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Humanitarian Interventions in Situations of Urban Violence

*Discussions
from the
Community of
Practice*

This document shares emerging thoughts from the Urban Response Community of Practice on the topic of urban violence. It includes questions raised during a webinar and subsequent discussions on the topic.

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What are the challenges of a context not covered by international law?

State prestige means resistance to a humanitarian presence may be high

Criminal gangs are poorly motivated to uphold humanitarian principles

Domestic laws may present differences over detention and use of force

Non-recognised belligerent actors make engagement difficult

International actors have less ability to negotiate in 'domestic' issues



Principles such as **neutrality** and **impartiality** should remain ...

... they are still the best approach to gaining the **confidence** of, and **negotiating** with, the actors that control the access to communities.

How can we respect core humanitarian principles in urban contexts?

How does urban violence increase the risks of poor targeting?

Such contexts often blur the line between **victim** and **perpetrator**

Assessments can also suffer from **limited** access to communities

As well as inadequately responses, poor targeting also risks **compromising neutrality**

Organisations such as World Vision start by providing **visible, uncontroversial assistance** for the community.

What are the effective 'entry points' and how can we directly engage with armed actors?

Through greater local involvement in assessing needs, **greater access and direct contact** may be awarded.

All actors will likely have a selfish interest in both their **communities and infrastructure**.

Acceptance ultimately needs to depend on **offering something of interest**.



In urban settings, all the issues of humanitarian aid and service delivery are **intertwined locally**.

With limited time and space for access in contexts such as Mogadishu, **area coordination** could replace the compartmentalised, sector-based cluster system.

Should we reorganise along geographical, rather than sectoral, lines?

Joint needs assessments and provision can help to mitigate the risks of inadequate targeting



Is it the responsibility of humanitarian actors to address urban violence?

The current system is failing the majority of victims of violence because such cases **lack a succinct 'disaster' or 'war' to precede it.**

Urban violence therefore presents a problem for **defining humanitarianism**, as it includes so many longer-term issues.

There is an **'analysis gap'** of such situations, since they fail to be identified as a humanitarian crisis despite displaying all the effects.

How does such **violence manifest itself** in different places?

To answer this we need to consider: how can we **monitor and evaluate** such interactions?

How do we **bridge these different mandates** to include non-traditional contexts such as urban violence?

What are the big questions that still need to be answered?

