vice versa. Therefore, before, during and after a crisis, urban systems should be re-imagined and re-designed by local actors with support from international organizations, not the reverse. In this paper, local actors are defined as an individual or organization from a crisis-affected area or country who or which has influence on the town or city where the response is taking place⁴⁶. Some examples of local actors include political parties, media, chambers of commerce, private businesses, youth councils, service providers, gangs, law enforcement, financial institutions and community-based or faith-based organizations⁴⁷. Below are some of the key challenges and opportunities identified in relation to how different actors within the GAUC can re-imagine and re-design urban systems.

Local authorities

When municipal governments were asked to list primary partners in a crisis for this research, communities, volunteers, businesses, and local leaders were most frequently mentioned. Other key actors that were less frequently mentioned included NGOs, landowners, the police and the military. Reflecting on past crises they faced (floods, earthquakes, tsunami and waves of displacement), most municipal governments expressed a lack of preparedness within the government structures and policy environments as well as within the communities they served. Recommendations by local authorities to better prepare for and respond to urban crisis included: 1) prioritizing DRR and preparedness in long-term development plans; 2) creating integrated multi-disciplinary response groups across different scales of government departments; 3) bolstering community participation; 4) conducting risk mapping of technical environmental risks to better prioritize risk reduction investments; and 5) investing in / or identifying ways of building resilience through local regulations. Moreover, better coordination and collaboration with NGOs and other actors engaged with reconstruction are needed to prevent overlaps with planned or ongoing activities by local authorities. A lack of collaboration can affect markets and delivery of essential services, and lead to tensions between disaster-affected populations, local authorities, and governments.

Civil society

Local actors are not only the first responders when disaster strikes a town or city, but they are also best placed to understand the nuances of their urban systems and context so as to prioritize reconstruction or resilience-building activities. Pre-positioning trust, skills and resources is critical to minimizing the impact of shocks. Activities that require collective action before a disaster, such as savings groups, neighborhood or settlement upgrading programmes, anti-drug programmes and neighborhood policing, adapt and transform into leadership structures, networks and confidence where people can unite to support one another in times of crisis. One such example is the 2011 floods in Bangkok, Thailand, where a settlement upgrading programme in the Bang Bua Canal provided the structure for 12 neighborhoods to pool their savings, community resources and leadership teams to preposition supplies before the flood hit and set up hot food kitchens in the days before emergency assistance arrived⁴⁸.

International agencies

The primary role of international agencies is to support local actors to re-design and re-imagine urban systems to serve people in more inclusive, efficient and effective ways. Despite decades of commitment to 'localization' (the shift of resources and decision-making to local actors), the Start Network⁴⁹ reported that the proportion of aid channelled directly to local and national NGOs in 2015 accounted for just 0.4 per cent of international humanitarian assistance. The World Humanitarian Summit has responded to such trends by calling for a 'participation revolution' with a commitment in its Grand Bargain to providing 25 per cent of global humanitarian funding to local and national responders by 2020 and a specifically articulated localization agenda⁵⁰. Such collaboration often tends to happen when there is a national legal requirement to do so, as in the 2015 Nepal earthquakes⁵¹, the 2018 Sulawesi, Indonesia earthquake⁵², and numerous disaster events in India^{53 54}, where governments are strong and prevent international agencies from responding.

A fundamental change is needed to reform the humanitarian sector's outdated architecture, assumptions, structures and behaviors that largely took shape after World War 1⁵⁵. Today, new models have been proposed for responses in towns and cities, including a 'collaborative model'⁵⁶ by Ramalingham and Mitchell that accounts for the numerous overlaps between various systems and the interconnections that are required for a town or city to function overall. The collaborative model sees local actors taking leadership of the response with international organizations working alongside domestic capacities. This model recognizes that in towns and cities there is no longer a need to set up systems for providing basic needs, as there is in camp settings. Instead, the main task is to strengthen or expand existing infrastructure systems and complex supply chains of private and public mechanisms for providing basic needs such as food, water, sanitation and protection.



Self-built houses on the creek that is prone to flooding with torrential rains in Dosquebradas, Colombia. Photo: Ebru Gencer, CUDRR+R, 2017.

Built environment professionals

In relation to urban resilience, the primary function of built environment professionals, such as architects, engineers, urban designers and planners, is to protect and enhance life through disaster-resilient design and reconstruction activities⁵⁷. They are engaged in the design, planning and construction of the totality of the built environment that comprises a town or city. A research agenda set by the International Council for Research and Innovation for Building⁵⁸, recommends that skills relevant for disaster risk reduction be included as a core competency in practical training, professional development courses and undergraduate degrees for the built environment. In its guidance note for the New Ten Essentials for Making Cities Resilient, the Urban Planning Advisory Group to the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction (UPAG) has recommended that “[r]isk-sensitive urban planning education should be integrated into tertiary education curricula in planning schools. In addition, urban planners who have not received risk-sensitive planning education attend certificate based continuing education classes that are developed in partnership with professional licensing bestowing associations such as Chamber or Association of Planners”⁵⁹.

Evidence of good practice suggests that hiring local built environment professionals to provide technical surge capacity to local government departments in a crisis can be an effective approach to providing surge capacity. An example includes a programme run by UN-Habitat called *Regional Technical Offices for Improving Municipal Planning and Enhancing Local Governance* by recruiting local public and civic workers to enhance service delivery and mainstream planning interventions⁶⁰.

Academic Institutions

Academic institutions and think tanks are often overlooked despite being important sources of knowledge and objective evidence. They play a critical role in monitoring long-term trends and developing an evidence base of good practice. Those who conduct their own evaluations, such as aid agencies and governments, tend to provide subjective evidence suggesting activities and actions taken were largely effective. Yet, many urban residents affected by crisis are being left behind by humanitarian responses. The role of academic institutions is to provide objective evidence about those left behind and identify ways for improving the effectiveness of crisis prevention and response. An example is the assessment of Nepal’s disaster preparedness and response capabilities after the 2015 Nepal earthquakes by the Asia Foundation⁶¹.

Priority 5: Understand and act on the pledge to leave no one behind

The pledge to leave no one behind⁶² “demands explicit action to address the disadvantages, deprivations and discrimination”⁶³. In urban areas, it can be difficult to support people who may be hard to access for whatever reason – be it lack of mobility, reluctance to engage with international actors, or a mistrust of local authorities. Such groups may include labor migrants, refugees, disabled or elderly people, and someone who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex. It can also be difficult to identify hidden problems, for example sexual and gender-based violence, in places such as settlements that are not on official maps, in buildings that did not receive planning permission or on undocumented roads⁶⁴.

The reality is that millions are being left behind everyday by persistent and multiple challenges. For instance, for those trapped in a protracted crisis, there may be no clear path to escaping the impacts of chronic vulnerability, disaster shocks, climate-related stresses and the negative consequences of rapid, unmanaged urbanization. Approaching protracted crisis response in towns and cities requires addressing interconnected issues, such as gaps in social protection and health services, preparedness for climate-related hazards, new forms of violence, and managing the impacts of rapid urbanization⁶⁵.

Leaving no one behind is essentially a ‘demand driven’ approach where those with the greatest needs are prioritized. To this end, asking the right questions and capturing relevant, reliable and disaggregated data that compares different population groups in contexts of crisis is critical to identify who in fact is most vulnerable and why. Doing this in an urban context can be challenging due to the ever-changing nature of the city, the density of people, institutions and buildings, and the diversity of cultures, social norms and languages. Access to information plays an especially critical role in holding institutions accountable, providing feedback and developing an evidence base from which communities can use to design their own initiatives.

For local authorities, leaving no one behind means engaging in fairer planning practices that are more inclusive, strengthening transparency and accountability in governance (for example through participatory budgeting), putting a stop to corruption and taking well-considered action on difficult issues, such as the right to work for refugees. From the perspective of civil society, those most at risk of exploitation often do not have social networks to identify them or help them. Access to local social workers, health visitors, police officers, peace and justice authorities, religious centres and humanitarian protection workers can help with a range of hidden problems, especially for those engaged in informal work or living in informal settlements.

For built environment professionals, leaving no one behind means designing towns and cities that are more inclusive of the needs of disconnected and marginalized groups by designing safe access to services related to transportation, public infrastructure, schools, health care and public spaces. For humanitarian and development agencies, it means finding ways to not only engage marginalized groups on more hidden issues, but to design, implement and monitor projects with such persons in leading roles. It also means putting theories of change into action to address behavior changes that reflect and respect human rights. Finally, for academics, there is a role for this group to be future focused by anticipating upcoming issues, and new ways of intervening while documenting evidence of what works for addressing today’s urban challenges.

Leaving no one behind means doing more than meeting basic needs⁶⁶. It is about working together on development, peace-building, climate change and gender equality to move every person, regardless of their age, gender, nationality, or other characteristic, out of crisis by implementing global frameworks on a local level. These include the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.



View from Tacloban after Typhoon Haiyan. Photo: Simoné Giovetti, UCLG.

On a more local level, the above values can be translated into tools that use systems thinking to identify the multiple root causes of vulnerability and marginalization. For instance, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) has developed a Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises that analyzes systems related to food security, nutrition, food safety, health, hygiene and sanitation, social protection, and education⁶⁷. Organizations such as Mercy Corps use urban systems mapping to better understand resilience through a systems approach. The *Strategic Resilience Assessment Tool (STRESS)*⁶⁸ has been used across a spectrum of urban-rural contexts in Uganda, Niger, Nepal, Mongolia, Myanmar, and specifically in the urban context of Chennai, India after the 2015 floods⁶⁹. Understanding the interconnections between people, urban systems and risk creates opportunity to adapt and adjust programmes, plans and policies.

Conclusion

Central to building resilience to urban crises is the need to anticipate the broad ways in which shocks and stresses might impact people and the urban systems delivering essential services. Within this tenant, the research has identified a pressing responsibility to address several drivers of disaster vulnerability, as well as the daily urban processes that work against resilience. As discussed, these can include mismanagement of urban resources, environmental exploitation, the negative impacts of climate change or, crucially, the negative consequences of rapid demographic shifts and unmanaged urban growth, among others. While prevention may not stop crises from happening, it goes a long way towards reducing impact, making resilience both a goal and a process.

In conclusion, the Alliance emphasizes five priorities for building urban resilience in order to ensure that crisis preparedness, response and recovery mechanisms adopt a longer-term resilience perspective while narrowing existing gaps between humanitarian action and development programming.

1. Given the networked nature of towns and cities, there is no clear moment in urban crises where humanitarian action stops, giving way to development activities. In this context, the **requisite of responding to today's needs while planning for years into the future** can have the convening power to reconcile different perspectives, while addressing interconnectedness between short-term priorities and long-term goals. This necessity for planning ahead needs, first and foremost, strong **local government commitment** matched by adequate **multi-year funding**, both of which can benefit from a spatial urban planning approach in order to build back better and mitigate impacts of future crises.
2. When humanitarian practitioners are confronted with the complexity and diversity of urban systems, a **common understanding of the local context** – namely of how people and the built environment influence each other – is key to tackling systemic problems. While the humanitarian sector has made available a large body of analytical tools and knowledge in this respect, there is still considerable room for harmonization of approaches to urban profiling*, context analysis and vulnerability assessments.
3. **Prioritizing support for services that are essential to sustain people lives and livelihoods in crisis-affected towns and cities.** While municipal authorities have primary responsibility for taking care of the people within their areas of jurisdiction, humanitarian practitioners, development agencies, academics, civil society actors and built environment professionals can all play a key auxiliary role, such as by providing knowledge and technical support. Regardless of the sector, all these players must be aware that different population groups engage with services differently – according to gender, age, culture and disability.
4. As stated above, local actors are the first ones to respond to a crisis, therefore making it imperative that **support is provided to local actors for re-imagining and re-designing crisis-affected towns and cities.** Local actors may include political parties, media, chambers of commerce, youth councils, service providers, gangs, law enforcement, financial institutions, community-based and faith-based organizations, among other players.
5. While different constituency groups may operate with different means, capacities and rationalities, all should **understand and direct their actions on the pledge to leave no one behind.** A 'demand driven' approach, where population groups with the greatest needs are prioritized, leaving no one behind means doing more than just meeting basic needs; it means establishing a continuum between short-term humanitarian intervention and longer-term resilience programming.

* See the Alliance's effort to integrate the various approaches and good practices within urban profiling in the 2018 report entitled, Urban Profiling for Better Responses to Humanitarian Crises.

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Displaced children living in greater Beirut. Many refugees within Lebanon have few options of return while humanitarian assistance remains short term.

Photo: Jacob Russell, IRC.



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