

What's Missing? Adding Context to the Urban Response Toolbox



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Webinar launch transcript:

Responding to urban crises effectively means grappling with complex, interconnected environments. Although the number of crises in urban areas has risen in the past decade, evaluations of urban humanitarian response have consistently found that humanitarians have had little understanding of contextual issues. These criticisms aren't new, they have been made following responses to urban crises in Haiti, Afghanistan, CAR and West Africa.

Does the humanitarian sector require a cultural shift to recognise the value of understanding context? And, what does 'understanding context' mean anyway?

New research from ALNAP has explored the potential of using tools to better understand context and how this can improve response to urban crises. You may ask, what are these tools? Don't we already have enough tools? And, where would one get started to learn more?

This webinar presents key findings from ALNAP's new study 'What's Missing? Adding Context to the Urban Response Toolbox' and feature presentations from Concern and International Rescue Committee, to organisations currently using these tools. Throughout the webinar, participants had the opportunity to ask questions and share their own experiences.

Speakers

Chair and Speaker: Leah Campbell, Senior Research Officer, ALNAP

Speaker: Bessie Nikhozi, Programme Manager, Concern

Speaker: Andrew Meaux, Governance Technical Specialist, International Rescue Committee

(85 minutes)

Leah Campbell (LC): Hello everyone, and welcome to the latest addition of ALNAP's urban webinar series. My name is Leah Campbell, and for those of you who don't know me, I'm a senior research officer here at ALNAP. I'm joined here in London with two of our communications officers here at ALNAP, Tim and Kara, and we also have on the time Andrew from IRC who's calling us from New York, and Bessie of concern who's calling in from Nairobi.

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LC: So, thank you all for making the time to share the next hour and a half with us today. We've got an exciting agenda to go through with you, and we're very pleased that you made the time to join us. So, I'm going to pull up a poll to get a quick sense of who's on the line with us, and the experience or understanding that you all might have of the topic we're going to talk about today, which is understanding context, tools that help us do so in urban humanitarian response, particularly.

So, as I mentioned, my name is Leah, and I've been with ALNAP since 2012. I lead our work here on urban humanitarian response, which includes this webinar series. So, those of you who have listened to these before, you might be familiar with my voice. We also have our community of practice resource portal, and we also have a series of research in urban humanitarian response. Also, at ALNAP, I work on our leadership and coordination research stream, and within that piece, I'm currently working on some research about humanitarian decision making, along with my colleague Paul Knox-Clark. We have with us today, as I mentioned, two speakers. The first is Andrew Meaux from IRC. Andrew is a governance technical specialist at IRC, and he's leading their global approach to context analysis. Prior to this role, he was the urban project coordinator for the stronger cities initiative, where he led the development of the urban context analysis toolkit, which is what he's going to be presenting today. Before joining the IRC, he was a senior programme specialist at PACT, supporting community development projects in Southeast Asia, and began his career as a project manager for housing reconstruction in post-hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. He has an MA in conflict management and development economics from John Hopkins, and a BA in international development from Tulane.

We also have with us Bessie Nikhozi, who is a programme manager in the urban livelihoods and social protection programme at Concern Worldwide in Kenya. Bessie has worked on livelihoods, cash based programming, social protection, and emergency response in the urban context for the past nine years, and is currently leading the urban early warning and early action project. The project is a partnership with the Nairobi city county government, to put in place a mechanism to monitor food security and nutrition related emergencies, based on key urban context sensitive indicators.

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LC: And she's also part of the core team, which is leading the process initiated by Concerned Kenya, to undertake a contextual analysis in the urban informal settlements within the city of Nairobi, which is what she's going to present with us today. The purposes of such exercise is to design a holistic approach to address the drivers of poverty and vulnerability in this context.

So, that's a very quick introduction to us, your speakers. And now we'll pull up the results of the poll. So, we have quite a mixed bag, really. The good thing is that we have no experts who feel that they should have been presenters in the webinar, so hopefully we've picked some good ones. We have about 20% of you who have not really heard of this topic, not heard of complex tools before signing up for the webinar. 28% who've heard of these sorts of tools, but aren't quite sure what they might be. Another 28% who are familiar with the tools, but haven't used them, and 25% who have used them a bit, but would like to know more. So, quite a mix between those four options, and hopefully the webinar will be able to give a little bit for each of you, and help you learn some more. We'll have another poll at the end of the webinar to get some more of your thoughts.

So, the reason we're holding this webinar, the reason we're all here today, is because the past couple of years, ALNAP has lead a piece of research which looks at the importance of understanding context, and the sorts of tools which we might be able to use to do so. And the broad scope of the research is bigger than what we're going to be able to fit into the webinar today. But I just wanted to let you know a bit about it, so if you haven't had a look at the paper that explores all the various aspects of the research, you can take a look. The scope includes what is the context, whether we need to understand it to respond more effectively to urban crises, what are these tools that we might be able to use to understand, how do they differ from each other, and also from other sorts of analyses, and how humanitarians can use tools most effectively.

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LC: The first thing that the paper talks about, and what I am going to spend a bit of time talking to you today about, is that first question, what is context? What I found when doing the research is that the term is often used to mean different things. And so, we can have a bit of confusion, because if it's not clear what we mean when we say we need to understand context, it's not clear what our point is, and it matters to me because I think context is something that's currently a gap in a lot of humanitarian response, and it's important to be clear what that gap really looks like. So, we came up with a definition that we used in the research, and that's on the graphic that's on your screen, which is one of the graphics that's in the paper, so if you would like have a look at it in more detail, you can. So, basically, what we've outlined is that context is the environment and circumstances within which something happens, and which helps to explain it. And in the urban environment, the context can include these six different areas, and it means the economy, politics and governance, the services and infrastructure, social and cultural aspects, the space and settlements, and also the range of different stakeholders which exist in that context.

It's important, again, to be clear what we mean by context, because it's different then some other terms that it's also important to be clear on. So, to reinforce what I said on the last slide, the context is the environment within which something happens, and which also helps to explain it. And some of the questions that we might consider when we're thinking about context are, why are the things the way they are, who are the relevant stakeholders to this context, and how does the context affect humanitarian response? The context goes beyond any specific situation which might have happened, and is broader than the experiences of any particular individual or group. And so in saying that, we're distinguishing context from, for example, the situation, which is the crisis or the conflict. The things that are happening, and the conditions which exist at a particular time. So, in a humanitarian crisis, we might have just had an outbreak of violence, or a displacement, or an earthquake, or a flood, or multiple situations, multiple different things happening at the same time. And each of those are taking place within a broader context. So, the context, in a way, does include the situation, what's happening, but it's broader than that. And the context is also different and broader than the experiences of a particular individual, or group of individuals, and their capacities, their vulnerabilities, and their needs.

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LC: So, in distinguishing the context from capacity, vulnerability and needs, what's important to note is that we currently have tools, for example, for understanding some of these things, like a needs assessment, or vulnerability assessment, or a damage assessment, which tells us about the situation. But what we don't often do, is use a sort of tool which helps us to understand the context, and so that's the gap we're talking about in terms of what these tools can add to our existing range of tools, and how they're different than the tools that we might already be using.

I want to three reasons why it's important to understand context. The first is just simply that it helps to improve our response. Humanitarian response, especially in urban areas, has been criticised for not being context relevant enough, and part of the problem is that we don't have an understanding of what that context is in the first place. And so, if we don't understand the context, how can we possibly have a response that is relevant, and appropriate to that context? So, it helps in that way. It also helps us to be sensitive to sensitive issues, to conflict, to be able to do no harm by not pressing any buttons that we don't even realise that are there. And finally, on this one, it can help us to base our response on evidence rather than assumptions. The second reason it's important to understand context, is to ensure that we're building on what already exists in the city. So, in any urban environment, there are lots of different existing systems and structures of governance of the markets, of social networks, of religious communities, that all exist, that are all capacities that could be harnessed. There's also a huge range of stakeholders that even if we won't necessarily end up partnering with them, so they're not the most relevant stakeholders to our programming, they might be the most relevant stakeholders to the context. And so, it can help to understand them, because we can harness that knowledge, the existing capacities, and also we can not get in the way of anything that exists. The final reason it is important to understand context, is that the urban environment is complex, and each piece of it is interconnected, and so we need to try and understand, even though it's difficult, as best as we can, how those connections can actually, do actually take shape in order to help us to have an understanding that's holistic. More holistic view of that context. Each of these points, again, is covered in the paper in a bit more detail, so feel free to have a look there to learn a bit more.

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LC: Okay, so getting on to what are these tools that we're talking about that can possibly help us understand context. The paper looked at 25 tools. Some of them focused more on the context than others. Many were developed and used in humanitarian contexts, but I also looked at tools that were used in development and urban planning environment. Some of the tools focused on urban context, others did not, were more broad. Each of the tools that are explored in the paper are mentioned briefly, and there's also a separate annex, the image of which is on the slide on your screen, that goes through each of the tools in more detail. There are also a few different graphics in the report, which highlight some of the differences and distinctions between the different tools, and I'm just going to pull up a couple of the images really quickly. Again, these are all in the paper, so you can have a much more detailed look at them afterwards. This one, for example, shows the timeframes that each tool takes. You will see on there the two tools that we are going to look at today, concerned contextual analysis and the urban context analysis developed by IRC. You'll see that some of them are quite short, some of them take a long time, some of them vary quite a bit. We also have a graphic that looks at the scale of focus for each of the tools, so whether they are used to look at a country level, a national level, a city level a neighbourhood, or some combination of those. So, again, those graphics, as well as a number of others are in the paper, so you can have a look if you'd like to compare some of the tools, and we will shortly get to the presentations from Andrew and Bessie to learn about 2 of the 25 tools in more detail.

I just want to mention a couple more things about the term 'tools', really. The first is that tools is a word that I found along the course of the research can be a bit problematic for some people. Some people hear the word tool and think, oh goodness me, I'm going to be made to read and memorise and use meticulously a 300-page document. I don't need any more tools in my life, what I need is a checklist. The way I've grown to understand tools, is a very broad term. A tool could be a 300-page manual, it could also be a chair, or a hammer, or a piece of paper, or a pen, or whatever it is that can help you to get to the objective that you have. So, please understand, when I say tools, which is a term that I will use a lot in this webinar, and also that's used a lot in the paper, it's used in the broadest sense possible. A couple of points about why tools, aka why do we need tools, why not just hire staff who have an existing understanding of context.

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LC: A couple reasons. Tools can help guide us to relevant information, which we might not already look for. Tools can help centralise and triangulate information from a variety of sources. Tools can help to legitimise things that we thought we knew, but we weren't quite sure, we didn't have the evidence for. And also, in using a tool, especially if they're done with a team of people, or even as a joint coordinated exercise, this co-production of understanding means that the process of using the tools, in itself, adds value.

On the other hand, there are some limitations for tools. They do have to be used properly, and the findings have to be actioned in order to be of any use. The analysis isn't automatic, it does require our human time, and our human minds. And it's also important, just to reiterate, that context tools aren't necessarily most likely the same as tools which we might understand to use other things, like needs or assessing damage, or even designing a specific technical intervention. So, they're not a be-all and end-all tool that's going to do everything for everybody. One last thing that I'll highlight is the importance of setting an objective for an analysis, which is the first step that you need to do, if you're thinking about using a tool to better understand the context. I've been asked a few times since putting out the paper, and while doing it, which is the best tool, of all the 25? And the answer, really, honestly, is that there isn't one, because you need to go back a few steps and ask, what are you trying to achieve? And then what scope are you aiming for? For example, do you need information in a week? Is this really urgent? Maybe the World Vision's GECARR tool is for you, then. Are you trying to facilitate a collaborative process and do you have the time to spend and invest? In that case, the displacement profiling tool, often facilitated by JIPS, or the city profiles developed by UN Habitat, might be more appropriate for you. So, the objective, and also the practical needs and limitations that that objective brings, will help you answer that question of which tool is best.

And two last points I'll make on this, the best tool is not necessarily the one you used before, or the one that has your organisation's logo on it, and the best tool still needs to be adapted for specific use in the context you're going to use it in, in the specific case that you're going to apply it for. And again, all of these things are discussed in more detail in the paper, so please do have a look.

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LC: This is another list of questions, which I'm not going to go through, because we don't have time to answer all of these, but these are all covered in some detail in the paper, so if you're curious you can have a look there, and you can also follow up and send in a question if you want to learn more about any of these, for example, when's the best time to do the analysis, how do you make sure that you get uptake, should the tools be used by one organisation, or many, and so on.

So, before we get to Andrew and Bessie's presentation, I'll just summarise some key points to take away. If you remember nothing else from the past 20 minutes or so that I've been blabbing on for. The first is that right now, humanitarians, particularly in urban humanitarian response, don't sufficiently understand the context and we need to. We need to do better. There are lots of tools that do exist, and these can help. They can improve our understanding of context if we use them. Identifying an objective before we start doing any kind of analysis is really critical, and it's something that we need to go back to, when we're making decisions throughout the response, and throughout the use of our tool. The urban context is interconnected and so it's important to have a tool that looks at all of these different areas and how they're connected. And the last thing is that the tools can't help unless we change our mindsets, and make understanding context something that we decide is a priority, that we decide is important. It does mean taking time to do yet another thing, but the value of that can be significant, and so that's the point that I'm trying to make in the research, and I hope that you'll find the paper useful to look at.

On this last slide, I just highlight the series of research that have lead up to this paper, as a reminder that ALNAP is working on a broader research piece around how we understand and work better in the complexity of urban environments, and so this paper is just one in a series of research that ALNAP has done. And also to highlight if you'd like to access any of the papers, if you don't already have a copy of the What's Missing paper, you can find one on our website at the addresses on screen. So, I'm going to pass over to my colleague Andrew, now, who's going to share with us learning from developing and piloting and use of the urban context analysis toolkit.

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Andrew Meaux (AM): Thanks, Leah, for that presentation, which I think was a great introduction, and makes my job a little bit easier, since I can go right into the tool and not have to provide as much background. So, I'll be talking today about the urban context analysis toolkit, which was developed as part of a consortium and partnership with NRC and World Vision, and funded by IID, through funding from DFID, and also received support from ECHO. So, the toolkit was developed and when we started to look at the toolkit, we did a desk review of what are the available tools that help to analyse the context. And I think in this process was around the same time period where Leah was doing her earlier research around urban systems, and defining what context meant. So, as you'll see later in the presentation, the framework that we developed is very similar to what Leah had proposed previously, as we were arriving at the same idea about what context meant.

So, the tool was then piloted in five locations, in Bangkok, Dar es Salaam, Maiduguri, Juba and Amman. Each of which had different particular dynamics that helped to make the tool piloting more robust and learn from that experience. And finally, it was published in June 2017. There's also been use in 2017 after the publication and the initial pilots of the toolkit in Uganda, in Nigeria, along with an upcoming context analysis that we'll be doing in Milan. So, the key features of the toolkit, they stem from where, the inspiration behind where we want to focus this on. One was trying to be systems based, and the image on the right is the framework that we adopted, which is based on Leah's work around urban systems. And kind of putting at the centre do no harm, and gender equality as something that cross-cuts these areas. The questionnaires and the toolkit in general is tailored for a man-made crises, or one leading to urban displacement, but could also be adapted to work in other context. It's best for that transition period from emergency response to recovery and development, because it gets at some of those underling 'why' issues that may be harder to get at in an acute emergency. And the timeline for data collection we targeted was two weeks, as the longest period for data collection, and then one week, roughly, of analysis and report writing.

So, the process to conduct the analysis, it is basically similar to any type of assessment, in which you start with the preparation period of defining what is that key question, or objective that will guide the context analysis.

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AM: The data collection itself, which primarily consist of key informant interview, and focus group discussions. So, key informant interviews and focus groups, at the level of the community. And then also key informant interviews at a city-wide level, or even potentially state or regional, to get that multi-scaler perspective. And then finally the analysis piece of actually digesting the information received, holding a validation workshop. And I think a key step is communicating those findings, both internally, extensively with stakeholders, but also, ideally, externally to organisations that may have not participated in the analysis, but would benefit from access to the analysis.

And in addition to the ten steps, there are ten accompanying tools. These fall into the categories of preparation. So, the tools required to prepare the analysis. A series of questionnaires. So, two questionnaire guides, tailored for displaced in host community, and then along with key informant interview guides that are tailored for different types of stakeholders that you would often run across in an urban context. And finally, analysis. So, looking at how to digest the key findings. What are those implications for programmes. An example of when we piloted this, and I think it was one of the largest of the pilots, was in Maiduguri in December 2016. So, for those not familiar with the context, Maiduguri had basically doubled in size from 2012 to 2016, growing from 1 million people to a population of nearly 2 million due to a large number of IDPs that had been displaced by the presence of Boko Haram. 88% of those IDPs at the time when we were doing this analysis were living outside of camp settings. When we went there, we selected three wards to focus the analysis on. In total, during the context analysis, we did 18 focus group discussions, 24 key informant interviews at a community level and 23 key informant interviews at a city-wide level. So, the stakeholders that maybe cover multiple areas of the city.

And the results of the analysis were basically two-fold. Implications about what are ways that we need a shift from the emergency response to building recovery and resilience, and adjusting some of those underlying factors that lead to the crisis, along with what are different ways of working in the city, how should we work differently. And we're now about a year from when the context analysis was conducted. And so, in retrospect, and then talking with the country programme, some of the changes that they've made were quite substantial.

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AM: So, one was a new shift of programming around education and health system strengthening that wasn't previously done before. The economic programmes also shifted from cash to cash-plus-livelihood programming, recognise that the displaced was going to be a protracted situation, rather than something that would quickly resolve. Along with youth livelihoods being underlying factor that lead to the crisis. And finally, contingency planning. The analysis highlighted that cholera was a recurrent crisis, and at the time, organisations were treating it as it arose, rather than expecting that it would come up, and preparing that response. So, in the past year, there was a more coherent and consistent preparation across all of the organisations working in Maiduguri, that avoided the cholera outbreak from ever being a major issue. And then finding different ways of working. So, three big takeaways for the country team, a year on, was increased focus on stakeholder and community engagement, recognising those power dynamics and stakeholder dynamics at the community level. And increase focus on coordination with local actors, and the country team taking on a bigger leadership role in workgroups, and ensuring there is a stronger liaison with the local government, rather than treating the local government as some type of road block. A focus on really recognising them as a partner, and responding to the crisis. And finally, a systematised approach to client feedback channels, and really thinking about client needs and preferences as the key function of how we be more effective in our programming.

Now, I highlight here, just at the top right, a quote from the deputy director of programmes at the time, which I thought it encapsulates it well, in the sense that sometimes tools, as Leah mentioned, can seem like, oh, another tool. But when I think they're used right, they can be as the DDP said, a fascinating and super interesting analysis that helped lead to real change in the programmes. A few considerations when using it. When to use it, is that it's good for establishing that good enough understanding of urban systems. It identifies entry points to transition from emergency to recovery. It is not good for quantitative data, or a quick emergency response. In terms of how to use it, defining clear guiding questions, including a diverse team to have that diversity of perspectives that helps make the analysis more robust. And data collection, meeting with stakeholders, is that first step of engagement. So, messaging around how to meet with them is important, I think, both that initial understanding, but also future collaboration.

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AM: Using daily debriefs with the data collection team to really see, are we getting the right information? Are we probing deep enough? Are we just touching the surface level? And ensuring that we do get down to that deeper level. And finally, ensuring that the analysis aligns with decision points, so that there is uptake, and taking the time to communicate the findings, even if it seems like an extra effort.

So, that's a quick overview of the urban context analysis toolkit. I include here the website where you can find all of the materials that came out of the Stronger Cities initiative, along with my email address, in case there's any specific questions. So, thanks for the time, and I will turn it back over to Leah and the next presentation.

LC: Great, thanks so much, Andrew, for that. It was really great to hear more about the IRC tool. We're going to go to our final presentation, and turn over to Bessie from Concern, who's going to share with us a bit more about the concern contextual analysis tool, and how it's being used at the moment in Nairobi. So, we'll turn over to Bessie.

Bessie Nikhozi (BN): Hi, I'm Bessie from Nairobi. Working with Concern Worldwide in our Kenya programme. I will be presenting on the Concern tool, which basically, Concern brought together its existing assessment tools and created a contextual analysis tool, which has been used in a range of context, where we operate since 2012. So, Concern's mission is to help people living in extreme poverty achieve major improvements in their lives. And to eventually walk ourselves out of a job by ensuring these improvements (? 31.57) Concern's support. So, to achieve this, we engage in long term development work, and resilience building. We also respond to emergency situations, and basically seek to address root causes of poverty through our programmes. Some of the key programme areas that we have engaged in in the past include health and nutrition, education, livelihoods and advocacy work. Therefore, our contextual analysis tool seeks to provide information that will support our mission, and works to give us information that resonates with our mission. You will notice that this theme of extreme poverty cuts across most of what you're going to be talking about throughout the presentation.

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BN: When you look at understanding extreme poverty, we as Concern, designed a tool that can help us design programme interventions that address extreme poverty in a holistic manner, by helping us to understand integral immediate causes of poverty. Also in emergencies, we are not only focusing on the basic needs, but we are also trying to take into account issues of inequality, risk and vulnerability for these specific, extreme poor groups that we are working with. And therefore, you will agree that in many of the contexts, these prevailing issues of inequality usually exacerbated during emergencies. So, that's why our tool is key in bringing out those key issues during emergency response. We're also keen on focusing on slow onset emergencies in urban settings, which the tool helps us to provide information that you can build on, and understand the context as applied during response. The tools assist us in the target groups, as it identifies what are extreme poor, understanding why they're poor, and what keeps them in poverty. As you will see in the illustration, we cover in our development programmes, our target group being chronic, the chronic poor, and the churning poor, but in our response, then, we also focus on the occasionally poor. So, the tool allows us to be able to do both targeting and also look at strategic partnerships, the stakeholders and the duty bearers (ph 35.29) that you're supposed to include in the intervention, and also in terms of finding out what are the key issues to target when you're talking about the extreme poor.

It is anchored on the three dimensions of extreme poverty. We outline these three dimensions in our paper, which is called 'How concern understands extreme poverty'. And this looks at inequality, low return on assets, and lack of return on assets. It also looks at risk and vulnerabilities. And when you look at lower return on assets, concern sees the extreme poor people as those without the basic assets, and that even with the basic assets, when they are available or exist, they do not generate significant returns to meet their basic needs, therefore keeping them in extreme poverty. Again, when looking at extreme poverty, you look at maintenance and obstacles of that (? 36.57), people from getting out of poverty, and this is where inequality, risk and vulnerability come in. We go beyond owning up opportunities, but looking at addressing specific obstacles for the extreme poor to participate, and to be able to achieve better outcomes.

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BN: So, how do we address these vulnerabilities? We answer five key questions in our contextual analysis tool. The first question is who are the extreme poor in this context? And where are they? This helps us in both geographical and beneficiary targeting. We also answer why are they poor. This also assists us to put together the proper holistic projects, or programmes that allow us to assist them to get out of extreme poverty. What keeps them in poverty. We also answer what opportunities are available for the extreme poor. This also assists us in any innovations that we need to put together to be able to bring them out of poverty. And then what needs to change? Who is responsible, and what is already happening. When we talk about who is responsible, we talk about the duty bearers, and what is already happening. You know, like in the urban context, we have a lot of actors already on the scene, so what form of complementarity are we bringing in to the context to be able to support what is already on going, or support whatever the community is already doing? The contextual analysis has eight steps. The first one is mostly internal, we're talking about communication and planning. Looking at how Concern understands extreme poverty, if you are using a consultant, trying to get everybody on board, and putting together the teams, that also flows into preparation. Where we agree on the scope and the objectives of the contextual analysis, as Leah had mentioned earlier. Training, we need to look at the tools and the methodology, the data gathering framework, and then when you're going to step forward, which is data gathering, mostly looking at secondary data in line with the framework. And broadly identifying what the extreme poor, and identifying broad risks. We then go into the fifth step, which is looking at secondary data and primary data, to cover the gaps from information that you couldn't get from step four, and also looking at communicating with communities and other stakeholders to refine the information that you are getting. Step six looks at answering the key questions, so you analyse what you've gathered from step four and five to answer the key questions that were presented earlier, and then step seven goes into programme options, where we are looking at what can we do to support, what can we do to alleviate the problems that we've analysed and gotten from the steps above. Finally, all of this is captured in the contextual analysis report, that is used further, and can be used by other organisations, or other projects.

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BN: Then we are currently carrying out a contextual analysis in Nairobi, and we are currently at step four, which is the data gathering phase. At this phase where we're at, we are already starting to have some emerging discoveries. One is that the contextual analysis is a lot of times a myth buster. Where having worked or lived in a context for a while you start thinking that you know it all. While a contextual analysis can be able to highlight, or bust some of those myths. For example, many times you assume that people living in informal settlements are all poor, or at the same level of poverty, which is not always the case. We are currently seeing this contextual analysis, and this information that you are getting from it is peeling away at the layers of poverty, and you can see that in the semi-informal settlements you will have landlords who are much better off, and you can find the people who are living closer to the rivers, with the areas that rent is much cheaper, being worse off than the people living in other areas. We are also finding that there are some areas, because we are doing an contextual analysis that is area based, you find that there are some areas where it's been over researched. There is a lot of conflicting information, and then you will find some informal settlements, especially the ones that are recently formed, where you will have lack of data. Information is mostly at sub-county or county level, and many times it is not disaggregated between the poorer areas and the more affluent areas. So, we are getting a lot of issues in terms of getting disaggregated data, I think, from one settlement level. And then the sector lens view, I think is something that we have a lot, when we go into some of these contexts. If you are coming from the health sector, you are looking at the problems at a health section lens view. I think this has helped us also to remove that sector lens view, and we are looking at the context in a more holistic manner, which is a good thing, because it will allow us to actually come up with projects that are more holistic.

We have used this contextual analysis tool in other cities, and we find that though the tool has been used, the same tool has been used in several different cities, the outcome of problem options that have come out of it have been very, very different. You find in Haiti, Port-au-Prince, there was an integrated reconstruction and development programme that addressed living environment and also worked closely with the local authorities. In Dhaka, you will find the project targeted extreme poor living in squatter settlements, and was targeting the key thematic areas, as listed there.

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BN: In Mogadishu, you will find that it was the programme option selected were youth skills building, TVET training, small-scale enterprise for women and the partnerships. And this clearly translates that one size does not fit all. The same tool can be customised for different contexts to be able to bring out rich information that can allow you to actually come up with the programme options that are suited to that context, which is the key of having context specific programming. And with that, I would like to hand you back to Leah.

LC: Great, well thanks so much both Andrew and Bessie, for your presentations. I'm sure that there are a tonne of questions that are going to be flooding in. To kick us off, we're going to start off with a question that was actually submitted by one of you in the registration, and we're going to turn to Andrew first, and the question is, thinking about these sorts of tools, what's new about context tools, these sorts of tools, and how do they enhance our current approaches, the things we're already doing, if we add in these sorts of tools for our work? So, over to Andrew.

AM: Thanks, Leah. So, I think there's a first acknowledgement that many of the tools do draw from existing practices. I would say, particularly though, for humanitarian context, is that political economy tools have generally been high level guides, and there were very few things that we found that were practical ways of doing a context analysis, and understanding what are some of these power dynamics, or political economy dynamics, in terms of practical questionnaires, or very easy to follow frameworks for humanitarian organisations to adapt to their context. The other thing is I think, many of the conflict analysis tools do get at some of that, but a framing of a conflict analysis isn't always appropriate for urban settings, where it's often hosting situations, where you're looking more to how do you collaborate with organisations, how do you partner with them, how do you engage the right stakeholders, versus just a conflict lens of the actor landscape and some of the underlying conflict causes, versus the underlying urban systems issues that might exist in the city.

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LC: Great, thanks Andrew. The next question, I'm going to take a stab at, and then we'll go back to Bessie and Andrew. This question is a couple of questions that have come in, combined together, really, and it's about how much time it takes, how much resource, or even how much cost there is to use these tools. And if there are any particular tools that are appropriate if you need to get an analysis done quickly. So, this is a short answer. In terms of the resource or cost, I did try when doing the research to get information about each of the tools, and how much it cost to use them, but it was difficult to get this information consistently, and it also seemed to vary quite a bit, depending on the context. Because depending on if you do something in one part of the world, or another, that changes quite a bit. Also, some people would just add up the cost in terms of two flights for international staff and a vehicle for a week, whereas others also costed out the staff time, so it was quite difficult to get a consistent picture. I think the best thing to do, would be if you are interested in using a particular tool, to contact people who have used that tool before, and if anyone needs a contact for any of the tools that are explored in the research, and it's not publicly available, then please do get in touch, and I can put you in touch with someone directly who can shed a bit more light. In terms of the timing, I won't pull the graphic up that I showed earlier in the presentation again, but as you see there, there is a huge range of difference. So, there are tools that can be used in just about a week, plus some time for planning, and the quickest one that we found was the GECARR, that was developed by World Vision, and obviously that's a bit more of a macro-level view, and it's also, the name GECARR, the first two letters stand for 'good enough', so that's the kind of approach that's used if you need something really quick and immediate. And the others range in time. Most of them seem to take between 1-6 months, in that kind of period, and then there were other ones which primarily, because they were not just about coming up with an analysis, but also about the value of the process, could take longer than 6 months. And again, in the paper there's that graphic that you can have a look at to see how much time, and so on.

So, we're going to go to our next question, and I'm going to turn back to first Bessie, and then Andrew. This question you might interpret a bit differently, but the question is, what are the biggest challenges that you faced when doing the context analysis in the context that you've spoken about, and what did you do to overcome them? So, we'll turn first to Bessie, and then to Andrew to hear more about this one.

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BN: Thanks, Leah. The first thing is something that I've mentioned, is that we have a lot of data that you are getting to use as secondary data, because that is the first one of the major steps that we are carrying out. But, what we are finding out is that a lot of this data is at national or sub-county or county level, and is not disaggregated at lower levels, or between the poorer and the more affluent areas. So, you find that you have a lot of information, but most of it is not useful if you want to do an area based contextual analysis. Another issue that has come up in the past is often having, it's very hard to be objective based on your, as I mentioned, the outlook that you have based on the projects that you've been working on before. So, we are working cross-sectors, and just having multi-sectional team to look at the context in a more holistic manner, is working for us in terms of beating that challenge. In terms of the data, it means that we might have to do more primary data collection, than we thought, at the beginning, and to be able to cover the data gaps that we are currently facing from the secondary data analysis.

AM: From our side at the IRC, I think one of the challenges that comes up with the context analysis is that you're often trying to understand fairly sensitive political issues at times of why things aren't working, or why things are the way they are. So, I think a key approach has been the messaging around how you are framing the context analysis, when you're reaching out to initial stakeholders for a meeting, making sure that it's not just, and the purpose isn't just about the displaced population, it's about really responding to the needs of vulnerable people in the city, or at large, rather than a framework of rights based. More, what are those opportunities for joint collaboration, and I think just continuing to focus that message around that aim of supporting the local government can help to ease some of the potential tensions, or issues that can run in. When you're meeting with different levels of government to talk about some of the underlying issues that may be sensitive, or even issues related to NGOs that may be sensitive to talk about.

LC: Great, thanks to you both. The next question is something that I did touch on in the paper, so I'm glad that someone's raised it, because I think it's an important one, and the question is rather than using tools, shouldn't we prioritise the empowerment of local actors who might already know the context, rather than enhancing the understanding of international actors, international NGOs. So, I will turn back to Andrew, and then I will share my own thoughts on this one.

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AM: It's a good question. I would say, first off, recognising that the current dynamics is that INGOs are often the primary recipients of large awards, so there is a key necessity of INGOs understanding the context. What it often entails is enhancing INGOs' understanding of who is the local actor landscape, so that they are partnering, rather than the common approach of just going in as an INGO and directly implementing and doing all the work. So I think it's that first step that allows actually a recognition of who are those local actors that we should be working with, and then working with them. I think another key point, and I like in Bessie's presentation, this topic of myth busters, it's just recognising that people that are within the context, may often struggle to understand underlying issue of the context. I know I have strong biases, I'm from the United States, about why things are the way they are in the US, and I have very limited understanding, or may have blind spots that I don't recognise. Sometimes that structured analysis, and not assuming that a local actor, by being in the context, will automatically understand all the different dynamics, I think is an important thing. Maybe just a third final point, I think also a key role INGOs can play, is because they are in a place of power, is leveraging that power to understand and influence higher level stakeholders, including UN agencies, including higher levels of government. That can be difficult sometimes for local actors to address.

LC: Great, thanks Andrew, and I think some of the things you mentioned are exactly what came up and what I've put in the report. I guess one thing I'll mention is, I did talk to, not as many, but some local staff, local organisations when doing the research about whether the analysis exercise they'd been involved in was useful for them, as actors already working or already from the context that the analysis was taking place in, and the ones who I spoke to, again though it wasn't the main focus of the research, so I didn't do it systematically, but those who I spoke to said that it was useful, and three things seemed to come up.

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LC: One was going back to that idea that I mentioned previously, about the co-production of knowledge, that even if they knew something, or they had some existing understanding, that actually going through a process where either their whole team, or also people from an international office, or even actors from other organisations worked on the analysis together, that that time spent understanding the analysis jointly, so that everyone came out with the same picture of the context, was really useful. Therefore, it was useful to use the tools, even though everyone might have had their own levels of understanding beforehand.

The second part is legitimisation of knowledge. It goes back to, again, the idea of using evidence rather than assumptions. For some of the local staff that I spoke to, they said, “We didn’t find out anything that really shocked or surprised us after doing the analysis, it kind of confirmed things that we knew on the whole, but it was really useful to be able to say that, you know, that this tool, this analysis exercise that had a methodology to it, that wasn’t just something that I knew in the back of my head, legitimised this knowledge,” and that also empowered them to be able to share the existing knowledge that they had, because it was supported by the analysis exercise, rather than feeling that they wanted to share some information, but didn’t have any proof for it, so would they be challenged if they shared it? So it helped to legitimise their knowledge. Also it help to break them out of the narrower view that they might have had, thinking of their own sectoral focus, and I know this is something that I haven’t mentioned yet, but alongside this paper we’ve developed a few videos and bite-sized materials, and in one of the videos, because Bessie was also interviewed for the interviews, so you’ll all want to take a look at those, and we’ll share the links, they’ll be posted at the end. Bessie talked about finding that the tool helped to expand one’s view, and to not just look at things that might be relevant to one specific sectoral expertise, and to look at the broader context.

So the next question that we will go onto, is going back to Bessie, and it’s about, once the analysis is done, how can your organisation focus on a specific problem or its cause, especially if you uncover the kind of complexity, and interconnectedness, and that holistic view that we mentioned, would actually be a good thing?

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LC: How do you then walk away from having this broad understanding, and turn that into something that your organisation can concretely focus on as a specific programme intervention? So we'll turn over to Bessie for that one.

BN: As I mentioned, this is for us in the tool, one of the steps of the tool, where we go and identify programme options. It has always been a difficult step, I must say, out of the eight steps this is one of the most difficult ones, because as you've mentioned, the urban context is very complex, therefore you have to be able to find programme options that can be able to address the issues in the context. So, what we look at in our analysis, once we have all the programme options, we look at programmes that address immediate and root causes of the problems. We also take into account who is responsible, in terms of causing and solving these problems. We also look at what others are doing in the context, through the (? 01.01.43) analysis, and then also look at the resources and the skills available within Concern and its partners, to be able to address the problem. So, when we are looking at it, your rationale for selection programme options has to be based on something. We have highlighted in the tool somethings, we don't limit it to that, but one of them is that looking at the competencies that we have in the sectors of our focus, and then looking at our policies and our strategies. How in line are the programme options in line with our strategies and our policies? We also look at the humanitarian imperative, and check whether the programme options, or the intervention saves lives, and whether it alleviates suffering.

We also look at the impact of the intervention, how effective it will be, it's sustainability, because as I mentioned earlier, our aim is to ensure that whatever interventions we carry out last beyond the involvement of concern. Then also have a bit of cost benefit analysis on how efficient this intervention will be, and whether it will reach the extreme poor and make lasting changes in the lives of the extreme poor. Basically, it's not one size fits all for all organisations.

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BN: When you're analysing the kind of interventions you can do after doing the contextual analysis, you have to look at very many different things, I've highlighted, but also your objectives, when you are starting out the contextual analysis, what are your objectives, what was the main aim of carrying out the contextual analysis, which will also help you answer the question in terms of identifying the programme options, or identifying the interventions that you need to carry out in an emergency setting. Again, due to the complexity of the urban setting, many times you cannot do it on your own, so it needs a lot of collaboration and coordination with local authorities, with the communities themselves, with other actors in the area, building on the strengths of other interventions that have already been carried out. So, you have to consider all these things before you come up with programme options, and also work in tandem with ongoing systems.

LC: Great, thanks Bessie. Another question that's come in is around something that I covered in the research a bit, and also is the focus of one of the bite-sized materials that I mentioned that we've developed. So I'll touch on that briefly before going back to Bessie and Andrew with another question. The question that's come in is about how to get donors on board to be able to support the resource need for analysis, but also to make space for analysis. I think this is really important, the entire fifth section of the report, which is quite a sizable one, is about what else you need beyond the tool itself, to be able to use the analysis that results from any of these tools effectively. There are a few other things in there about buy in from senior leadership, and the skills that you might need to be able to understand and interpret the findings that come out, but one of the key things is the role that donors and institutions in general can do to basically support the use and uptake of analysis. So, one of the bite-sized materials that we've created, which will be online hopefully this week, but early next week at the latest, which we'll put on our website and we'll also send an email to all of you as attendees of the webinar, with all of the links to the bite-sizes that we're producing. This one is a policy brief that focuses on the key advocacy messages, the stuff I mentioned at the beginning of the presentation about the need to understand context, and ends with a couple of key things that donors and institutions can do to support, and really be an advocate for improved use of analysis.

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LC: I hope in some small way, that having the policy brief and the research behind it can support donors. I know there have been a few that have been engaging with us through the research, and we're thankful for those, and hopefully others will come on board as well. That doesn't fully answer it, but I hope that's a useful contribution.

Another question that's come in, I'm going to go back to both Bessie and Andrew on this one, so I'll prepare you. The question is about balancing the depth that you go into, in the analysis. How do you know when you've reached the point where you have enough information, because for all of these topics we could probably write a PhD about, the governance structures of Maiduguri, the social complexities of Nairobi, so how do you know when you've got enough information to be able to make functional use of it, and you're not missing anything that's critical, but you're not then just collecting minute detail that actually isn't going to be practically useful? So, I'll go back to Andrew on this one first, and then we'll go to Bessie after.

AM: It's a great question, and I think it's something we struggled with throughout the tool development process, trying to answer. It's hard to say, I think in a certain sense, you don't know until you're doing it, and then you start collecting information, and the same information is triangulated by a number of sources, and by that point you feel fairly confident, and after meeting with ten diverse stakeholders, and it's the same story, and there's been probing, that a particular finding seems roughly correct. I think the way we tended to approach it, was basically we would spend about one to two days in each particular community, meeting with as many different perspectives as we could get. So, usually six focus group discussions ideally, and then with hosts and displaced, or other relevant community groups that are there, and then holding key informant interviews. We felt that that usually gave us enough information that would, I would say, tell us what our known unknowns are, and remove some of the unknown unknowns, so that if we were working in that area, we would know what to watch out for, and we would know what things we need to dig a little bit deeper on, for that minute level detail, that they think becomes relevant when you start to implement a programme.

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AM: Knowing exactly whether the local leader is good or bad in one particular area, may be a level of detail that can be hard to aggregate up across a city, knowing every single individual leader, versus generally at a higher level, which are some communities have these particular dynamics, these communities have other dynamics. When we work with them we should think about these particular approaches, was how we tended to apply it. It's a great question, I'm not sure if there's a magic bullet or answer to it.

BM: In our case we focused on the five questions that I presented on. All the data we gather is geared towards answering those five questions. If the secondary data doesn't cover it, then we go to the second data gathering phase, which is to fill the information gaps that the secondary data did not get. As I mentioned earlier, it's very easy to know the information gaps that you have after the first round of data gathering, therefore that is what is going to inform what you need to collect during primary data gathering. In our case, since we were doing a lot of area-based data collection in some of the most lowly ranked informal settlements, then it's much easier to focus in, or to dig deeper into the layers, once you have the secondary data and you know what data is missing, to help you answer the five questions. All the data we gather is anchored on those five questions, and if it does not answer any of those five questions, we do not collect it, and if any of the five questions is not answered, then we go to the next layer of data gathering, to be able to answer those questions.

LC: Great, thanks to you both. There is a section on this balancing the scope and the depth in the report, and I think it was a challenge for everyone that I spoke to really, so I've tried to capture what I got from interviewing all the people involved in the 25 different tools, and there is a section on this in the report, so have a look there as well for a bit more. The next question I'm going to turn back to you Andrew, as a forewarning. The question is about, a lot of the tools that seem to get used in humanitarian context, not necessarily tools just for understanding context, but tools in general. The person who's asked this question has noted that a lot of them focus on the problems, and the challenges, and the negative aspects, problems that need to be solved, rather than identifying the strengths or opportunities that exist.

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LC: So, the question is, does the tool do anything to capture the strengths that exist in the context that's being looked at, as a way to build on, as opposed to just identify problem areas? I'll turn over to Andrew for your thoughts on whether the urban context analysis toolkit has found a way to do this.

AM: Yeah, certainly, I think it's another very good question, and I think quite important especially, because I think one of the key principles of working in the urban areas is recognising those opportunities and taking advantage of the fact that there are more opportunities of working with stakeholders in an urban area, than you may find in a rural area. So I think two approaches would tick into this, one is in the stakeholder analysis, is that it's not just identifying which are the stakeholders to be aware of, and mitigate risk around, but also who are those that have capacity, how can we work with them? Who are those who maybe don't have certain types of capacity, but we could strengthen their capacity, we could partner with them or collaborate to be able to achieve this outcome jointly together. I think similarly, on the social issues, is using the common tool of dividers and connectors analysis, and thinking about not just what divides the community, but also what are those factors that bring people together. Now can we programme around, especially I think, commonly an urban displacement crisis, what are things that connect hosts and displaced communities, and how can we really leverage those in our programming, so we're building on that as a particular asset in that particular context?

BN: In the case of the Concern tool, we're looking at one of the questions that we asked when we're collecting data, or doing the contextual analysis is, what are the opportunities that are available to the extreme poor people, and what is already happening. So, building on that, it's basically looking at a systems building approach, where you look at what is working well. Instead of carrying out a contextual analysis that then comes up with programme options that create parallel interventions to what is already working well in the system, the contextual analysis will provide information to see what is already working well, and where are the gaps. So if the system has gaps then the contextual analysis will provide information that will allow you to plug into those gaps, and to assist what is already happening, and strengthen it. Yes, in that sense the tool does look at systems strengthening, and strengthening the already existing interventions.

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LC: Great, thanks to you both. We're almost at the end of the webinar, so I'm going to ask one final question, and then after that, I'm going to ask each of our presenters to share any final thoughts, or reflections that they have, and also launch a final poll to get those of you who stuck with us to give your thoughts on how useful these sorts of tools might be. The final question is whether we think that it's worth spending time to create these sorts of toolkits, given how unique each crisis is. Basically, is it worth it to spend time and resource in creating toolkits, given how unique each crisis might be? I'll give my answer first, and then turn over to Andrew to answer, and also to share his final three thoughts.

My response to this one would be, each of the tools that I found have been used for the most part in different context, sometimes quite different, vastly different than each other, and the reason that works, and the reason I'd say it is worth spending the time to develop a toolkit like those that have been shared today, and some of the others in the research, is that the tool isn't specific to one exact context, it's a generic kind of thing, particularly focused for urban, or for a certain neighbourhood, or for national, depending on which tool it is. Each one would require adaptation to any particular context. The answers might be different if you ask for example, what's the governance structure in Maiduguri, compared to what's the governance structure like in Port-au-Prince, or other urban environments, but the questions are often the same, especially thinking about the urban environment, the sorts of different things that we need to understand, the governance, the economics, the social aspects, the services and so on. The questions about those things are often the same, even if the answers are different. So I'll turn over to Andrew for any thoughts that he has, and also to give his final thoughts as we get closer to the end of the webinar.

AM: Thanks Leah. I think, like Leah said, it provides that starting point, and the responses to the questions may be different, but some of those guiding questions, those questions that Bessie had in her presentation, can be quite universal, and apply across a range of contexts. With the urban context analysis toolkit, you know, we've done this in Juba, and we're about to do this in Milan, and have done this in Amman, so it does cover quite a range of different contexts and levels of development, and the findings are extremely different, but the general framework tends to work fairly well, this systems lens of understanding the city and its context.

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AM: The final thoughts, I just wanted to say, I think this is a really rich conversation, and I think a number of the questions that people are asking, are demonstrating quite a high level of understanding of how these things can be applied, and the thoughtfulness. Sometimes there can be an impulse, “We’ll adopt this tool because it sounds nice,” versus, “This is the tool because it’s the right tool, the particular type of information that we’re seeking to collect, and it can answer that key objective or guiding question that we’re seeking to answer,” which I think is really important to emphasise, the clarity of the purpose of conducting the context analysis will yield more useful findings and more uptake after it.

LC: Great, thanks Andrew. Before we turn to Bessie for her final thoughts at the end of the webinar, we wanted to ask your opinion once again, so we’re going to launch another final poll. This one asks you to give your thoughts about how useful these tools are, and what application you think they might have going forward. Obviously in the confines of a poll question, there’s not the space to elaborate a full detailed answer, so feel free to send in any more elaborated thoughts using the question box or by email. You have our contact details. While you’re answering that poll, which should be up on your screen now, we’re going to hear some final thoughts from Bessie.

BN: As we go through the contextual analysis in Nairobi, it is very interesting to see how many things are coming up, as I mentioned, in terms of myth busters and things that you do not normally notice, if you did not take the time to carry out the contextual analysis. I really feel that it is important, if we are going to make any sustainable changes, to be able to understand the context, how things work, to be able to address the issues in the urban context, especially since it’s very complex. We are finding that the tools are very helpful, in terms of bringing out hidden issues, and how to best address them.

LC: Thanks Bessie. Only 42% of you have voted. There is an option for ‘I’m not sure’, so you can click that if you’re sitting staring at the question and aren’t sure how to answer it. I’ll give the results right at the end. I want to mention a couple final things, as we close the webinar. The first is that as I mentioned, the paper and three different bite-sizes and three videos are also going to be on our website in the coming week or so.

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LC: We're going to send a link to all of those, to everyone who signed up for the webinar today, and we're also going to send you, probably in a couple of weeks, the recorded video and transcription of the webinar, so you can pass that on to colleagues, or use it to recall anyone's responses and questions and so on. We also have something that's going to pop up as soon as you leave the webinar, and you'll be sent an reminder, although in past experience, if you don't fill it out right after the webinar you probably won't, so please do fill it out. It's a survey that asks just a few questions about what you thought of the webinar, and we really do use these to shape the future direction of webinars, and to know what you thought of the session. Please do take a look at the survey. We will close the poll now, which again is a mixed response, the results of which you'll see just on the screen in a moment. 19% of you think no, which is good, because if everyone said yes, then I'd have to stop talking about context tools, whereas now I'm justified to keep on banging on about this for the next little while. Quite a few of you do think that these tools are useful across the board, others are not sure, and we've also seen a couple of comments coming in saying, it really depends, and obviously the poll is quite general, and each context is quite different, so we understand.

This is the end of the webinar. Thank you all for sticking with us. Thank you hugely to Andrew and Bessie for taking the time to share their experiences with us, and calling in today. Also thanks to my colleagues Cara and Tim, who have been behind the scenes for the whole webinar, making sure that it ran smoothly, so big thanks to them as well, and thanks to all of you. This is the end of the webinar now, and we look forward to seeing you, and hearing from you on the next urban webinar. Have a great rest of your day.