

Urban armed conflicts and water services

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Many of the recent armed conflicts have affected cities of the developing world. In the resulting emergency situations, water supply is among the most essential services to restore. It forms part of urban services commonly managed by local water sector institutions. This article is based on case-study research carried out in six war-afflicted cities and towns that looked at how partnerships between aid agencies and water sector institutions influenced aid operations benefits. In emergency operations, findings showed that partnerships did not necessarily influence the efficiency or effectiveness of the response in the short term but were beneficial because they prepared for rehabilitation. During rehabilitation, findings suggested that current practice maintains a separation between large-scale rehabilitation projects and community-based projects focusing on specific neighbourhoods. This has a detrimental effect on sustainability and fails to address the needs of the most vulnerable populations. The research recommended a more coordinated approach in order to reconcile sustainability and universal service.

Keywords: armed conflicts; humanitarian relief; urban areas; water and sanitation

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE BECOMING increasingly urban. According to the United Nations Population Division (2009), urban populations in the less developed regions will be larger than rural populations by 2020. In addition, developing countries are prone to social unrest, which in the worst of its manifestations may turn into armed conflicts. The vast majority of armed conflicts that have erupted since 1946 took place in developing countries (Themnér and Wallenstein, 2011). It is therefore hardly surprising that as many as 150 cities and towns from developing countries have been affected by armed conflicts between 1975 and 2004 (Pinera and Reed, 2007: 403). One of the main reasons explaining this trend is that cities are usually considered as decisive targets by rebels who see them as symbols of power and wealth. Moreover, in cities, unemployed male youth can easily be recruited as fighters (Murshed, 2002: 389).

The provision of essential services to city dwellers requires relatively complex infrastructure. Targeting this infrastructure during

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