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Brief: Urban Response Practitioner Workshop

Meeting Needs in a Context of Protracted Urban Displacement in the Horn and East Africa



Nairobi, Kenya
May 2016

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Executive Summary

Today, more than half of the world's population of 59.5 million forcibly displaced people live in urban areas¹ and their average length of displacement is 25 years.² This phenomenon is acutely felt in the Horn and East Africa (HEA) region³ where countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda are among the top-10 major refugee-hosting countries in the world, taking in refugees primarily from Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Burundi. All the while, these countries are becoming more urban. While estimates vary, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Ethiopia are all urbanizing at a rate of 2% annually, while East Africa as a whole is urbanizing at a rate of 1.7% annually, the fastest regional rate in Africa.⁴

This has significant implications for cities within the region, including heightened challenges for providing basic services to the city's inhabitants. It also impacts the changing humanitarian landscape, where traditional humanitarian responses have been most often designed for camp or rural/remote contexts. Humanitarian organizations must adapt to this new reality in order to meet the needs of impacted populations and to support the city, its local actors, and its systems. This raises questions around the interplay between urban local actors (such as municipal officials or urban planners) and humanitarian agencies and how coherent and sustainable service provision strategies can be implemented in this challenging context.

In order to better understand these issues, to learn from challenges and successes, and to identify more appropriate ways of working, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) hosted an **Urban Practitioner's Workshop on Meeting Needs in a Context of Urban Displacement in the Horn and East Africa**.

The aim of the workshop was to bring together humanitarian (both international and national), international development, and local municipal actors called into action by various urban crises within the region. Collectively, these actors are referred to in this brief as the **urban response network**.

Based on the workshop's discussions, the IRC developed the following four key recommendations to meeting needs in a context of urban displacement:

- 1. Recognize Our Work Doesn't Start from Scratch**
- 2. Think Holistically**
- 3. Act Locally, Advocate Regionally**
- 4. Innovate Together**

At the conclusion of the two-day workshop, attendees agreed that humanitarian organizations have a critical role to play in meeting the needs of urban displacement in the HEA region. While the exact nature of this role depends on the context and nature of the crisis, it is clear that humanitarians should be generally a.) **rethinking traditional programming models** and b.) **acting as a part of a larger network of urban responders** to collaboratively address the needs of urban crises.

¹ According to the ODI report, "Protracted displacement: uncertain paths to self-reliance in exile," 59% of refugees live in urban areas, a number that is increasing annually. Protracted displacement: uncertain paths to self-reliance in exile. ODI. September 2015. Available at: <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9851.pdf>. Accessed June 27, 2016.

² World at War. UNCHR Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2014. June 2015. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html>. Accessed June 27, 2016.

³ The IRC terms this region the Horn, East Africa, and Zimbabwe (HEAZ) region, which includes the organizations country programs for Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.

⁴ World Urbanization Prospects. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations. 2014. Available at: <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/highlights/wup2014-highlights.pdf>. Accessed June 27, 2016.

Overview

In May 2016, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) hosted a practitioner workshop entitled **“Meeting Needs in a Context of Urban Displacement in the Horn and East Africa”** in Nairobi, Kenya. The workshop is part of IRC’s Urban Crises Program, which is divided into two components: learning and advocacy. The goal of the Urban Crises Program is to generate practical evidence as to what constitutes effective urban humanitarian response for both beneficiaries and the places in which they live, and to use this evidence to improve humanitarian urban programming and advocate for innovative and sustainable approaches to urban response within the international community.

To this end, the aim of the workshop was to bring together humanitarian (both international and local), international development, and local municipal actors currently responding to crises affecting HEA’s urban areas. As many publications written about the topic of urban humanitarian response highlight the need for non-governmental and public sector actors to collaborate,⁵ this workshop sought to gain insight from these various perspectives in order to determine the challenges, opportunities, and potential solutions to meeting needs in a context of urban displacement. With this in mind, the workshop’s organizers encouraged each invitee from an international non-governmental organization (INGO) to invite a local municipal or national actor with whom they may or may not coordinate with on the ground. This allowed a forum where actors working in the same country but representing different perspectives engaged with one another over the two-day period. Workshop participants are listed in the **Annex**.

This brief is meant to provide an overview of the key points generally agreed upon during the workshop. The following recommendations are meant as a general overview and are the sole opinion of the Urban Crises Program project team and the IRC.

⁵ For a comprehensive database of publications on the topic, please visit ALNAP’s Urban Humanitarian Response research portal at www.urban-response.org.

Recognize Our Work Doesn't Start from Scratch

Humanitarian actors should take care to understand the existing urban context, its number and diversity of stakeholders, and the opportunities and challenges that exist in order to avoid doing harm, duplicating services, or creating tension.

Humanitarians working in urban environments are often joining the ranks of a large and diverse network of stakeholders and systems that, for better or worse, are connected by the context in which they function. Because of this, humanitarians should understand that their work doesn't start from scratch and that understanding the existing context is crucial to designing and delivering programming that is appropriated to both the needs of targeted beneficiaries and the political, social, and environmental dynamics of the place. This understanding will often lead to increased coordination, if not collaboration, between urban stakeholders, as well as programs that either support or leverage existing urban systems.

Attendees expressed this need particularly in Somalia, where over one hundred NGOs operate, largely within the urban centers such as Mogadishu, Galkayo, or Garowe. Despite the large presence of NGOs, meaningful coordination with local governments in Somalia remains an exception to the rule, leading to "siloes" programs and data that rarely changes hands despite its relevance across stakeholder groups. Similarly, in Kampala, a representative from the Ugandan government spoke of the myriad of service providers offering protection services to urban refugees, including the police, civil society actors, and other urban authorities within Kampala. Given these challenges, attendees recommended incentivizing information sharing between stakeholders, particularly between NGO and government agencies, in order to create a more level playing field for coordination and collaboration.

In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, NGOs have addressed this issue by convening an Urban Refugee Stakeholder Coalition (URSC) of local and international NGOs operating within the city. Still in its infancy, the coalition aims to serve as the coordinating body of NGOs actively programming for refugees, ensuring that services are not duplicated and gaps in service delivery are easily identifiable. International NGOs such as the IRC and Church World Service, and local NGOs such as Asylum Access Tanzania, have begun to tailor their programs around this coordination. The coalition is similar to one convened in Nairobi, which focuses on protection, and other city representatives of the HEA region expressed the potential benefit of coalitions within their cities.

In understanding context, it is also important to recognize the key differences between an urban area *in crisis* (i.e. at war) versus one *receiving* people from a crisis (conflict or natural disaster affected refugees, Internally Displaced Persons [IDPs]). The majority of cities represented during the workshop were places receiving people from a crisis, but one practitioner currently working for the IRC in Yemen, where the organization has programs in Sana'a and Aden, highlighted the particular need to remain flexible to in cities where the context is constantly changing due to conflict dynamics. Additionally, working with local partners and even local authorities can sometimes be more important in cities in conflict given the challenges International NGOs face in reaching affected populations.

Think Holistically

While keeping specific outcomes for the people they serve in mind, humanitarian actors should consider how their actions align or intersect with the overall development agendas of cities and how integrating various perspectives, partners, and working holistically (i.e across traditional humanitarian sectors) may support these agendas and influence funding.

Given the complexity and dynamics of urban areas, and given that the forcibly displaced within them often join pre-existing marginalized communities and neighborhoods for an average of 25 years,⁶ humanitarians should think holistically around how to enact programming that tackles multiple problems at once and could tie into a city's development agenda. This is particularly true in Nairobi, where both humanitarian and development actors are often working to address similar problems around poverty, inequality, and disenfranchisement, with perhaps the only significant difference being that humanitarians focus on refugees and IDPs while development actors generally focus on the urban poor. In Nairobi neighborhoods such as Eastleigh, which is notorious for its high concentration of Somalis, vulnerable refugees and the urban poor are one and the same.⁷ During the workshop, Nairobi-based practitioners spoke of the need to encourage a broader platform of synchronized programming among Nairobi's various NGOs and stakeholders that falls along the humanitarian-development continuum. This is particularly pertinent for Nairobi, a city that has high concentrations of poverty and yet is still making strides in economic development as the capital of the country with East Africa's most vibrant economy.⁸ By engaging more with the development sector of the city – including perhaps the private sector – humanitarians may tap into a larger well of opportunities in addressing the social and economic challenges of urban refugees.

Understanding this, and operating under a progressive national refugee policy that includes freedom of work, freedom of movement and right to own property for refugees,⁹ the Ugandan government is working to holistically meet the needs of both refugees and vulnerable Ugandans. Through a collaboration with UNHCR, the Ugandan government is supporting health, education, and livelihoods by supporting the urban authorities of Kampala in these areas of service delivery. This effort is aimed at promoting peaceful coexistence between refugees and Ugandan nationals while responding to their shared needs. Similarly, UN Habitat works holistically in Somali cities such as Bossaso and Mogadishu by focusing on economic improvement for vulnerable populations, primarily through A.) Housing and slum upgrades, B.) Strengthening basic urban services (such as road rehabilitation), and C.) Sustainable

⁶ World at War. UNCHR Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2014. June 2015. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html>. Accessed June 27, 2016.

⁷ Kenya has a refugee policy of encampment, meaning that refugees living in Kenya outside of camps – at those humanitarian programs seeking to address their needs - face unique challenges. According to the Refugee Consortium of Kenya, "it is estimated that 30-50,000 refugees/ asylum seekers live illegally in urban areas." Refugee Management in Kenya. The Refugee Consortium of Kenya. Available at: <http://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/FMRpdfs/FMR16/fmr16.6.pdf>. Accessed June 27, 2016.

⁸ For more information, visit: <http://www.city-data.com/world-cities/Nairobi-Economy.html>. Accessed June 27, 2016.

⁹ Following Uganda's Refugee Act of 2006. For more information, see, for example: Vanessa Akello, ed. Leo Dobbs. "Uganda's progressive refugee act becomes operational." UNHCR. June 22, 2009. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2009/6/4a3f9e076/ugandas-progressive-refugee-act-becomes-operational.html>. Accessed June 27, 2016.

employment and livelihoods creation.¹⁰ While these focus areas generally benefit communities or areas on the whole, they also have led to cross-cutting outcomes for youth and women.

It should be noted that working across sectors or with various partners does not mean straying from humanitarian outcomes. Rather, it means linking humanitarian outcomes to more holistic development agendas and creating more continuity between humanitarian and development goals. This linkage may lead to more effective humanitarian programs that more directly support the development of the city and promote self-reliance. It also means the potential need to rethink traditional funding mechanisms, which are typically separated between humanitarian and development donors. Collaboration between humanitarian and development actors may lead to long-term programs that meet the enduring needs of urban refugees, particularly those in protracted situations.

Act Locally, Advocate Regionally

As cities are hubs of political activity that may influence their representative countries as well as their representative regions, humanitarians should work with local, regional, and national government actors to promote shared lessons and advocacy messages across the region in order to effect meaningful policy change, particularly around durable solutions.¹¹

Given the heightened political activity within cities, particularly capital cities such as Nairobi, Kampala, Mogadishu, or Juba, urban humanitarian practitioners have a unique opportunity to proactively collaborate with different levels of government to influence policies that affect displaced populations. While being civil society representatives has its challenges, this distinction also allows urban humanitarian practitioners to connect different levels of government, both nationally and regionally, in ways they may not be able to do themselves. One example of this is the Tanzanian national government, which has recently shown willingness to learn from and possibly adopt some elements of Uganda's progressive refugee policy. By having a presence in Dar es Salaam (which houses Tanzania's Ministry of Home Affairs) and in Kampala, organizations such as the IRC have an opportunity to directly influence these shifts in policy and highlight the shared challenges of cities across the region.

With this understanding, workshop attendees highlighted the need to use advocacy as a programming tool in urban areas. By focusing on shared advocacy messages and pushing to positively influence policy decisions, humanitarians may ensure communities of concern are adequately considered in national and local policies while also strengthening cohesion between communities of concern and host communities in cities to avoid negative outcomes associated with social tension, such as exploitation or violence.

¹⁰ Implemented through the Sustainable Employment Creation and Improved Livelihoods for Vulnerable Urban Communities (SECIL) project in Mogadishu, which came to a close in June 2015: The Mogadishu

SECIL project comes to a close. UN Habitat. June 5, 2015. Available at: <http://unhabitat.org/the-mogadishu-secil-project-comes-to-a-close/>. Accessed June 27, 2016.

¹¹ As defined by UNCHR, durable solutions are solutions that enable refugees to live their lives in dignity and peace. They include voluntary repatriation, resettlement, and integration. For more information, visit: <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/solutions.html>

The Solutions Alliance, a global coalition of donors, governments, UN, and NGOs which aims to respond more collaboratively to displacement and contributing to durable solutions, is one potential avenue to explore these linkages. This is particularly true given that Uganda, Tanzania, and Somalia have national chapters as a part of the Solutions Alliance, meaning that the national governments of these countries are already actively involved in achieving durable solutions. The Solutions Alliance Somalia, for example, is “pursuing evidence-based, participatory, and enhanced political and economic analysis at the local, national, and transnational levels. It aims to support governments to ensure that planning and viability assessments address the issue of displacement with respect to political, social, economic, and developmental costs and benefits.”¹² Linking these aims to the needs of urban refugees would unify both policy and practice across the region.

Innovate Together

The challenges of operating in cities are many, but so too are the opportunities to enact humanitarian programming that looks to other stakeholder groups and new program approaches in order to enact creative ways of achieving IRC’s strategic objectives of scale and reach, speed and timeliness, and client responsiveness, particularly by connecting multi-faceted approaches and stakeholder engagement to clear outcomes for the people we serve.¹³

Attendees stressed that innovative programs come from A.) collaboration among and inclusivity of the urban response network, B.) a “human-centered” approach, and C.) a combination of methodologies of implementation, including area-based approaches, static service points, and community outreach.

As highlighted by attendees, collaboration often reveals channels for innovative programs that draw on a pool of resources and capacities from the entire network, rather than programs that rely on one or two humanitarian organizations. Engaging with non-traditional urban stakeholders may allow humanitarian actors the opportunity to leverage and/or build on their capacities and resources, thereby leading to programs of greater scale and reach.

Apart from collaboration, urban areas require a human-centered approach to urban crises; that is, programs that have proactive community participation, draw on data that is locally collected, owned by local stakeholders, and is informed by and responsive to client feedback. While human-centered approaches are effective in any setting, they are particularly crucial in urban areas given the heightened diversity of communities and the challenges that come with the host/displaced population dynamic.

They are also crucial to bringing urban programs to scale. One example of this is UNHCR’s role as co-chair of the Global Shelter Cluster, which implements

¹² For more information, visit: <http://www.solutionsalliance.org/somalia>. Accessed June 27, 2016.

¹³ As part of the IRC’s 2020 Strategy, the organization is adopting an outcomes and evidence framework to guide its programming. The five primary outcomes are health, safety, power, economic well being, and education. To find out more please visit: <http://oef.rescue.org/#/home?k=oyc5x0>

programming in Garowe, Somalia in partnership with the Puntland Ministry of Local Government. Garowe is Puntland's administrative capital and currently hosts approximately 10,000 internally displaced persons, many of them for more than two decades.¹⁴ The Shelter Cluster has found success adopting an owner-based (rather than contractor-based) approach to housing, where owners have more choice over building materials and therefore often build more resilient, safer, and cost-effective housing (and therefore more sustainable) than contractors.¹⁵

Lastly, attendees stressed that there is no one way to innovate. Rather, the characteristics of urban areas offers the urban response network a unique opportunity to employ a diverse set of approaches, each meant to complement the other. For example, area-based approaches have gained traction as an effective approach to urban areas as they aim to offer support and services for all people within a given geography rather than isolating a particular target group for services. However, area-based approaches may leave out vulnerable populations outside of the given geography. Combining area-based approaches with static service points or community-based approaches may better fill these gaps.

¹⁴ According to UNHCR, the latest estimate is approximately 3376 households. This is the most recent figure provided from secondary data for the mapping exercise conducted by UNCHR, which relayed the information during the workshop.

¹⁵ For more information please visit www.sheltercluster.org

Conclusion and Next Steps

Urban crises are not humanitarian issues alone. They affect municipalities, central governments, civil society, urban systems, and city residents of every kind. Their impacts are complex, far reaching, context-specific, and difficult to assess. And, as the above examples evince, their solutions require humanitarian actions delivered creatively and in tandem with those municipal and development actors working to solve beyond them. When delivered effectively, humanitarian response to urban crises can leverage a tremendous support network of responders and urban systems in a way that offers sustainable and community-based solutions.

The humanitarian community is engaged in an ongoing learning process to better understand specific steps needed to improve urban response. The findings of this workshop serve as one step along the way to improving our collective knowledge of how to better support cities' diverse residents and the most vulnerable within them.

Annex

The following organizations, offices, ministries, and universities and their associative countries were represented at the workshop:

- Asylum Access (Tanzania)
- Center for the Study of Forced Migration, Dar es Salaam University (Tanzania)
- Church World Service (Kenya, Tanzania)
- Development Research Institute, New York University
- International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED, global)
- International Rescue Committee (Burundi, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen)
- Kenya Department of Refugee Affairs (Kenya)
- Mudug Govenorate (Somalia)
- Puntland State (Somalia)
- Refugee Consortium of Kenya (Kenya)
- Somalia Ministry of the Interior
- Uganda Office of the Prime Minister (Uganda)
- UNHCR (Kenya, Somalia)
- UN HABITAT (Somalia)
- UN OCHA (Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa)

Topics of discussion included opportunities and challenges to urban response, municipal and humanitarian collaboration, potential solutions to urban response, case studies of urban response around the HEA region, and opportunities for innovation, amongst others.

The Urban Crises team wishes to thank all workshop participants for their insight and continued dedication to urban response.

Acknowledgements



The **Urban Practitioner Workshop and Brief** are generously funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) through the DFID–IRC Advocacy and Learning Partnership on Urban Crises. The partnership is part of the DFID Urban Crises Program on the urban aspects of humanitarian action, which involves the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

These products are convened and produced in coordination with the **Global Alliance for Urban Crises**. To learn more about the Global Alliance, please visit www.urban-crises.org.

To learn more about the Partnership, or to get involved in future Urban Practitioner Workshops, please contact Samer Saliba, Urban Response Learning Manager of the IRC, at Samer.Saliba@rescue.org. Additional information and similar publications may be found online at www.rescue-uk.org/what-we-do/urban-crisis.

Cover photo, of the Eastleigh neighborhood in Nairobi, taken by Samer Saliba for the IRC.

