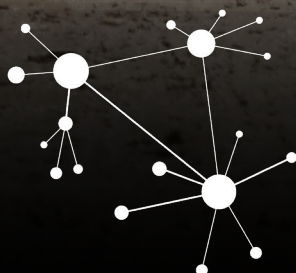# URBAN RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

An enabling institutional and policy framework to support resilient urban recovery at scale and the renewal of the social contract in urban crisis contexts

Policy Brief March 2022

URBAN RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

UN@HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

European Commission

Disclaimer

This product was developed through a multi-stakeholder consortium, under the Urban Recovery Framework (URF) project funded by the European Union.

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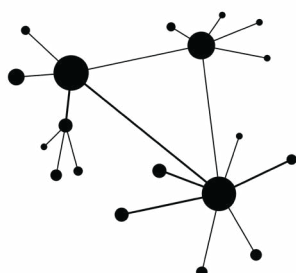
Cover photo: Harasta, Syria. Credit: UN-Habitat

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Photo: Harasta, Syria. Credit: UN-Habitat

Content

A Collaborative Response to Increasingly Urbanised Crises

1. The Urban Recovery Framework (URF) is a key instrument to enhance response to urban crises. The aim of the URF is to create an enabling environment for more effective recovery in urban areas, affected by natural or man-made crises, including conflict. It clarifies institutional and multi-level governance arrangements, policies and plans, the coordination mechanisms and the financing instruments needed to drive and steer the implementation of immediate and medium-term urban recovery interventions while laying the foundations for longer-term resilience. The basis of the framework is urban profiling, an analysis tool that supports a better understanding of displacement patterns, integrates various sectoral assessments of damages and pre-existing vulnerabilities into a spatial analysis of the city. The tool also helps to unpack the complexity of urban areas and systems, preparing the ground for a tailored granular area-based response. As such, the URF is a tool to work across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. It also helps to implement the New Urban Agenda in crisis settings, building back better and supporting cities to gain ground towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and other global agendas such as the Paris Agreement, the Global Compact on Refugees, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

2. The URF is intended as an important addition to the toolbox developed in support of the "Joint Declaration on Post-Crisis Assessments and Recovery Planning" of the European Commission, the United Nations Development Group and the World Bank signed in 2008. The declaration sought to mobilize these institutions and resources to "harmonise and coordinate post-crisis response frameworks to enhance country resilience to crisis, by answering recovery needs of vulnerable populations and strengthening the capacity of national institutions for effective prevention, response and recovery". The declaration outlined a common platform for engagement at global and national levels, as well as methodologies for needs assessments and recovery planning following disaster and conflict. Building on the declaration, the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Union released the "Joint Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessments (RPBAs): A Practical Note to Assessments and Planning" in 2017. The note outlined a joint approach to identify and address recovery and peacebuilding requirements as well as longer-term strategy elaboration in countries facing conflict or transitioning out of a conflict-related crisis.

3. Since the joint declaration was released in 2008, there has been an increase in the number of natural and man-made crises, particularly in complex and high-density urban settings. This includes conflict-induced damage and destruction in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, natural disaster impacts such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the 2019 cyclone in Mozambique and large-scale influxes of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to cities as observed in Lebanon, Somalia and Colombia. These challenges have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in impoverished and underserviced urban areas, and on urban economies and activities, owing to lockdown measures. Even as recently as March 2022, the conflict in Ukraine continues to impress upon the international community the severe consequences of urban warfare for civilians, with the fighting causing damages to residential buildings and critical infrastructure and services, and displacing hundreds of thousands across and between cities. Humanitarian needs in urban and protracted displacement crises are enormous and will continue to grow because of climate change-related disasters and continuing state fragility in some locations.

4. Urban disasters and conflicts cause disruption to productive sectors, service provision and institutional management systems, which often has ramifications in surrounding rural areas and at national scales, taking into account also the growing share of urban economies in the national GDP. For instance, the conflict damages in Syria's largest city and vital economic centre, Aleppo, has severely affected the national economy. The recent collapse in the energy sector in Lebanon was aggravated by the destruction of the national energy company, *Electricité du Liban*, in the 4 August 2020 blast in Beirut. Urban crises impact, in other words, exceed the extents of physically affected areas. Crises unfolding in cities therefore have to be understood and responded to by both addressing the suspension in access to, among others, livelihoods, protection mechanisms, services and housing for large populations at the local levels, by addressing and understanding the critical impact such

events have on systems and economic activities at regional and national levels, and by improving the countries overall abilities to respond and bounce back from crises.

5. While pre-crises functionality and productivity of urban systems and economies can vary greatly in cities affected by crises, it is important to recognise that cities are often governed by both formal and informal systems, as well as multi-level governance and multiple municipal mandates. Crucially, these formal and informal systems work interdependently for the provision of essential services and the response to the basic needs of vulnerable populations (e.g., for water and electricity provision). Moreover, in some contexts, local governance models have emerged that are sustained by *de facto authorities* who are not aligned to the central state, adding extra layers of complexity. Governance structures and management systems are also often affected directly by natural and man-made disasters. In Haiti, for example, the 2010 earthquake caused government buildings to collapse, severely reducing officials' capacities to respond to the emergency. Notably though, local authorities, stakeholders and service providers are the first responders to urban crises. This requires external aid actors to acquire a granular understanding of the governance structures in place and align with locally initiated responses or leverage existing capacities and knowledge.

6. Responding to the overwhelming scale and destruction from urban crises is costly. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), for instance, the huge financial resources that need to be channelled into recovery reflects the scale of destruction of its cities: $30 billion for destroyed houses in Syria, $8 billion for 16 cities in Yemen and $88 billion for Iraq of which $1 billion for Mosul alone. Furthermore, member states of the United Nations have spent over $13,5 billion after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, while well over $90 billion was spent in Afghanistan on reconstruction after 2001, notably with varying success. This money was spent in the context of state retreat, deterioration, or slow recovery, while eroded municipal capacities caused systemic challenges in urban basic service provision. The resulting inequitable access to rights and services are recognized stressors on social cohesion and can constitute major impediments to peace.

7. Most of the finance instruments to support recovery are tailored to support national governments and national budgets, and often fail to directly support local governments and service providers. These financing instruments need to be supplemented by blended financing streams, including mechanisms to mobilize the private sector, and the tangible and intangible assets held by communities and local businesses.

8. Displaced people, both the internally displaced and refugees, increasingly seek refuge in urban areas to access basic services, livelihood opportunities and shelter as an alternative to camps. In order to maintain their social networks and livelihoods, many displaced people prefer to stay as close as possible to home, moving from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, before moving onward to other cities or crossing international boundaries. The pull and push factors for movement from and to cities during crises are complex and are not solely related to security, but also to the functionality of urban systems, access to basic services, education, health and livelihoods. As such, the return of displaced persons to locations where the political, security and safety conditions have been partially or fully achieved, depends on successful urban recovery. Arab States carry the largest burden of displaced populations globally, both in terms of cross border and internal displacement. Other regions, too, may see similar burdens in the months to come. In the first weeks of March 2022, over 3,6 million people were displaced to neighbouring countries, from Ukraine.

9. Urban crises response requires capacities from humanitarian actors that lie beyond their traditional mandates and *modus operandi*. This includes the strengthening institutions and the coordination of recovery activities across sectors, critically, applying a localised perspective to resilience interventions. Most international humanitarian organisations are not configured to apply this kind of approach, neither at the onset of a crisis, nor as it becomes protracted. Furthermore, discussions on urban recovery may need to address sensitive issues, for example about the degree to which decentralisation and local public service delivery is supported vis-à-vis the role of central authorities. This requires a more longitudinal and incremental planning process which the traditional humanitarian response architecture scarcely allows for.

10. The emergence of a growing number of complex, multi-faceted and protracted crises affecting cities, has prompted international, national and local partners to develop and pilot new tools and ways of working that are more attuned to the specificities of urban crisis contexts. In recent years, several urban profiling and analysis tools have emerged to guide needs overview and response planning in cities, and urban response methodologies have been formulated, in particular "area-based approaches" (ABAs). International humanitarian organisations increasingly recognize ABAs as critical tools for spatial coordination, prioritisation and sequencing of activities at lower administrative levels. ABAs are also promoted within several humanitarian clusters under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) cluster system.

11. While area-based approaches have been developed specifically to identify priority interventions with the greatest impact in the context of enormous needs and competing humanitarian funding requirements, these approaches have often been applied by only a limited number of partners at a sub-city level or applied as a parameter under humanitarian cluster strategies as ad-hoc coordination mechanisms.

Moreover, even though these frameworks in their baseline analysis and project formulation cover a variety of urban sectors, their delivery models do not as a rule take into consideration the inter-dependence of these sectors within urban areas. This has resulted in the deprioritisation of cross-sectoral interventions, and also limited the possibilities to enhance effective and cost-efficient responses in expensive urban response settings. Furthermore, it has resulted in a situation where insufficient attention has been paid to wider city, regional or national impacts of disrupted economies and services. Despite work to align methodologies for urban crisis responses, and in particular area-based approaches and assessments tools that have been adopted by an increasing body of agencies, there is a clear need to consolidate these efforts on the ground under a clear operational framework. As a minimum, such efforts should spatially integrate, phase and sequence interventions in cities as a critical exercise to address complex urban challenges. Donors, in turn, require frameworks that are better attuned to complex urban contexts to guide funding and portfolio management decisions.

12. The Urban Recovery Framework builds on the initial area-based approaches to urban response but suggests a more structured approach to work at programmatic, policy and regulatory levels in parallel, supporting recovery and the renewal of the social contract from the neighbourhood to city level, to national (policy and regulatory) levels. While still in development, initial piloting has proven that the URF is an effective approach to respond to urban crises at scale and is able to address the complexity of urban crises and the impact of both pre-crises and post-crises stressors. The URF is therefore a critical tool to support cities to 'bounce back' from crises, and to introduce transformative measures guided by social, environmental and political safeguards that contribute to reinforced systems, longer-term urban development, and resilience to future shocks.

13. Recognizing the progress made in the past years to establish robust tools for urban crisis response and aiming to contextualise the 2008 Joint Declaration on Post-Crisis Assessments and Recovery Planning and the RPBA to an urban context, this note has been developed to support inter-institutional dialogue that will result in the formulation of a common position, advocacy and principles for urban recovery. In this regard, the following considerations have been identified to further guide the development of the URF approach:

   i. Anchor programme planning in strong contextual analysis. Promote increased sensitivity to local dynamics by including granular stakeholder, political economy, conflict, and sectoral analysis accounting for pre-crises grievances and root causes to needs and conflict in advance of project design. Leverage non-humanitarian data sources, such as damage assessments, urban functionality, spatial inequality as baselines and to monitor progress.
   ii. Support increased response readiness, strengthened institutional arrangements and multi-level governance for coordinated multi-stakeholder response in different crises-phases by integrating and systematizing stand-alone tools and program-level actions into one common approach.
   iii. Introduce a model to deliver an iterative urban recovery programming (analysis-planning-implementation-monitoring) process from humanitarian to recovery to resilience at scale that contributes to build-back-better.
   iv. Enhance multi-sectoral and area-based programming that acknowledges interdependencies between sectors, systems, and urban governance in a principled way with due attention to rights-sensitive topics and engaged in the wider policy debates that are critical to urban recovery.
   v. Increase aid and development effectiveness and equitable response through evidence-based prioritization and sequencing, broadening the financing instruments to provide direct support to local governments and service providers.
   vi. Develop local recovery plans through a participatory model that acknowledges shared responsibilities and accountabilities, ensuring input and feedback from communities, local stakeholders and government counterparts throughout the URF cycle.

This policy paper intends to initiate a collaborative process that will lead to the formal adoption of Urban Recovery Frameworks (URFs) to streamline and harmonize the approaches of donors, member states and international organizations. The note is split in two sections, the first outlining the URF concept, process cycle and guiding principles, while the second part show how the URF can be put into practice through the URF Syria case. Each part highlights some key messages for leveraging the experiences and outputs to date, and possible avenues to further scale up the use and application of the URF. Though the note advocates for the adoption of longer time-horizons for interventions in urban contexts, it also argues that the delivery of aid in a fair, equitable, non-discriminatory, and non-politicized way requires a better understanding of urban contexts and conflict-sensitive approaches. The URF has been piloted in several crisis-affected countries in Arab States and builds on the broader experiences in the design and delivery of area-based approaches. This paper reflects on that learning and outlines key principles and features of the URF, with the objective to further elaborate this into joint policy guidance by the United Nations, World Bank and European Union in 2022.

URF: A holistic and area-based approach to urban recovery

The overall goal of the Urban Recovery Framework (URF) is to improve urban recovery responses in cities affected by crises. The URF is designed as a pragmatic framework to guide recovery interventions in crises and post-conflict settings, bringing together interventions across time and spatial scales for the greatest impact from available funding and capacities. The URF can be described as *an enabling institutional and policy framework and related programming to support resilient urban recovery at scale and the renewal of the social contract.*

The approach has been developed with three broad strategic objectives:

1. To strengthen institutional arrangements and guide investments to optimize recovery impact and to deliver cost-efficient urban recovery.

2. To contribute to an integrated response within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, in stabilisation, early recovery, resilience, and reconstruction programming, addressing root causes and crises impacts.

3. To improve urban governance, including strengthening local capacities and participatory mechanisms, promoting local ownership, accountability and to restore the social contract.

The URF combines attention to peoples' needs and city system and functionality gaps to assess possible urban recovery actions. To address the complex, compounded and protracted nature of urban crises, including risks and short- and long-term impacts of shocks, there is a need for a transformative approach to build back better – or even bounce forward. For instance, to mitigate the dependence on repetitive short-term interventions such as water trucking or temporary shelter repairs, planning for recovery and resilience interventions needs to start early in the response cycle. Similarly, restoring livelihoods to secure vulnerable families' income, as well as restoring value-chains, businesses and industries to recover regional and national economies, require a complimentary focus on livelihoods creation and recovery at local
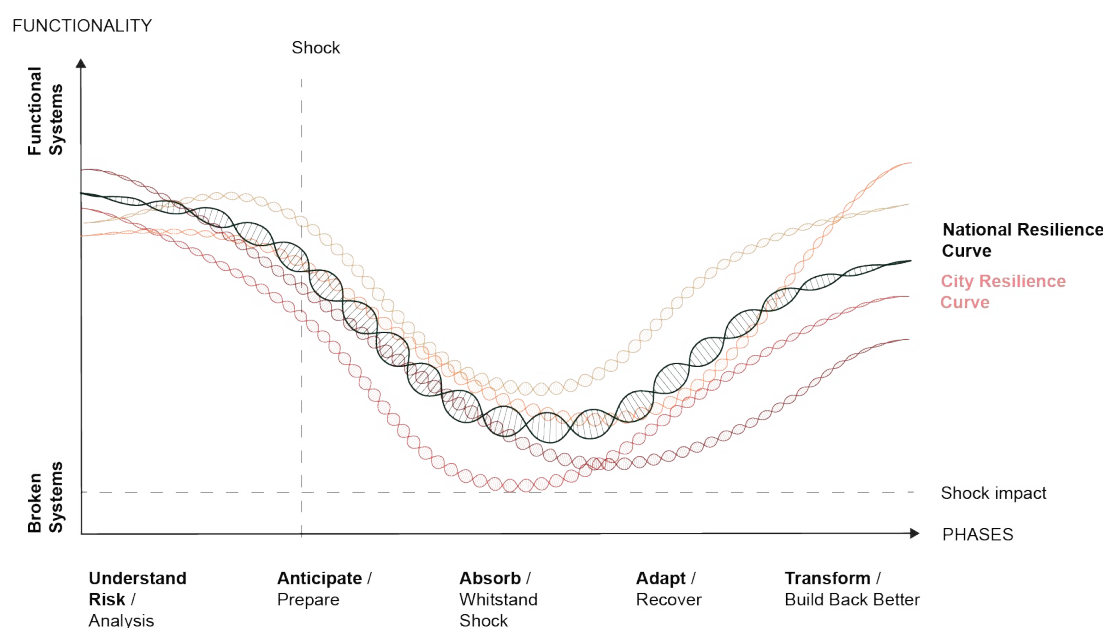

Figure 1 The resilience curve. Source: Urban-A

levels and bolstering value-chain performances at the city or regional levels, including enabling business environment and functionality of infrastructure (e.g., access to energy). To support longer term resilience, recovery efforts also need to address root-causes of conflicts, some of which impact ecosystem services and urban-rural linkages. In other words, to achieve recovery at scale and to breaking donor dependencies, needs and systems gaps should be addressed in parallel through absorptive, adaptive and transformative measures (Figure 1). To this end, the URF categorizes interventions in the extents they contribute to:

- Absorptive, responding to immediate needs;
- Adaptive, medium-term response and recovery;
- Transformative, longer-term response.

The URF makes use of contextual urban analysis to identify initiatives across the short-, medium-, and longer-term, as a basis to prioritise interventions. Projects or policies may cover one or several of the response phases, while ensuring an appropriate balance, contingent on the context. Furthermore, such contextual analyses, supported by consultations, contribute to the identification of leverage points addressing several needs or root causes, informing priority interventions for each relevant crisis phase.

URF analysis and recovery planning can thus help link quick-wins and immediate relief with longer-term recovery and reconstruction to move towards resilience. Planning for absorptive, immediate actions with recovery and reconstruction in mind will ensure greater alignment with institutional interests and greater buy-in as the situation changes.

Concept: Integrated area-based approach

The URF is developed to guide recovery with consideration to spatial dynamics, multiplier effects and the importance of phasing and sequencing interventions, recognizing sectoral inter-dependences in urban areas. This entails considering local economic, social, cultural and political landscapes, and subsequently prioritizing interventions across sectors within defined geographic areas, identifying interventions with the greatest impact to respond to multi-faceted needs. The approach thus covers several interdependent thematic areas proven to be critical sectors of intervention for the recovery of cities (Figure 2). Addressing both root causes, shock impacts, and emerging challenges within these thematic areas are identified as critical pathways to secure overall progress of recovery.

The phased interventions across sectors and along the humanitarian-development continuum, entails contributions from local, national and international stakeholders. This approach emphasizes existing local knowledge and capacities as well as improved dialogue with communities and promotes coordination of activities through comprehensive analysis and recovery planning. Moreover, this entails embedding multi-
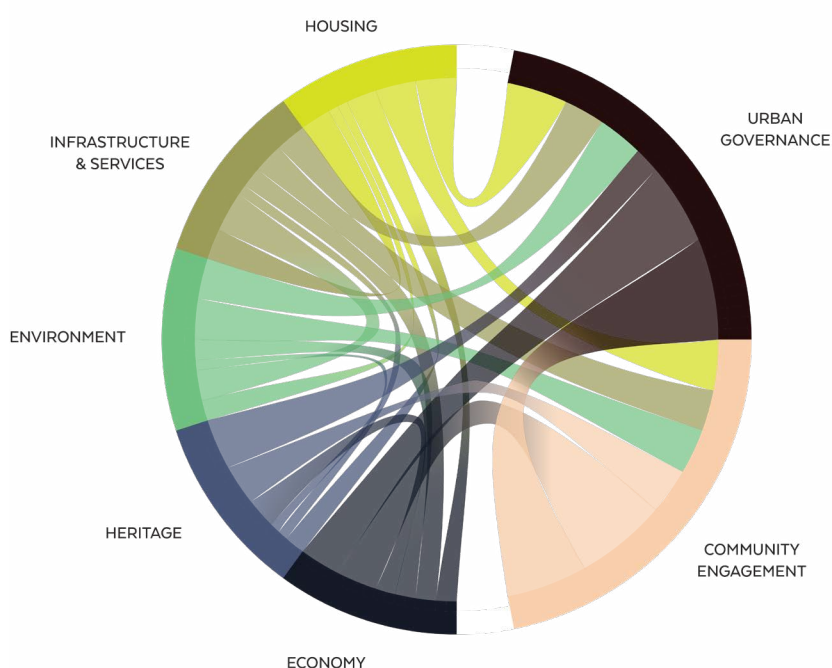

Figure 2 Sectoral inter-dependencies within an area-based approach. Source: UN-Habitat

stakeholder contributions and financing. This underpin the URF as an area-based approach that goes further than sectoral planning within target areas.

The area-based and multi-sectoral approach also informs more flexible, fluid yet predictable funding mechanisms suited to an urban context. By bringing together multiple stakeholders and prioritising actions at national, city and neighbourhood levels, URFs are useful to guide funding decisions for implementation and making aid effective and impactful. Early humanitarian relief usually attracts more funding than more complex, longer-term recovery initiatives. The URF can help bridge the liquidity gaps and support projects with the greatest value-for money across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. In the early stages of a crisis, URF funding will to a larger extent support critical needs through absorptive measures, while over time increasingly support resilience measures. Pooled funding with larger grants for multi-partner implementation reduces transaction costs, improving business practices, and streamline reporting. In the longer-term, the URF can be used to incentivise blended finance for investment opportunities e.g., for infrastructure, services, or housing. Given a large and increasing funding gap in humanitarian crisis settings, mechanisms to include private sector investment are critical to bring urban recovery to scale. In addition, the URF promotes reviews of public financial management, municipal finance, procurement, and disbursement capacities, which in turn can contribute to increased funds for interventions.

URF Cycle: Iterative and evolving process for upscaling

URFs are developed through an iterative and evolving process (Figure 3) starting with detailed contextual analysis, to a participatory planning process, to the implementation of interventions in a given location (either at neighbourhood or city level, complemented by policy and planning at national levels), to monitoring systems for environmental, social and political safeguards. This process is sensitive to local dynamics, pre-crises stressors and root-causes, and conflict sensitivities.

While the cycle of analysis-planning-implementation-monitoring are also common to humanitarian planning cycles, the Urban Recovery Framework tailors this process to the recovery of cities. An urban lens takes into consideration various factors, including spatial analysis, basic and social services, housing, and urban economy, and utilizing existing governance structures as key implementation tools. As such, the planning function can also support the operationalisation of humanitarian responses. Finally, the iterative process allows for responding to shifting needs and challenges as a crisis-context changes over time. Piloted interventions under the URF provide proof of concept and are intended for scaling-up and integration into larger, sustainable systems.

4 MONITORING
MECHANISMS FOR IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAMMATIC LEARNING

Environment and social safeguards system
Identification of gaps for resilience programming
Tracking multi-stakeholder contributions to area-based programming

Baselines
Progress monitoring
Impact evaluation

1 ANALYSIS
CONTEXTUAL AND CONFLICT SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS

National thematic papers
Urban profiling and information analysis
Conflict and stakeholder analysis
HLP analysis and risk screening

Damage assessments
Area-based and multi-sectoral assessments
Localized needs assessments

3 IMPLEMENTATION
MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CONTRIBUTION ACROSS SCALES OF INTERVENTION

Joint programmes
Action plan implementation
URF Guidance
Due diligence mechanisms (including capacity building of partners)

Enabling laws and policies
Financing and implementation strategies

2 PARTICIPATORY PLANNING
URBAN RECOVERY PLANS (NEIGHBOURHOOD AND CITY-LEVEL)

Urban recovery plans
Agency coordination and prioritization

Risk assessment frameworks
Institutional frameworks
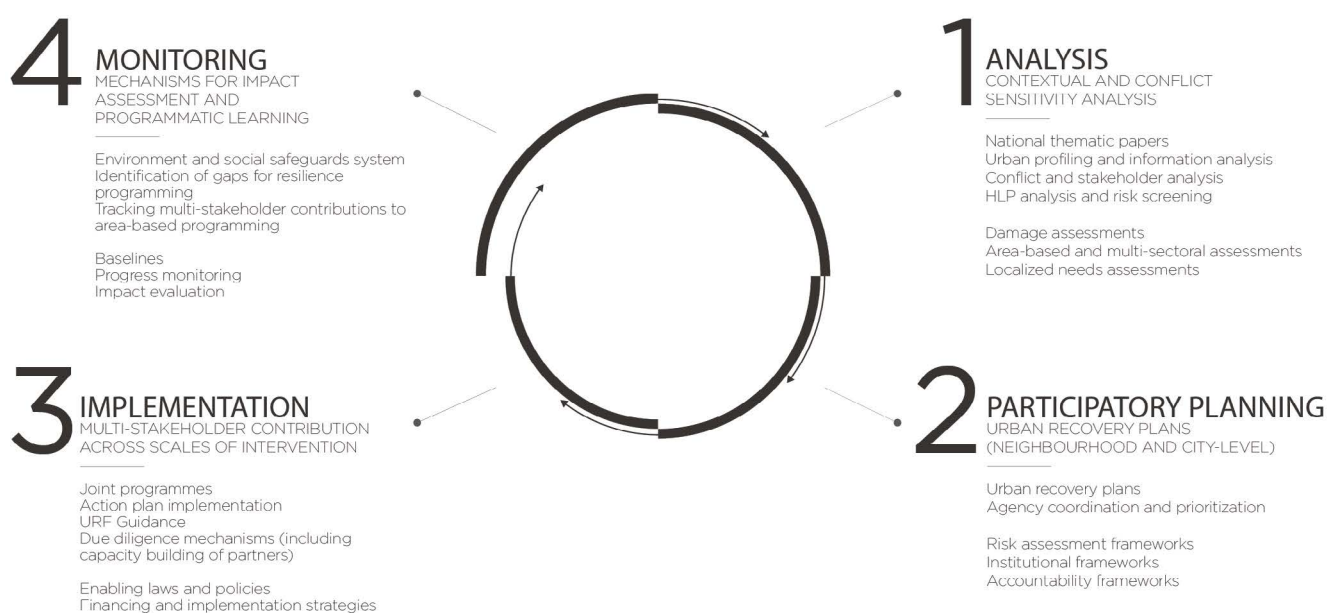Accountability frameworks

Figure 3 URF Cycle. Source: UN-Habitat

Analysis: Conflict sensitivity and urban information analysis

Urban analysis forms a solid foundation for a holistic and evidence-based response and decision making. It includes activities that create a common understanding of crisis contexts, such as the root causes of crises, their diverse impacts on people and services in different city areas, and conflict impacts. Furthermore, analysis within an urban recovery framework is cross-sectoral (examining impacts across URF thematic areas), multi-scale (examining impacts across local, city, regional and national scales), multi-stakeholder (potential role and capacity of different stakeholders) and temporal (examining impacts in the short, medium and long-term). Developing urban analysis products makes use of existing municipal capacities and seeks to inform Municipal Information Systems. URF analysis products include among others the following outputs:

1. **Context analysis:** Multi-sectoral urban analysis and profiling at city or sub-city levels, including damage and service gaps assessments, historic and socio-economic context including rural-urban linkages, and needs and population analysis developed in close coordination with local authorities and communities.

2. **Conflict sensitivity analysis:** Analysis of drivers and inhibitors of tension in recovery and peacebuilding processes in countries facing conflict or transitioning out of a conflict-related crisis.

3. **HLP analysis:** Risk screening and guidance on housing, land and property issues that will influence recovery planning, and peoples' ability for housing restitution. The analysis informs both on-the-ground recovery action, and needed amendments to regulatory and policy frameworks post-crisis.

4. **Urban Baseline Information:** Comparative analysis of urban functionality at city and neighbourhood scales, mapping spatial manifestation of key events, population flows, service functionality, sector assets, and 4W information.

5. **Policy review:** Analysis of related regulatory and policy environments (e.g., on Housing, Land and Property issues) that will set parameters for urban recovery planning and interventions.

Box 1 Urban Analysis

Neighbourhood profiling in Lebanon

In Lebanon, a rigorous methodology for neighbourhood profiling has been developed collaboratively by UN-Habitat and UNICEF. The methodology included a spatial mapping of vulnerabilities on a cadastral and sub-cadastral level to identify and rank the most disadvantaged areas in Lebanon. Based on this, neighbourhood profiles have been developed for 28 disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Lebanon. The profiling has been a major contribution to the understanding of host and refugee vulnerabilities in Lebanese cities among response partners. It has further contributed to addressing the lack of granular, reliable, comparable and up-to-date data. This includes population data (the last census in Lebanon is from 1932 and large discrepancies between population estimates remain) with a particular focus youth and children, as well as data on thematic areas including economy, services and governance.

The neighbourhood profiles, which provide insight into socioeconomic, demographic and built environment conditions, have demonstrated large variations in conditions between areas. This has been important to identify commonalities in vulnerabilities and opportunities across neighbourhoods, and to understand how the neighbourhoods diverge in the ways in which they are disadvantaged. The profiling suggests that granular analysis is needed to address local issues and capitalise on local resources. At the same time, the comprehensive profiling provides a robust baseline from which general conclusions can be drawn. This reduces the need to collect the same vast amount of data to inform programming in neighbourhoods sharing the same characteristics. Several projects have been implemented based on the identified priority interventions in the profiles.

City profiling in Syria

As part of the analysis phase, a consortium of partners created the www.urban-syria.org platform. In a relatively short space of time, the partners were able to develop comprehensive urban profiles that have served to inform a shared understanding of needs, as well as providing contextual and conflict sensitive analysis, including damage assessment, service functionality, local government arrangements, priorities for recovery, as well as housing, land and property (HLP) analysis and risk screening.

This initial profiling package supported a move towards more comprehensive multi-sectoral and

area-based recovery planning and implementation. The portal has been further expanded with urban dashboards, providing key information on urban functionality and trends that allows for monitoring over time.

City profiling in Yemen

Building on experience from urban profiling from Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Libya, eight city profiles have been developed through multi-stakeholder collaboration in Yemen. The profiles contribute with important urban information and analysis, providing an evidence-base for planning and monitoring at city and sub-city levels. The profiling has relied on comprehensive damage assessments through remote sensing. This has been used to assess the degree of conflict damage inflicted on infrastructure and services. On-ground verification was critical given the limitations of satellite imagery interpretation in dense urban neighbourhoods. However, security and other limiting factors made verification of assets difficult in certain areas. An important component of the profiling work was the involvement of partners. Among others, technical expert from the two major universities in Yemen, city authorities, response actors and representatives from local communities provided and verified data, and helped inform the analysis and recommendations for programming. The data and analysis from the work can be accessed on the A City Profile Web portal.

Planning: Locally anchored recovery plans through extensive community and local stakeholder engagement

Urban recovery plans identify and prioritize interventions based on agreed-upon principles and parameters. Building on the urban analysis, the plans are developed through participatory processes involving local stakeholders, authorities and communities. While the diverse group of relevant urban response actors usually have different priorities and policy objectives, a shared understanding of the situation derived from the analysis forms the foundation for a shared vision and prioritised interventions amongst different stakeholders at the national, regional, city and/or neighbourhood level. Furthermore, prioritisation will favour scalable, cross-sectorial activities with the potential for multiplier-effects, synergies and creating transformative change. Prioritisation take into consideration value for money, where costing will be done to determine expenses relative to the potential gain for different interventions.

Recovery and action plans are developed both at the city and sub-city levels, both considering the systemic needs and overall recovery objectives at the city level (among others, focused on recovery and management of services and the urban economy) and population needs in most affected areas. This dual approach is essential. Otherwise, the risk is that plans concentrate on target neighbourhoods alone, and that the identification of needs and opportunities to support response and recovery at systems levels are missed. In a best-case scenario, this is ineffective. In a worst-case scenario, this has a destabilising effect on the overall city or wider region.

The planning process entails capacity building of local authorities and service providers to utilise cross-sectoral analysis for integrated recovery planning. Anchoring recovery planning processes in municipal planning and service provision means response efforts can directly support longer term improvement of municipal services and capacity to monitor and plan according to needs. Moreover, involvement of local and government actors from an early phase, under conditions where this is possible, paves the way for considering options for responsible exit strategies for humanitarian agencies.

Planning outputs may include, among others:

1. Regional Recovery Priorities: Regional plans outlining key priorities for recovery interventions linking several cities and villages within given regions, where the connectivity (e.g., through rural-urban linked infrastructure and value-chains) is important to maximise outputs of recovery plans and accounting for internal movement of people within regions.

2. City Recovery Plans: Plans developed for one city that includes prioritisation of urban recovery projects, developed in consultation with local authorities, service providers and communities. Recovery plans at the city level gives due attention to urban economy, including urban-rural linkages, as well as consideration to urban growth and population changes.

3. Neighbourhood Recovery Plans: Plans developed at sub-city levels, often for most disadvantaged or crisis impacted areas. The plans outline priority interventions that will address socio-economic vulnerabilities, protection risks, and social cohesion issues at the minimum.

Box 2 Recovery planning in Iraq

Ramadi, Iraq, is one of the worst conflict-affected cities in Iraq. Led by UNDP and UN-Habitat under the Local Area Development Programme, a joint data collection, analysis and planning process has been carried out in Ramadi to assist local authorities in their work to address inhabitants' pressing needs and reconstruction priorities. Based on the analysis and using a participatory process, the Ramadi Strategic Urban Recovery and Development Plan was formulated for the city. In the process, local authorities were engaged to complete a comprehensive damage assessment and identify priority needs. Further, a series of consultation workshops brought together municipal-, governorate-, and central level officials, representatives from civil society and universities to provide input to the plan.

The Ramadi Strategic Urban Recovery and Development Plan targets interlinked interventions across housing, basic services, infrastructure and the economy with the objective to rebuild damaged communities. The principle of building back better has guided the prioritisation of actions. As such, the focus is both on urgent reconstruction needs as well as key development aspects that go beyond restoration to pre-conflict conditions. The priorities include, among others, relocation of polluting industries and reuse of brownfields, creating infill opportunities within the city centre to accommodate future urban expansion and reduce encroachment on public and agricultural land, and steering economic investments for potential multiplier effects.

Box 3 Adding local authorities back into the recovery planning process

Experiences from the Arab States region shows that several factors are limiting local authorities' capacities to deliver on their responsibilities and to take a leading role in recovery and reconstruction efforts. Conflicts, exacerbated by compounded shocks, have contributed to an increasingly challenging operational environment. Massive demographic changes, a rapidly worsening socio-economic situation and physical damage to service-related infrastructure combined with dwindling human and financial resources, coupled with illicit economies, represents key challenges for local authorities in the region. In countries such as Yemen, Syria, Libya, and Iraq, legal reforms targeting decentralisation have been introduced. However, this has by-and-large not been accompanied by a process of political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation. This has result in the assignment of additional responsibilities for many local authorities, but without the needed decision-making powers or resources to deliver. To strengthen local authorities' capacities, priorities in recovery plans have included activities aimed to improve local authorities' own sourced revenues.

Local authorities have played an important role in URF planning processes in the region. Given their responsibilities and role as first responders to crises, involving local authorities in the identification and prioritisation of recovery activities has been central to produce robust and resilient recovery plans. With local authorities, response actors have identified priority activities that can support rebuilding existing systems rather than creating parallel systems, and that will help strengthen the social contract between local authorities and residents. Engaging local authorities in the planning process has also provided an alternative inroad to anchoring planning locally in contexts where working with de facto authorities can pose a political challenge. Experience has also shown that involving local authorities can be an efficient way to rebalance inequitable funding allocation from central to local authorities. The URF planning process has been an opportunity to build local authorities' capacities through training and improved access to data and analysis.

Photo: UN-Habitat Syria

Implementation

URF programming and implementation, following the analysis and planning, covers implementation of relevant projects that contribute to short-term ('shock absorbing'), medium-term ('adapting'), or long-term ('transformative') processes. Implementation models may help to overcome challenges related to the replication of prevailing models for humanitarian assistance, particularly in terms of a shift towards more sustainable and multisectoral programming. These may vary according to local feasibility and include, among others:

1. Joint programming by UN/INGO partners in line with prioritised recovery plans.
2. Community contracting for locally prioritized projects.
3. Private sector engagement.
4. Multi-stakeholder implementation models.
5. Examples of anchoring the URF process within ongoing processes, such as the I3RF with area-based approaches and housing in Iraq, and the 3RF and Lebanon Financing Facility with housing in Lebanon.
6. Implementation models with multi-donor trust funds and regional development banks, linking humanitarian and development implementation streams.

Box 4 Urban recovery interventions in Syria

In Syria, the participatory planning approaches under the URF have contributed to expand the space for engagement of municipal technical staff and local community representatives in a context where this traditionally has been limited or non-existent (see Annex Urban Recovery Frameworks work in practice: Syria Case for detailed overview). This has further helped advancing area-based approaches that bring together actors, starting from the planning processes. To date, UN-Habitat, in collaboration with local authorities and other response actors, have developed comprehensive and multi-sectoral recovery plans for major Syrian cities as well as more than 80 basic recovery plans.

The participatory, bottom-up planning processes to develop these plans involve both formal and informal stakeholders. These processes include local planning workshops and meetings with city officials and local community representatives to develop plans, and wider community participation at local and city levels through community consultation meetings to validate and endorse the plans. Key priorities identified in the recovery plans include basic services, mobility and access, economic recovery, social cohesion and return preparedness.

The Joint Programme (JP) on Urban and Rural Resilience in Syria brings together the six United Nations agencies, UNFPA, FAO, UN-Habitat, WFP, UNICEF, and UNDP, to collectively implement priority actions based on recovery plans. In the JP, targeted recovery plans, or 'action plans', are developed on a neighbourhood level to localise the multisectoral priorities from the city recovery plans. This reflects the large variations in conditions within Syrian cities, where e.g., functionalities of services, displacement patterns and damage to builings and infrastructure differ widely between areas of the city. This creates an imperative to link different areas of the city, as well as focusing on strategic interventions in selected areas based on the specific needs and resources in those locations.

The urban recovery interventions under the JP focus on improving basic and social services, improve and enhance community resilience, strenghten social cohesion, and promote sustainable livelihood opportunities. The objective is to integrate activities wherever possible and useful, based on close coordination between project partners. For example, for livelihood support in Dara'a, FAO is supporting agricultural entrepreneurship among women and youth, UNDP and WFP are promoting household's productive assets and infrastructure, while UN-Habitat is rehabilitating the market street.

Monitoring: Safeguards and programme learning

Monitoring of URF interventions includes the tracking of urban recovery data through the identification of critical key performance indicators for urban recovery (e.g., "urban functionality", "damage and reconstruction to houses", "access to services"), setting up mechanisms for the production of the data, and managing and communicating these results in an accountable and transparent manner. The monitoring tools under URF programmes do not replace but complement humanitarian monitoring tools (e.g., Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), Human Rights reports, Joint Analysis tools). The monitoring tools will enable sound coordination at national and sub-national levels around URF progress and specific intervention implementation.

In conflict and crisis affected areas, a solid due diligence process is critical to prevent reputational risk and to ensure a project does no harm. URF-guided projects include risk screening tools to categorize, manage and mitigate risk and assess potential negative impacts of projects. These impacts include both social and environmental impacts, such as the impact on social cohesion (e.g., as the result of spatial inequity of programming), contamination of water or impact on biological receptors.

Box 5 Monitoring and due diligence

In Syria, monitoring and due diligence has been tested in various locations. Measures have been applied throughout the URF cycle, using rigorous safeguards and programming learning. As part of this work, the capacity of local authorities to collect and monitor urban data has been indirectly strengthened, including through improved information systems.

Monitoring and due diligence measures for the different stages of the URF cycle include:

- Analysis: context and political risk analysis, environmental and social risk assessment.

- Planning: Risk screening for indicative recovery plan priorities.

- Implementation: Environmental, social and political risks screening for project packages – green/red light system in discussion with donors.

- Monitoring: reputational risk monitoring using urban baselines and indicators for environmental and social management plan with mitigation measures for risks during implementation.
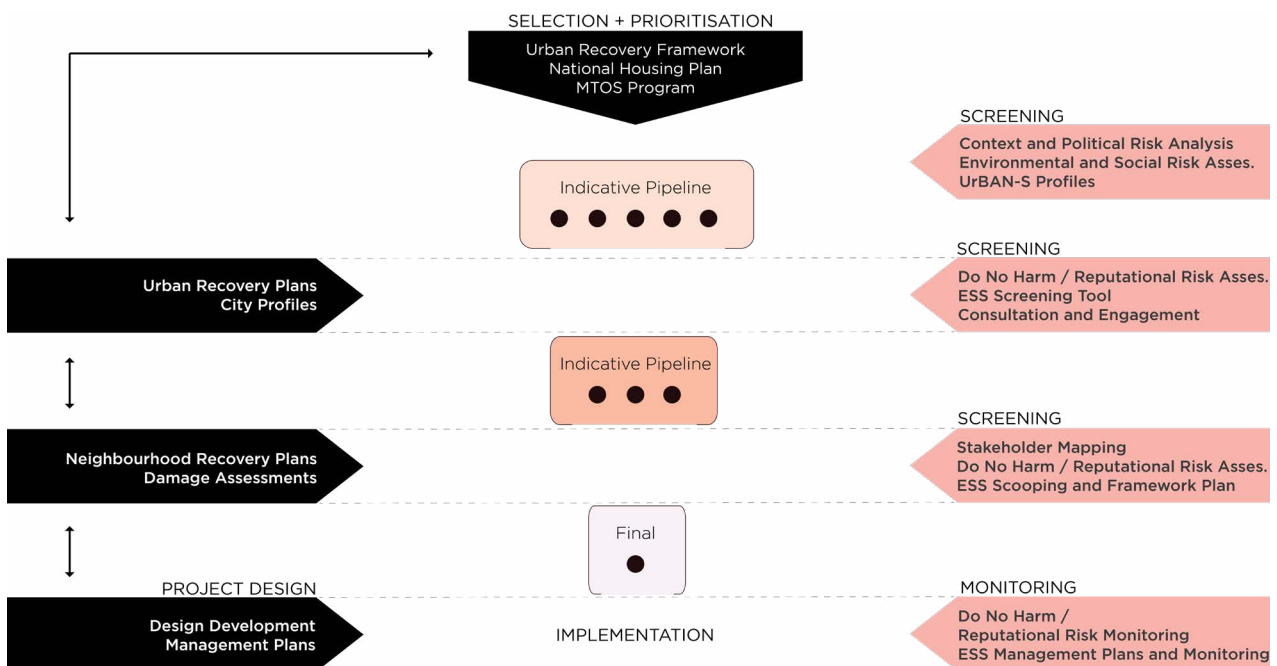

Figure 4 Monitoring and due diligence for the URF in Syria. Source: UN-Habitat

Key principles of Urban Recovery Frameworks

Drawing on the outlined goals, concept and embedded process cycle of the Urban Recovery Framework, the following principles outline the core values that they should encompass. They represent an initial common position on urban recovery that should inform all policy and programming for participating stakeholders.

Principles

The following principles are shared for all urban recovery interventions in cities following disaster or conflict.

Principle 1: Do No Harm

Reduce operational and reputational risks by utilizing a conflict sensitivity analysis, and social and environmental safeguards, considering immediate and longer-term impacts.

Principle 2: Building Back Better (BBB)

Urban recovery and reconstruction interventions shall consider potential improvements to reconstructing what was been lost, including options to adapt to climate change and mainstreaming resilience in all interventions.

Principle 3: Geographic and social equity in programming

Urban recovery, supported by urban spatial analysis, must ensure geographic and social equity in programming, both within and across cities.

Principle 4: Municipal and community empowerment

Urban recovery interventions shall be coordinated through local governance and representation bodies such that no competing urban management structures on the city level will be created.

Principle 5: Prioritize vulnerable groups, women and youths

Urban recovery interventions must prioritize vulnerable groups, women and youth in programming and consultation. Urban recovery frameworks strive for equity in assistance among others by acknowledging the shared, and often equal, vulnerabilities of host populations and displaced.

Principle 6: Human rights and protection

Urban recovery programming shall conduct due diligence to consider human rights, protection and social cohesion implications in advance of programming.

Principle 7: City as systems

Urban recovery planning shall consider cities as systems, review interventions against sectoral interdependencies and weigh potential multiplier effects of city level interventions and due consideration to linkages between neighbourhoods as well urban-rural linkages, and on their long-term transformative potential.

Call for action

The importance of addressing urban dimensions of disasters and conflict is increasingly being recognized as key to delivering collective outcomes that transcend the traditional humanitarian-development divide and build peace (the "triple nexus"). While cities in the Middle East continue to grapple with compounded urban shocks, cities in Africa are affected by large scale migration triggered by both conflict, socio-economic factors, and climate change stressors, and cities in both East Asia and Central America and beyond experience increasingly impactful natural disasters. The conflict in Ukraine shows again the massive consequences urban warfare has for a civilian population. Moreover, the resulting forced displacement and destruction of the built environment will require years of international support. The proliferation of large-scale crises combined with economic downturn following the Covid-19 pandemic means fewer resources are available for humanitarian aid in each of these situations, necessitating more effective response approaches.

The URF-approach has, through institutional and programmatic piloting, been designed to address these growing challenges and to better enable humanitarian and development actors to respond to urban crises and conflicts. In an approach that pays due attention to multi-level governance, the combined attention to institutional arrangements, policies and regulations, and the coordination of implementation activities with new financing models, position the URF as a tool that contributes to an advance in resilience and preparedness for future shocks, and to peace building efforts. As this note has outlined, the URF has been piloted and tested and is increasingly being accepted as a tool that could foster area-based multi-stakeholder alignment that should be anchored in humanitarian response plans and strategic frameworks, as well as informing Humanitarian Needs Overviews from the onset of urban crises.

The increased and renewed relevance of the URF has prompted reengagement and commitment among international partners after the Covid-19 pandemic to further develop the approach, and to develop a common position and guidance for donors and actors working on the ground in 2022. The evolution of urban humanitarian response approaches over the past decades, has shown that there is an increasing interest to align efforts and promote holistic recovery planning attuned to the urban scale from early stages of response. Past experiences have shown that there are an enormous amount of actors involved in urban crisis response (in both Haiti and Nepal several thousand actors were responding), and the early trends of the response to the Ukraine show similar tendencies. **If we want the urban response and recovery to this growing humanitarian catastrophe to be effective, common action is needed on the following:**

Improve aid effectiveness by utilizing the URF as a framework for area-based coordination. Urban response and recovery at scale is contingent on the collaboration between, coordination of, joint analysis and planning among relevant response actors – including international agencies, local NGOs, and communities. To ensure the URF approach is readily available as a tool, the URF as an approach should be endorsed by and anchored in the institutional level of both donors and UN agencies. It furthermore should be embedded in the coordination and response architecture to maximize its effectiveness.

Use the URF as a framework to develop new blended financing models that combine humanitarian and development funding with private sector partnerships, municipal investments, self-funded recovery and diaspora remittances, among others. Acknowledging the protracted nature of urban crises, planning for blended financing, and especially linkages with development funding and non-humanitarian funding instruments, will be pivotal for urban recovery. While driven by HNOs and humanitarian tools from the onset of a crisis, ensuring continuation of the response from humanitarian to longer-term support, will require dialogue and engagement with e.g., the development banks, trust funds etc.

Prioritize and promote an incremental URF implementation for quick impact, confidence building, piloting and scale-up of project implementation. This includes leveraging early urban analysis, the early set-up of appropriate coordination structures, as well as making use of existing capacities and networks of local authorities, in order to ensure multi-partner inclusion from the very start of a URF process.

Develop pre-defined URF mechanisms for involving and building the capacities of communities and local authorities to be leading agents in identifying needs and prioritise recovery interventions. This entails promoting the anchoring of the majority of activities at the local level, supported by area-based

and sectoral humanitarian coordination from the onset of response. Equally important is to ensure that humanitarian actors approaches local authorities with pre-aligned priorities and suggested level of engagement to reduce burden on local authorities in keeping up with a myriad of response actors.

Increase the sustainability of urban recovery by anchoring its activities in local governance processes. While there is an understandable tendency to centralize decision-making during a conflict, an effective, people-centred urban recovery process requires municipalities to play a central role in implementing any overall national recovery plan. As the level of governance closest to the people, local authorities are often on the frontlines of responding to conflict and in rebuilding trust in societies divided by conflict. Despite regular calls for strengthening their role in recovery, their leadership role and the resources required to deliver on their mandate and peace-building potential is often limited. Crises also compromise the legitimacy of local authorities, leaving the public wary of their capacity to deliver. Therefore, even it may seem at times opportune to reduce the involvement of local authorities, the URF expressly includes them from the onset of needs, projects, and policy formulation processes, either directly at the municipal level, or indirectly through neighbourhood coordination mechanisms. Strengthening the role of local authorities in cities can encompass a range of activities including the development of better processes and tools for community mobilization, or capacity building for urban recovery planning.

Promote inclusion and citizen engagement by providing spaces for policy dialogues on urban recovery. Some laws or policies targeting specifically urban areas may be biased against certain communities or may contribute to inequitable recovery at the sub-national level. These include policies related to housing and property rights, usage of debris, informal settlements, and the like. Laws passed during a conflict may also require review as part of the national reconciliation process. This can be achieved by, among others; facilitating discussions with local inhabitants on needs, pre- and post-crisis policies relevant to cities; fostering discussion on the specific impact of sectoral policies (related to environment, heritage, infrastructure, housing) on urban recovery; and facilitating discussion between different governance levels (e.g., community and municipality) on urban development policies.

Photo: Deir-ez-Zor, Syria. Credit: UN-Habitat

URBAN RECOVERY FRAMEWORKS WORK IN PRACTICE

URBAN RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

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Urban Recovery Frameworks work in practice: Syria Case

In Syria, the URF has been applied in response to the conflict starting in 2011. The objective of the URF has been to address urban recovery needs in the country in a comprehensive manner. From 2014, the URF has been piloted and tested through an iterative process by UN-Habitat in collaboration with a wide range of partners. Spanning the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, its application has evolved from initial urban analysis to a comprehensive multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach anchored in the UN Strategic Framework.

In Syria, urban development was heavily influenced by the rural-urban migration that began in 2nd half of 20th century, among other resulting from environmental and climate changes, disrupting rural livelihoods. This led to informal extension in agriculture lands with the purpose of rapid conversion to urban land in areas adjacent to Syria's main cities. Rural-urban and urban-urban migration has accelerated with the conflict, leading to more urban informal areas (densification of informal construction, additional informal construction to formal buildings, etc.), and pressure on available services and access to livelihoods. The URF in Syria has evolved from a programme initially focused on humanitarian needs, to increasingly giving attention to some of these pre-crisis conditions that will influence longer term-recovery options, including what this means in terms of resilient and sustainable urban development in the longer term.

Figure 5 illustrates the progression and increased integration of URF phases over time. This section presents an overview of URF cycle components and key lessons from implementation in Syria. It has been developed as an illustrative case-study, to show how the URF and its components have been applied and further developed in a protracted conflict context.
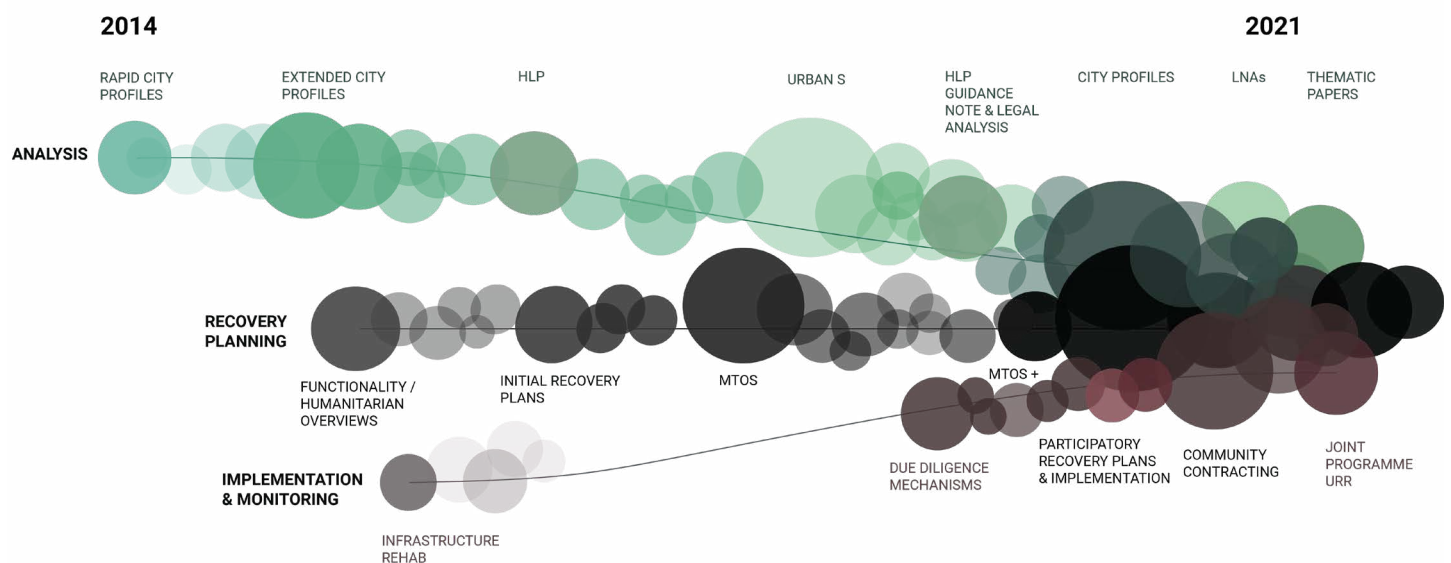

Figure 5 Timeline summarising main activities and achievements under the URF cycle in Syria. Source: UN-Habitat

Analysis

Conflict sensitivity and urban information analysis continues to constitute an essential component of the URF in Syria. Given the large variations and shifting realities in factors such as demography, geography, economy, nature, and culture, access to granular information and reliable analysis remains critical. Since the onset of the crisis, however, access to data on even services and population has been ad hoc or non-existent, so that significant data gaps persist. This lack of reliable data constitutes a major challenge for response actors. Improved data collection and analysis tools for an evidence-based response have therefore been indispensable for effective early recovery, particularly in urban areas where the situations are often complex. The URF outputs have contributed considerably to the data availability and understanding of the situation in Syrian cities, providing an improved foundation for recovery planning and implementation of prioritised activities.

URF data collection and analysis has evolved over time, from focusing on comprehensive city and neighbouring profiles towards more policy and programme specific analysis. The developed URF analysis products contribute to:

- Providing a baseline for early recovery planning: Outputs include 15 Rapid City Profiles (early phase), 26 City Profiles and baselines (UrbAN-S consortium). The European Commission's Joint Research Centre has provided remote sensing using among other satellite imagery to map damages and inform baselines.

- Bringing voices of different population groups (including displaced persons) into contextual analysis: Outputs include six Localised Needs Assessments (LNA) and training of local experts in mapping.

- Improving the understanding of how pre-conflict grievances, humanitarian needs, and structural challenges can be addressed through an urban recovery approach. Outputs include six thematic policy papers, covering among others Local Governance, Environment, Infrastructure, and Heritage.

- Providing area-based recommendations for return considerations, risks and safeguards for programming. Outputs include HLP analysis, risk screening, situational reports, and stakeholder analysis.

Data collection under the URF has been carried out using a participatory approach where possible. The engagement of community members and relevant actors has been critical to understanding community needs and perspectives, to improve reliability and accountability of the data, and anchor the URF activities with local communities and stakeholders from the outset. In Homs City, for example, a comprehensive community-led physical damage assessment has been developed and applied, to complement remote sensing data. This has been an important contribution to improved triangulation of data. It has also been an effective way to protect HLP rights in a context where the degree of damage is decisive for whether areas may be considered for redevelopment.

Cross-sectoral urban profiles, as well as the more thematic focused policy and regulatory reviews, has spanned both urban management capacities; damages, access, and performance of housing and basic services and infrastructure, including damages to e.g., education, health and water services; environmental and climate change stressors (and further impacts from the conflict) and management; livelihoods and economy (including performance of rural-urban value chains); cultural heritage; as well as social cohesion and conflict mitigation. The data and analysis have highlighted challenges, needs and opportunities that must be considered in any Recovery Plan for Syrian cities. The conflict sensitivity and urban information analysis provide important knowledge on the conflict-impact and the disproportionate effects of the conflict on urban areas. The analysis has helped unpack structural, socio-economic, political, cultural, and environmental factors that contributes to the current situation in the country.

The URF analysis supports a context-sensitive understanding of interlinked issues to be accounted for and addressed in recovery planning, selection activities and implementation. These issues include, for example, the extremely high yet varying levels of damage and destruction within and between Syrian cities, and the large-scale displacement and influx of displaced populations to urban areas. Many clashes that have taken place in cities have forced people to flee their homes and abandon their neighbourhoods. At the same time, the arrival of displaced persons in cities has transformed entire neighbourhoods and added pressure on housing, land and services. While safety and security have been the prominent drivers of displacement, conditions such as access to livelihoods, housing, and services have contributed to concentrating displaced persons in certain cities. Weakened governance, competing humanitarian needs, large-scale damage to infrastructure, and constrained budgets are limiting local authorities and other response actors' capacities to adequately address the situation. Physical destruction has included vast damage to cultural heritage sites and buildings, particularly in the old city cores which, combined with changing demographics, has led to a fragmentation of cities socio-cultural fabric and local identities. Furthermore, damage to industrial areas, businesses and the loss of human and financial resources has contributed to a challenging path for economic recovery. Given the interlinkages between issues, the analysis has taken different forms depending on which lens has been applied. The range of URF analysis tools and products has provided a solid basis for recovery planning and prioritisation of effective and impactful activities.

Photo: Homs, Syria. Credit: UN-Habitat

Photo: Homs, Syria. Credit: UN-Habitat

Planning

UN agencies, in collaboration with other stakeholders, have developed comprehensive, multi-sectoral recovery plans for Syrian cities including Homs, Aleppo, Dar'a and Deir Ez Zor, as well as basic recovery plans in more than 80 other locations. The plans are used to identify resilience and recovery-oriented priorities with strong inclusion of local participants and form a roadmap for multisectoral interventions. There is a growing recognition of the importance of area-based approaches among actors involved in the Syrian response. The URF has been used to further promote and support multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder partnerships in such area-based initiatives, starting from the planning processes. Furthermore, recovery plans have been developed to support objectives such as basic service restoration, mobility and access, economic recovery, social cohesion and return preparedness. The city-wide recovery plans provide the foundation for further elaboration at the neighbourhood level. Neighbourhood plans are used for implementation in selected neighbourhoods, based on severity of needs and the strategic focus and direction of the city recovery plan.

A critical feature of the recovery plans is that they consider multiple scales. This allows for linking short-term humanitarian activities with more medium-term resilience-based activities. City recovery plans, developed as city-wide plans, incorporate household and neighbourhood needs into strategic system interventions at the city level. Similarly, action plans at sub-city levels are developed considering the wider context of the city and country. The plans are guided by national-level policies and regulations. This design of the plans allows for responding to the interlinked and complex urban recovery needs, systems and actors that are at play in urban areas.

Breaking new ground on participatory planning

In Syria, participatory processes involving city officials and local community representatives have traditionally been limited or non-existent. The URF has contributed to breaking new grounds on such participatory planning processes and have gradually expanded the space for who and how involvement takes place. Over time, this has allowed for a balanced approach to recovery planning, with formal and informal representation centring on participatory planning with local authorities, and extensive community consultations to capture the voices of people (see overview of the evaluation of participatory processes in Figure 6). The result is a bottom-up planning process that has been applied in, among others the

MTOS: formal representation demonstrating technical information and local authority's views including service providers and city council members as representors of the city's residents.

UrbAN-S: informal representation demonstrating local community perceptions, including residents, the diaspora and displaced through community focal points and focus group discussions, and informal interviews with service providers and past local council members.

MTOS+: formal and informal representation (city council, service providers, neighborhood committees, local community leaders and notables, local NGOs, consulted together and under the same forum to converge facts and perceptions and agree on common values.

UN Joint Programme on Urban/Rural Resilience: a majority of informal representation to design interventions at the neighborhood level, capacity building and field damage assessment.
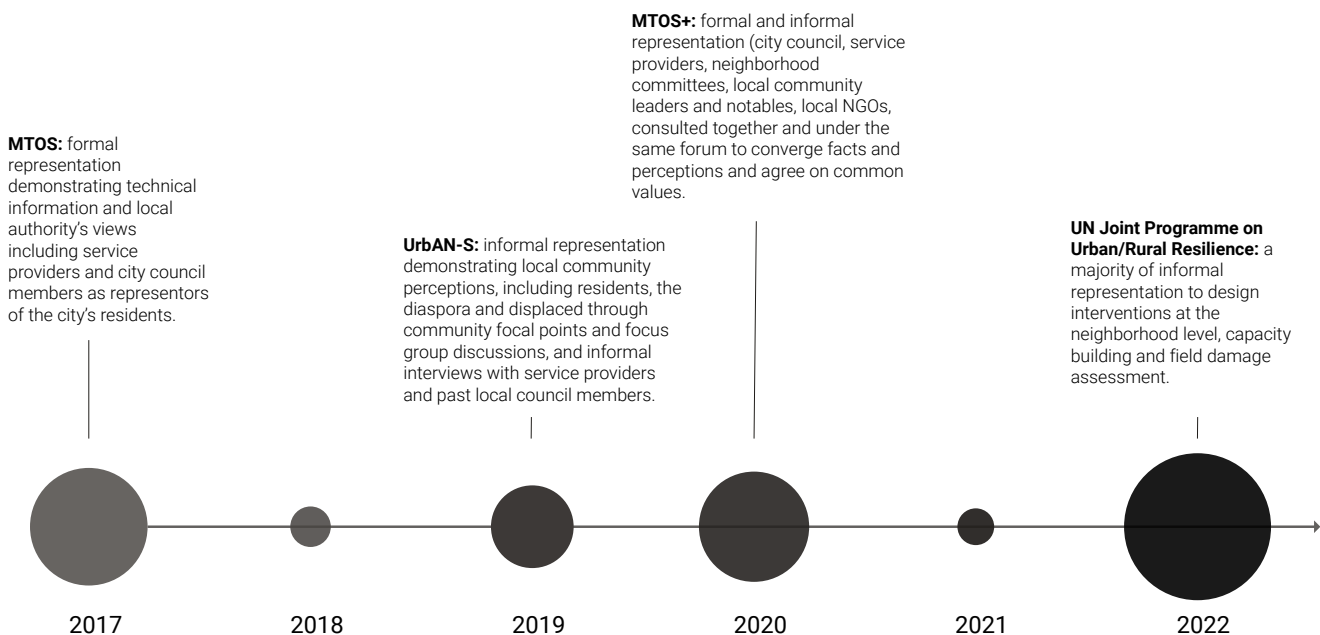
2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022

Figure 6 The evolution of participatory processes under the URF has allowed for broader and more balanced participation with different stakeholders including local authorities, community representatives, NGOs. Source: UN-Habitat

United Nations Joint Programme (JP) on Urban and Rural Resilience, as further detailed below. These participatory processes have shown the need for innovation in how to engage people and have among others resulted in the development of digital tools for community-based planning.

The URF community consultations start from participatory local planning in workshops and meetings with city officials and local community representatives, community consultation meetings with a wider community participation on the neighbourhood and city levels to reach the final validation and endorsement of developed plans. Utilisation of virtual reality tools is currently being piloted to further strengthen entries for community engagement.

Recovery Plans for Syrian Cities

Aleppo Recovery Plan

Prior to the conflict, Aleppo was the largest city in Syria. At the time, the city contributed with almost one quarter of GDP with an economy centred on industrial and agricultural activities and trade. Being one of the most conflict-affected cities in Syria, the city has been largely isolated from its rural hinterland and surrounding market, as well as suffering from large-scale damage. This includes destruction of cultural heritage sites, including markets and traditional artisanal production buildings in the Old City, and traditional green spaces. From 2013 onwards, the population was drastically reduced. By August 2018, the population was estimated to be 1.6 million. Return is particularly low in eastern parts of the city, which suffered from the most intense damage, where reconstruction is slow and security concerns are high. While increased activities in contracting and reconstruction sectors have been observed in Aleppo in recent years, several major obstacles for economic recovery persist, including issues linked to energy, fuel, water, labour, and housing supply.

The Aleppo Recovery Plan was developed during the period 2018 – 20 using a participatory process. Based on the city recovery plan, recovery plans were developed for each of the city's eleven service directorates.

The strategic priorities for the Aleppo Recovery plan were identified as:

Strategic Priority 1: Economic recovery and strengthened value-chains. Connectivity and urban-rural linkages are strengthened to restore activities in industrial and market areas of the city.

Strategic Priority 2: Environmental management improved. Pollution reduced and blue-green public spaces and assets protected.

Priority activities aim to:

- Improve green and public space
- Enhance mobility
- Improve structural safety

While the types of priority activities in the final action plans remained the same as those set out in initial workshops, the engagement of local leaders, neighbourhood committees and service directorates' heads in the process led to significant shifts in the order of priorities. Beyond the critical input on what the most valuable activities for people and the city were, the participation contributed to trust building and improved dialogue between the municipality, service directorates and the community, and to strengthened accountability and local ownership of activities.

Dar'a Recovery Plan

Dar'a was one of the first localities in Syria to be affected by the conflict in 2011. During the conflict, the city was divided into the opposition held south and GoS controlled north. Heavy shelling and aerial bombardment of the south, particularly informal areas, rendered most essential services and infrastructure in the southern part of the city damaged and non-operational. Lack of services such as education, electricity, health care, solid waste management, water and presence of ERWs are thus particularly pronounced in this part of the city. While the norther part of the city sustained minimal damage, it still suffers from low availability to services.

In Dar'a, the Recovery Plan and its priority actions have been developed to improve access to services and mobility between the highly damaged and less damaged areas of the city. Through strengthened connections and functionalities, the objective is to contribute to economic recovery and social cohesion in Dar'a. The Recovery Plan is focused on three main areas: an east-west axis (Area-A), and north-south axis (Area-B), and a blue axis along the river (Area-C). For each area, tailored priority activities include:

- Highly damaged Area-A crossing city centre. The priority activities for Area-A aims to enhance connectivity and accessibility by rehabilitation of services and infrastructure along the east-west axis crossing the city centre and, including upgrade of gardens, public space, commercial area, wholesale market, light industrial area, and bus terminal.
- Highly damaged Area-B with important heritage sites. The priority activities for Area-B aims to strengthen connectivity and accessibility along the north-south axis including upgrade of
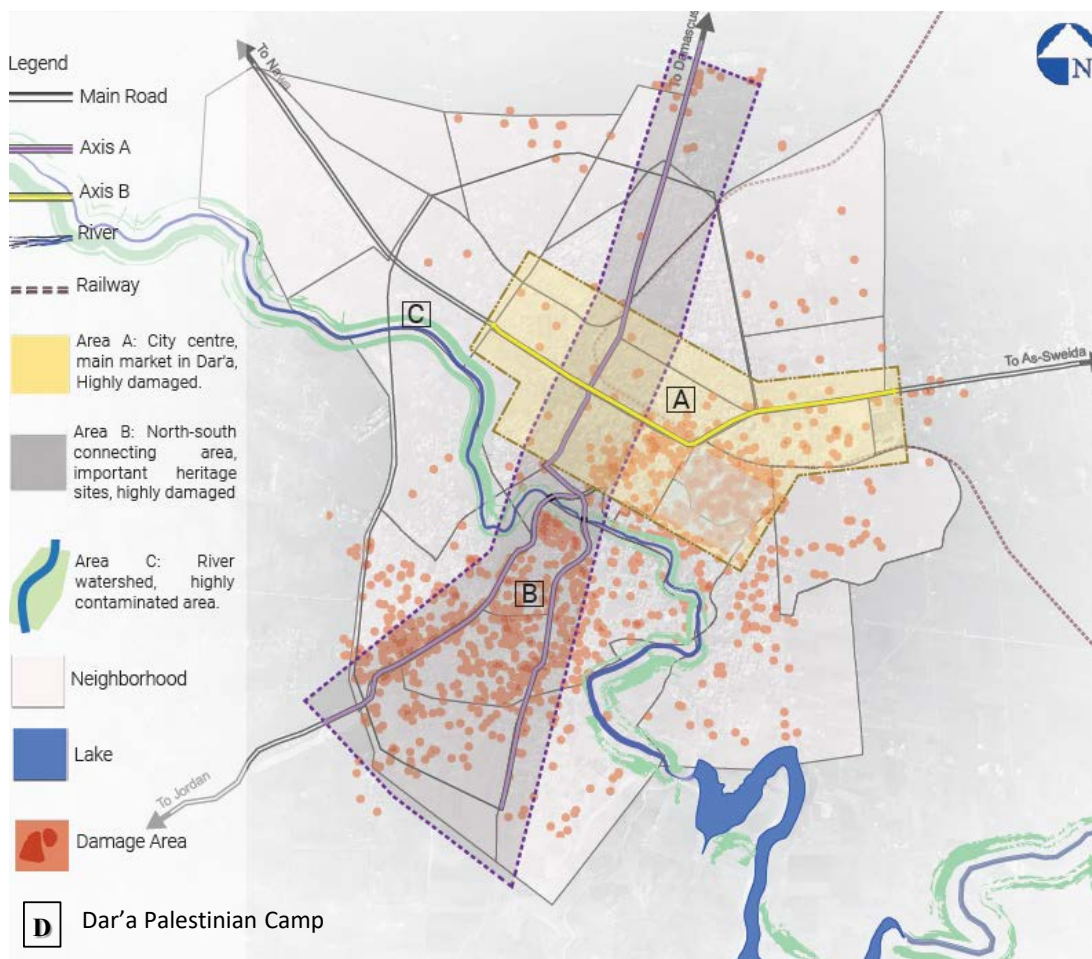
Figure 7 Map priority actions for the JP based on the Recovery Plan for the City of Dar'a. Source: UN-Habitat

> gardens, public spaces, commercial area, heritage sites, and sport stadium.
- Highly contaminated Area-C with river watershed. The priority activities for Area-C aims to protect the environment, including prevention of pollution from sewage water, along the river valley and estuary through enhanced solid waste management and cleaning campaigns.

Harasta Recovery Plan

During the conflict, around 45 per cent of buildings in Harasta were partially damaged and 14 per cent destroyed. From a pre-crisis population of 70,000 to less than 500 during the peak of conflict, over 30,000 persons have returned to the city. One of the most pressing HLP issues in the city is the tunnel network that was constructed during the conflict. This tunnel network is threatening building safety and harming sewage and water networks.

The Harasta Recovery Plan focuses on three areas of the city. Area I and Area II suffer from great damage to the sewage network and threats to the structural safety of buildings due to the tunnel networks. Area III, the industrial area with the old market, is suffering from conflict-inflicted damage to buildings and infrastructure and the impact on economic activities.

For each area, tailored priority activities include:

- Moderately damaged Area I along the Damascus-Homs highway and extensive tunnel network. The priority activities for Area I include improved housing conditions by structural safety assessments for partially damaged budlings and rehabilitation of residential units, assessment and treatment of tunnel, rehabilitate of the main access, including gardens and main market, removal of debris, and rehabilitation of building area adjacent the highway with restoration of shops and administrative centres.
- Partially damaged Area II, current return area with extensive tunnel networks. The priority activities for Area II include structural safety assessments for partially damaged budlings and rehabilitation of residential units, assessment and treatment of tunnel, solid waste management and rehabilitation of infrastructure.
- Area III, economic centre. Priority activities for Area III include rehabilitation of factory and old market, rehabilitation of the severely damaged industrial areas.

Homs Recovery Plan

Homs City suffered large-scale damage and displacement from the conflict, particularly in certain areas of the city. An estimated 54 per cent of the housing stock has been damaged, reaching close to 70 per cent in informal areas. This is affecting nearly three in four inhabitants in the city. By 2019, the population had been reduced by between 45 and 63 per cent from pre-conflict population, with an estimated population of just under 500,000 and limited return. Reconstruction of housing has been slow, with large variations between neighbourhoods. HLP issues in Homs include a high share of informal housing and complicated, overlapping jurisdictions land ownership, presence of ERW in certain neighbourhoods, and the threat of development plans for modern, mix-use projects to be carried out through land readjustment.

Building on the experience from Aleppo and other city recovery planning processes, an integrated Recovery Plan is currently being prepared for Homs City. The process includes extensive community consultations and wide-ranging analysis on damage levels, infrastructure and service functionality, environment degradation, economic barriers and options for local economic development, rights protection (including HLP issues), urban heritage threats, local governance issues, social cohesion issues, etc. Return considerations are further informing the Recovery Plan and proposed priorities. It is anticipated that the comprehensive recovery plan will provide a strong platform for area-based return support and joint programming, and that it will likely generate future support.

Strategic priority I: Vision and mechanisms for integrated and bottom-up recovery prioritization

Priority activities aim to:

- Generate a set of key messages deriving from the Recovery Plan that lays out a vision, roadmap and priorities for integrated recovery interventions in Homs City, for stakeholders dialogue.
- Ensure interconnectivity between sectoral plans (local economy, environment, safe public spaces, local governance), cascading down to the local implementation level.
- Build consensus on the mechanism and modalities to transition between humanitarian and resilience interventions, as defined by the Recovery Plan; empowering communities and re-defining the role of civil society.
- Explore options for new financing and delivery modalities, that include community contributions and joint stakeholder recovery efforts (e.g., public private partnership).

Strategic priority II: Economic recovery and strengthened value-chains

Priority activities aim to:

- Develop a local economic recovery plan that includes a focus on rural-urban and regional linkages, with analysis of economic assets and relations in terms of labour, livelihoods and connectivity (e.g., Al Hasaweh light-industrial area and the connection to agriculture area in northern Homs triangle, Homs neighbourhoods and main souks).
- Identify and introduce sustainable energy solutions that will have a multiplier effect on economic recovery (including service functionality restoration).

Strategic priority III: Service functionality restoration in support of resident and displaced communities

Priority activities aim to:

- Target the prioritisation and implementation of an integrated set of urban service and critical infrastructure recovery interventions with a wide range of implementing partners.
- Apply an area-based approach to put in place (influenceable) conditions for returns, taking account of demographic displacement dynamics.
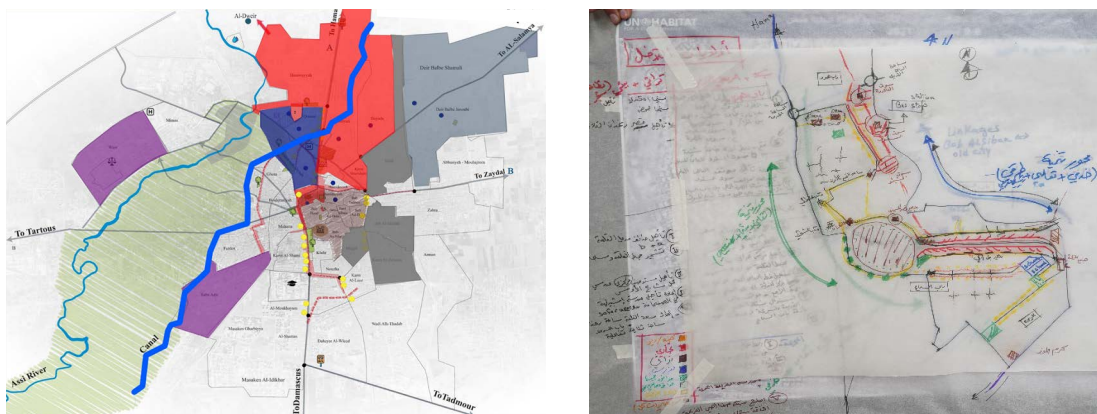

Figure 8 Right: Homs Recovery Plan (draft 2022), Left: Neighbourhood Priorities. Source: UN-Habitat

Implementation

In Syria, Recovery Plans and priority actions have been implemented both through multisector and multistakeholder programmes and as standalone area-based programmes.

Implementation of the Dar'a Recovery Plan

Joint Programme (JP) On Urban / Rural Resilience – UN Agencies Collaboration
The JP on Urban and Rural Resilience has been established to implement priority activities in the period 2019-2022 based on the Dar'a Recovery Plan. The programme builds on a commitment from the six programme partners – UNFPA, FAO, UN-Habitat, WFP, UNICEF, and UNDP – to collective programming towards recovery and resilience. Through the JP, targeted recovery plans have been developed at neighbourhood level, based on the Dar'a Recovery Plan, through extensive community consultation. In the process of identifying and implementing resilience-oriented, multisectoral interventions to advance city recovery, the programme benefits from the partners' mandates, capacities, methodologies, and previous work in Dar'a and the region.

The JP seeks to support the following outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** Urban Area-based Recovery and Neighborhoods Plans that are responsive to community's needs, particularly the most vulnerable groups, are developed, delivered, and monitored in an inclusive participatory and conflict-sensitive manner at local level.

- **Outcome 2:** Basic and social services restored, improved, and sustained to enhance community resilience and social cohesion

- **Outcome 3:** Households and communities benefit from sustainable livelihood opportunities, including economic recovery and enhancing social cohesion and community security. This outcome incorporates activities by all six agencies.

Coordination and collaboration:

The first phase of the JP focused on Area-A with its east – west axis across the city, while the second phase focuses on Area B (Dar'a Al Balad) and area C. The study area was also expanded to include some selected rural areas (FAO, WFP). The assessment data produced laid the foundation for a common needs understanding and approach for complementarity of interventions and a shared workplan. The JP partners contributed to the assessments in the following ways: FAO undertook a natural resource assessments and food systems analysis focused on value-chains for agricultural products and rural-urban linkages. UNDP undertook risk mapping and assessments of needs and priorities and facilitated coordination with active NGOs. UNFPA conducted needs assessments from the gender perspective and WFP conducted vulnerability profiling, supporting livelihood and value chain, UNICEF undertook demand driven technical and vocational education, self-learning programme, and back to learning campaign. UN-Habitat, as the technical advisor to the Resident Coordinators Office (RCO), coordinates with Programme Management Unit (PMU) on the participatory processes vital to ensuring principles of an area-based approach are upheld in the selection of activities, with a view to achieving a balanced set of well-sequenced interventions and effective participation of the community through the preparation and participation of training workshop. The partners follow a unified approach for joint and bilateral consultations, assessment and collaborations. Biweekly technical working group meetings are used to share updates on implementation progress, discuss challenges and agree on common solutions for coordination and harmonization of activities on the ground.

Priority activities to be implemented by partners include:

- **Livelihood support.** Support agricultural entrepreneurship among women and youth (FAO). Promote livelihoods by supporting households' productive assets and infrastructure (WFP, UNDP), market street rehabilitation (UN-Habitat).

- **Infrastructure and services restoration.** Rehabilitate ground water walls and irrigation systems (FAO and WFP). Provide solid wate removal services (UNDP). Provide access to education to children who are particularly vulnerable, including through school rehabilitation and training of teachers (UNICEF), rehabilitation of main axis, rehabilitation of house connections (Un-habitat)

- **Green and public space improvements.** Install solar PV street lighting (UNDP and UN-Habitat). Rehabilitate safer access to schools and open spaces within catchment area of schools (UN-Habitat).

- **Address environmental contamination and degradation.** Decontamination and clean-up activities of watershed valley which traverses the city. Provide community facilities in support of enhance cooperation and education on urban environment initiatives (UN-Habitat)

- **Food access increased.** Provide food vouchers (WFP).

- **Protection strengthened.** Carry out protection activities for girls (UNFPA).

UN-Habitat – UNRWA collaboration in Dar'a Camp

The Dar'a Palestine refugee camp was home to 10,500 Palestine refugees prior to 2011. During the conflict, the camp was destroyed, and UNRWA estimates that only around 600 Palestine refugee families (3,000 individuals) have returned.

UN-Habitat and UNRWA are working jointly to put in place the conditions for return of displaced Palestine refugees to the Camp and enhanced connectivity, outlining a targeted action plan for the camp that will link to the overall Dar'a Recovery Plan (area B). The focus is on addressing HLP issues identified through comprehensive profiling using integrated housing recovery interventions targeting a specific part of the Camp. The UNRWA needs assessment from November 2018 found that all premises including three school buildings and a clinic needed substantial repairs or complete rebuild, while the HLP assessments showed that risks differ between the areas of the camp. Social cohesion factors are also being mapped, and given due attention in the action plan. The profiling from these assessments is currently being finalised.

The following strategic priorities are addressed through the collaboration:

- **Strategic Priority 1:** Ensuring that the most vulnerable refugees meet their basic needs.

- **Strategic Priority 2:** Improve the effectiveness / efficiency of emergency programme delivery.

Priority activities include:

- Housing repair: pilot of shelter repair interventions. The selection of areas and households is based on UNRWA's vulnerability-based approach, undertaken with participation by community members and local committees.

- Infrastructure and service restoration: repair of UNRWA education facilities, sewage pipes and installation of solar lightning on the main streets.

- Green and public space improvements: creation of a community playground and recreational area for students and the community.

- Skills training: provision of technical and vocational training to improve construction skills for youth.

Implementation of the Aleppo Recovery Plan

In line with priorities identified in the Recovery Plan, UN-Habitat has implemented a package of projects that aim to restore service functionality, enhance mobility and access, stimulate economic recovery and social cohesion, and support returns preparedness. Packages include:

- Rehabilitating the main transportation axis linking western and eastern Aleppo along with secondary access routes and enhancing safer access for pedestrians and children;

- Improving air quality and solid waste management processes;

- Rehabilitating public spaces and markets linked to urban cultural heritage sites;

- Secure access to housing by supporting cadastral services.

During a second phase of support, a further set of project packages will be introduced that link to phase one interventions, with intended wider multiplier effects for recovery.

Rehabilitation of road networks and sidewalk tiling

Rehabilitation of micro-bus station

Safer access; rehabilitation of school premises of Saleh Hajjar school

Supply, Installation and Commissioning of 2 Medical Waste Incinerators - Aleppo Municipality

All photos on page: UN-Habitat

As per the Recovery Plan, priority interventions include:

- Housing repair: Rehabilitation of housing units in Area II, and façade building along Damascus highway.
- Infrastructure, services and market restoration: Rehabilitation of factories and shops, secondary water and sewage networks, schools, and installation of solar lighting and rehabilitation of sidewalks and pavements in main market.
- Structural safety improvement: Filling the tunnel network below the city, 2km length.
- Debris removal: Transporting debris from streets to the land fill for recycling.
- Green and public space improvements: Creating a functional axis that connects schools with rehabilitated gardens.
- Solid waste management: Provision of containers and equipment spare parts, cleaning campaigns). Treatment of informal dump sites.
- Local governance strengthened: Training packages for municipality on geographic information systems, urban planning regulation and its execution, and project management.

In Harasta, UN-Habitat is utilizing country-based pooled funds to introduce a multifaceted response to HLP issues, in accordance with identified priorities under the recovery plan. This includes interventions to ensure structural safety of housing by filling a tunnel network, removing debris, and preparing for further interventions related to common service provision.

Figure 9 Harasta. Tunnel passing beneath several buildings with depth less than 10 meter from terrain surface. Source: UN-Habitat

Monitoring and Due Diligence

Robust monitoring must accompany interventions to ensure sound prioritisation and equitable distribution of support as international response progresses from humanitarian to early recovery. A rigorous due diligence system has been developed and tested in different locations and applied through all stages of the URF process in Syria. This includes:

a) City and neighbourhood level profiling – context and political risk analysis, environmental and social risk assessment;

b) Risk screening for indicative recovery plan priorities;

c) Environmental and social risks screening for project packages with a green/red light system for approval, and;

d) Environmental and social management plan with mitigation measures for risks on each project.

A coherent recovery monitoring framework for localised recovery plans in Syrian cities can be supported by the SDG11+ tool, designed to enhance urban baseline data and improve targeting. A careful selection of 37 SDG indicators strikes a balance between understanding the status of needs, services, systems and capacities at decentralised levels, capturing activity outcomes against several levels of engagement form the neighbourhood to city to national levels. Furthermore, a virtual planning tool for monitoring and accountability has also been piloted in three locations in Syria.

Next Steps

Programmatic

Building on the experience of the URF to date, the following areas should be explored in new URF cycles in Syria and be tested in other contexts:

Scale up the URF approach: The URF approach has been successfully piloted in Syria using an iterative approach. Building on developed analysis, recovery plans, experience from implementation, and monitoring, each URF cycle has integrated learning and provided opportunities for existing and new actors collaborate across geographies, sectors and scales. Based on the results and value-add to date, the URF as a tested approach can be scaled up and replicated in more locations, with additional partners in support of ongoing and future work.

Increase the use of community contracting: The URF has shown how community contracts can be used for inhabitants to contribute with their own labour and/or resources for the realisation of priority activities. Community contracting can be further explored in future implementation to increase available resources to carry out activities, support identification and integration of local capacities by implementing actors, anchor and create ownership of activities in the local community, foster ownership of such investments, provide local employment opportunities and skills development, and improve accountability.

Improve multi-level governance within a URF framework: The URF provides a framework to improve multi-level governance arrangements, empowering the right levels of government with the legal and financial capabilities to implement urban recovery projects attuned to local needs.

Increase the role of private sector: The private sector plays an important role in the recovery and longer-term sustainable development of Syrian cities, including in sectors such as housing and service delivery. The involvement of private sector actors in response to date has been limited yet constitutes a critical instrument for leveraging market opportunities in urban recovery and for scaling up and improving efficiency in response. If done in a regulated and equitable manner, involvement of private sector can support sustainable economic recovery and improved access to goods and services. Depending on economic sanctions and other limiting factors, the URF may support increased private sector engagement in recovery activities in a responsible manner and mobilise private and civil actors in social responsibility.

Explore new financing options: The URF suggests how recovery interventions may be 'self-generating' in the sense it can be used to unlock private finance, and used to develop public-private-partnerships (PPPs). Local authorities in Syria have limited financial and human resources, and URF priorities have highlighted how existing municipal resources can be leveraged for recovery activities, and how local authorities can be supported to increase own sourced revenues (ORS) to further expand their capacities. Moreover, while still small-scale and largely unproven in Syria, blended funding options may be explored for interlinked interventions in the URF, e.g., for energy and housing development. Such instrument may be used for risk transfers, create market incentives, provide technical assistance, and to remove commercial barriers.

Plan for resilience phase: The URF should reflect the evolving situation in Syria and the transition from early recovery and stabilisation towards recovery and resilience. While maintaining the broad humanitarian-development-peace lens with absorptive, adaptive and transformative measures, the focus of the URF will need to shift towards greater attention to the medium and longer-term, and particularly on economic recovery as a prerequisite for resilience and recovery.

Continue attention to context analysis and recovery planning: Application of context analysis and recovery planning in new location(s) under JP Urban / Rural Resilience, and in new location(s) under Area-Based Return Support initiatives, and for the identification of standalone area-based programmes will continue to be at the centre of the URF in Syria. Further refinement of urban profiling and baselines should

entail elaborating systems for risk management and preparedness.

Conduct foresight analysis: The URF analysis provides valuable insight on future trends and how this may be leveraged in programming. Nevertheless, there is still untapped potential for predictive analysis and forecasting, e.g., related to the return of IDPs or environmental challenges, that would benefit the URF process and other response efforts in Syria. Forecasting processes are particularly useful to support collaborative efforts and to mobilise joint actions. The URF can thus inform priority actions in a highly uncertain context.

Explore options for innovation in data collection, analysis, implementation and funding: Building on experience to date, innovative and future-oriented methods, applying technological advances and different financing mechanisms (such as e.g., digital tools for community-based planning and blended financing) should be explored for improved efficiency, to expand the scope and to increase impact. This could entail the activation of and support to capacity building for urban and regional observatories and (or) the regional observatories, testing for SDGs/NUA indicators for benchmarking.

Support the improvement of return conditions: In preparation of an improved safety and security situation and changing returns situation in the future, the URF can help improve some conditions for return in cities. The URF facilitates this by developing a better understanding of the factors influencing return decisions for those who intend to return across population groups and geographies, using a human-centred approach. For example, the URF may help job creation and economic opportunities for returnees, IDPs, and those who remained in the locations, to support sustainable social and economic recovery, improve social cohesion, and advance programming around safer access, and public spaces' recovery.

Policy

The URF may help support inter-agency collaboration by:

- Advocate for a right-based housing sector recovery framework.

- Provide perspective on recovery of interlinked services and infrastructure in Syria.

- Improve the understanding of environmental challenges and recovery in the context of Building-Back-Better.

- Inform preservation of urban heritage and economic recovery.

- Operationalise the trajectory towards decentralization and accountable local public service delivery using participatory area-based approaches

- Strengthen localized durable solutions, including input to area-based return support.

- Provide an urban recovery specific monitoring framework, SDG 11+, to monitor area-based progress towards the SDGs.

- Provide context analysis, plans and policy recommendations, including risk and damage assessments, conflict sensitivity analysis, HLP policy guidance.

Photo: UN-Habitat

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