The 'Learning from Crisis' Humanitarian Formula: Bridging Disaster and Normality

Summary Report

Estella Carpi

About the authors

Estella Carpi, University College London, UK

*Contact: estella.carpi@gmail.com

IIED's Human Settlements Group

The Human Settlements Group at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) works to reduce poverty and improve health and housing conditions in the urban centres of Africa, Asia and Latin America. It seeks to combine this with promoting good governance and more ecologically sustainable patterns of urban development and rural-urban linkages.

Citation

Carpi, E (2017) *The 'Learning from Crisis' Humanitarian Formula: Bridging Disaster and Normality*. Summary Report. Urban Crises Learning Partnership (UCLP).

The Urban Crises Learning Partnership (UCLP) is a two-year (2015–17) learning initiative aimed at improving humanitarian preparedness and response in urban areas. It is a partnership between Habitat for Humanity GB, Oxfam GB, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), and University College London (UCL). The project has carried out primary research in Haiti and Bangladesh through the National Offices of Habitat for Humanity in both countries, and Oxfam in Bangladesh.

The UCLP has two primary objectives: to improve the way stakeholders in urban crises engage with each other to form new partnerships and make better decisions; and to improve disaster preparedness and response in urban areas by developing, testing, and disseminating new approaches to the formation of these relationships and systems.

The project has addressed these objectives by exploring four related themes: the role of actors who are not part of the formal national or international humanitarian system; accountability to affected populations (AAP); urban systems; and coordinating urban disaster preparedness.

The UCLP was established on the assumption that the humanitarian sector can learn from responses to previous crises, assimilate this learning, and improve the way it responds in future. This paper by Estella Carpi of UCL questions this assumption. It challenges us to articulate what we mean by 'learning', and to examine the conditions necessary for change if learning is to take place. Importantly, it also draws our attention to the limits of what can be learned from urban crises. Drawing on recent crises in Haiti – as well as the structure and culture of the international humanitarian system – Carpi outlines reasons why the sector is poorly structured to learn from crises in an effective manner.

Alan Brouder, UCLP Coordinator
Habitat for Humanity GB
November 2017

Contents

Introduction

Crises are no longer experienced and labelled as unusual, or as a disruption of normality (Hage, 2009), but rather as a product of often predictable social disruption and human hardships that then become a regular occurrence. In the case of Haiti, plenty of reports and much scholarly literature have discussed the agglomeration of urban risks that have led to disaster events in recent years.

That literature also suggests that learning can happen at several levels, in a process that involves both individuals and groups. There is a prevailing idea that crises hold lessons for the private and public sector, for management of emergency and humanitarian operations, and for community resilience (Dawes *et al.*, 2004).

But what does the idea of learning from repeated crises really mean? The question can be examined through the recent history of disasters in Haiti.

Learning from Haiti's Repeated Crises

More than two million people were affected by Hurricane Matthew, which struck the country in October 2016, leaving 1.4 million in immediate need of humanitarian aid (Thomas, 2017). Most of these people are concentrated among three *départements* or geographic divisions – Nippes, Grand'Anse and Sud – which are the largest in the country, located in the southwest. These are areas that have historically suffered massive damage to housing structures and agriculture. Some of the people displaced as a result of Hurricane Matthew are now reported to be residing in temporary shelters built by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and others in smaller makeshift shelters they built on their own.

Several years earlier, the 2010 earthquake caused 250,000 to 300,000 deaths, injured more than 300,000 people, and left more than one million homeless. The cholera epidemic that followed the earthquake infected nearly 800,000 Haitians and killed 9,100. As evidence suggested that peacekeeping forces introduced the disease, the United Nations was criticised for not doing enough to prevent and face such health risks. The international community's failure to act to contain this epidemic also led to a loss of accountability.

Accountability on the part of 'failing states' towards their citizens is usually considered to be lacking (World Bank *et al.*, 2016) – this generally makes it easier for the international community to intervene, and to be seen as more efficient.

However, even though Haiti makes international headlines only when hit by natural disasters, this is a country that is vulnerable on several fronts [**Box 1**]. Urbanisation is rapid, most households are classified as low-income, most people depend on the informal economy, institutions and the governance system are said to be corrupt and failing, and the class divide is daunting. In addition, the impact of natural disasters has increased material dependency on external support over the last few years as local capacity to respond remains limited – the relationship between the two trends cannot be overlooked.

Box 1. Natural disasters as the last straw

Natural disasters, which dominate media attention and have historically served to misrepresent the reasons behind the island's chronic instability, are actually only the last straw in a set of risks that go beyond unpredictable events.

These risks are diverse and distributed at several levels, and have been classified according to their frequency as follows (Garcia and Trabaud, 2015):

- Everyday risks linked with: insecurity of goods and people; a tropical climate (heat, humidity); spread of disease associated with insect vectors and a lack of appropriate treatments; water pollution, both in rivers and the ocean, associated with poor management of waste and oil products.

- Recurrent and well-known risks: hurricanes and storms, floods, epidemics.

- Occasional or exceptional risks: earthquakes; technological risks associated with electric power stations and offshore oil platforms in the Caribbean sea.

This plethora of chronic problems has led to a Haitian 'republic of NGOs' (Schuller, 2016). Adding to this, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti – named *le douze Janvier* to mark the date it occurred, January 12th – has drawn unprecedented humanitarian attention and action.

This is a postcolonial country, where external humanitarian action is perceived as the "return of white people"[1] to heal the damage they caused,[2] and where international NGOs (INGOs) are able to dictate rules and enact policies due to a weak local government. This is just one dimension of the human factor in dealing with crises, and in learning from crises.

[1] Interview with Ms Miriam Ruscio from AVSI-Haiti, conducted on March 18, 2017.
[2] Haiti has been a colony of Spain (1492–1625) and France (1625–1804), and under the heavy political and financial control of the United States over the 20th and 21st centuries.

Whose Learning? Narratives and Counter-Narratives

Kathleen Tierney, the director of the University of Colorado-Boulder's Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Centre, has emphasised that there is no such a thing as a natural disaster (CU Boulder Today, 2010). This carries an important meaning by defining disasters as human-caused, because their impact largely depends on human capacity to deal with them. For instance, the arrival of Hurricane Matthew in October 2016 was picked up by early-warning systems weeks before it hit the island.[3] But widespread destruction still followed, and this was due to the limited human capacity to respond to that information.

Population movements following the 2010 Haiti earthquake are another example of this human influence on the impacts of a disaster. A close look at these movements has revealed they had a high level of predictability, and seemed greatly influenced by people's social support structures (Lu *et al.*, 2012). These support structures – at times consisting of family-run food and shelter provision – played a significant role when people affected by the disaster returned to Port au Prince, the capital, three days after the earthquake occurred.

Based on these and other findings on the human factor in a crisis, it becomes imperative to liberate the disaster narrative from the idea that lessons are learnt solely by – and for – the international community that comes in to 'rescue' with prompt, mostly operationalised, standardised, and pre-designed assistance. It is important to note that some forms of assistance are, by and large, based on successes or failures in some other country or in an earlier crisis, but do not always lead to the same outcome when reproduced in new settings.

Unconditional cash transfers to crisis-stricken populations are an example of this. Cash is believed to be the most suitable way to support displaced populations (Bailey and Harvey, 2015). Likewise, cash grants are needed to receive technical assistance for the repair of buildings, and to replace equipment or stock (Killing and Boano, 2016: 46). However, when it was distributed by many INGOs in Haiti after the

October 2016 hurricane destroyed the South of the island, services and commodities were in poor supply in local markets[4] – cash was therefore not the priority.

A forthcoming study (Senat and Boano, 2017), which examines the humanitarian mission of the State University of Haiti (UEH), reveals a counter-narrative: the narrative of local people who have been able to respond to crises and support each other without drawing on external support. This is a narrative that goes against the rhetoric seen in the media, and also in scholarly work, which reinforces stereotypes of chaotic societies and incapabilities (Pyles and Svistova, 2015).

In the media, most narratives emphasised the expertise of outsiders and the inadequacy of locals to contribute to recovery projects (Provost, 2011). In research, studies have documented a dominant crisis discourse that portrays locals as disempowered, by emphasising the expertise of outsiders and the rise of 'disaster capitalism' – the money-making industry that crises have given rise to over the last century.

On the whole, local rescue efforts have been neglected in contemporary humanitarian debates. In the Haitian context, this has fed into a post-colonialist discourse which stresses the need for 'civilising and rescuing', and assumes ineptitude and corruption on the part of the local government (Pyles and Svistova, 2015). Arguably, the government's response during humanitarian action and recovery from approximately mid-2010 to early 2012 was particularly weak. Although that was a reason behind the need for humanitarian assistance, it was also a consequence of receiving that assistance. In their effort to go beyond the language of 'Do no harm' and 'Best practice', humanitarian entities reportedly operate by ignoring local authorities, and therefore further weakening government authority (Belloni, 2005; Fassin and Pandolfi, 2010; Zolo, 2011).

The counter-discourse in research is clear and empowering in its acknowledgment of the post-colonialist reality of countries such as Haiti, and the participation of locals in recovery from disaster (Pyles and Svistova, 2015).

---

[3] Interview with Ms Miriam Ruscio from AVSI-Haiti, conducted on March 18, 2017.
[4] Interview conducted with Ms Miriam Ruscio from AVSI-Haiti, March 18, 2017.

Politics and Perceptions on the Ground

Politics is another aspect of the human factor in dealing with emergencies, and it is worth mentioning how micropolitics responds to crises such as the repeated disasters that Haiti has been facing.

Reports indicate that people believe aid is distributed along political lines, and this creates mistrust (Save the Children, 2016). For example, after Hurricane Matthew in 2016, people in the south of the seaside community Dame Marie had erected blockades and dug a trench in the road to prevent humanitarian workers from reaching the Anse d'Hainault community, while accusing the mayor of failing to distribute aid (Save the Children, 2016).

The uneven distribution of aid in different neighbourhoods has often fed local grievances. Adding to the popular unrest in 2016 was the fact that presidential and legislative elections, meant to replace the transitional government in place since February of that year, were rescheduled from October to November due to Hurricane Matthew (Save the Children, 2016). Current President Jovenel Moïse, and the country's Electoral Commission, have both publicly called for the end of aid distribution by political party members as part of their campaigns (Save the Children, 2016).

Distributing aid fairly is crucial in order to avoid a perception of favouritism, and to prevent or reduce any possible tensions within the community receiving aid. It is therefore a political prerogative, if intervention is to be successful (Habitat for Humanity, 2016). Finally, the continuity of NGOs' relationships with – and knowledge of – local communities and authorities is the only way of working effectively, cultivating trust,[5] and gaining direct access to vulnerable areas.

What does this mean for learning? Some lessons learnt can be implemented – as long as the political agendas that shape the intervention model meet the interests of the population. For instance, it is possible that the recruitment of local staff through INGOs can become a transparent and merit-based process (Habitat for Humanity, 2016) through a strategy that ensures the selected candidate is both qualified and well accepted by the community.

---

[5] Interview with Barthelemy Leon, adjunct director of Habitat for Humanity-Haiti, conducted by Rachel Senat in 2016.

Reconstruction Post-2010: A Case for Non-Standardised Response

The destruction of houses and public infrastructure caused by Hurricane Thomas, which also hit Haiti in 2010, created challenges similar to those the country faced after the earthquake in the same year – suggesting that this is a case where lessons could be learned to adjust the response.

A report by Save the Children stated: "Documentation has been lost, boundary stones have been destroyed, property owners have died and previously informal arrangements will need to be formalised, adding a new layer of complexity to shelter reconstruction" (Save the Children, 2016). In the absence of documentation on ownership, land easily became occupied without the possibility of advancing legal claims at a later stage. People returned home often to find their land occupied by someone else (HIRC, 2017).

The presence of informal registers and a lack of identity documents in times of crisis challenge the suitability of standardised responses. Collecting data about the local context becomes complicated when the people hit by a crisis are undocumented. For example, although they may catalyse community engagement and mutual support, as shown in the case of the UEH's intervention (Senat and Boano, 2017), registers do not generally help identify the most vulnerable or improve outreach efforts. In Haiti, children and women paid a high price for this, and often felt they were neglected in post-crisis recovery (Habitat for Humanity, 2016). Many Haitians lost their birth certificates in the 2010 earthquake, which meant they could not be officially registered on the list of beneficiaries and therefore access services, including education (Save the Children, 2016). Poor documentation was a problem even before the disaster: in 2011, 20–40 per cent of the children born in Haiti were estimated to not have been registered at birth, placing them at risk of statelessness.

Furthermore, Haitians need to present a document confirming their nationality in oder to access public services (ACAPS, 2016).

Hurricane Matthew, which struck in 2016, caused less destruction and fewer casualties than the earthquake; humanitarian intervention was therefore more coordinated, with a small number of NGOs providing assistance. However, this also means that efforts to tackle certain problems cannot benefit from drawing on previous mistakes. The difficulty gaining access to remote regions was one of those problems: some communities are located in areas only accessible by foot, or in mountainous, unpaved roads that are particularly hard to reach in the rainy season due to localised flooding (Save the Children, 2016). Frustrations over the impossibility of accessing them also tends to deteriorate security (Save the Children, 2016). Other problems are specific to humanitarian response in the urban context: weak urban planning and land management; difficulties with removing rubble; and lack of space for emergency shelters and transitional housing. Unaddressed urbanisation contributed to the high level of devastation in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, which displaced a total of 1.3 million people (World Bank *et al.*, 2016).

The strategy of aiding the more capable people after a crisis, to enable them to develop and invest in their own community in the long run (Garcia and Trabaud, 2015), has come to be considered more sustainable than interventions which target vulnerable people. They also fit the neoliberal framework of encouraging individual responsibility and entrepreneurship. However, no lesson can be learnt when either local or international practices are standardised and applied to any political setting without adjustment.

Is 'Learning from Crises' Possible?

On the whole, these observations suggest that learning within the humanitarian sector is questionable in two respects.

First, as discussed above, because it does not take into account how local people feed into the response – in fact, the available literature tends to exclude local people from the discourse around 'learning'. How is it possible that a state, which has been hit by dozens of natural disasters over its history, would not have lessons to share as a result of humanitarian intervention?

Second, learning is questionable because it approaches crisis as an interruption of normality rather than an unusual expression of such normality. In this sense, the humanitarian sector should aim to learn from normality as much as it does from crisis.

According to Calhoun (2004; 2008), an 'emergency' is a more layered and predictable idea than that portrayed in technocratic crisis management. From a technocratic point of view, the displaced and the wreckage – the most visible parts of 'humanitarian emergencies' and 'urban crises' – are a product of historical changes. Response mechanisms tend to deal with such changes as a mere symptom of the crisis, and disruptive events remain a 'part of the fabric of life' (Dawes *et al.*, 2004).

The idea of learning from crises departs from this technocratic approach, which may lead to standardised and mechanical approaches. It suggests that most disasters are actually identifiable, and the lessons they teach can mostly be delivered in times of calm and by being passed on by communities or organisations.

However, crises are still being dealt with by humanitarians as interruptions of normality. This is despite the fact that strategies to predict and tackle them with dexterity are becoming a growing part of humanitarian culture, through implementing crisis simulations or 'best practice' guides, for example. It is as though they were problems that arise independently, to which there is no solution but to intervene. This approach of crisis vs. normalcy has meant that humanitarian actors needed to modify their reasons for keeping a presence in areas where disasters are viewed as mere disruptions of normal life. This ideological shift has further blurred the lines between humanitarianism and development, or between short-term *ad hoc* relief and long-term assistance.

The humanitarian community has repeatedly proven that it can learn from mistakes – when things do not go as expected, for example, or when the response proves inadequate. The existing body of literature that delves into the 'learning from crisis' approach suggests a number of barriers which need to be taken into account – and be accepted – in order to improve the learning capabilities of local and international providers of support after a disaster.

- **Marginalised local responses:** One of the barriers of learning during a crisis is the verticality of knowledge transfer processes (Turner, 1976). This refers to situations where local understanding of response and action plans is marginalised, or used in service of external agendas. Progress towards a major localisation of humanitarian action that would overcome this barrier has been observed (Senat and Boano, 2017). From the point of view of localisation, human ties and relationships, as well as contextual knowledge, are the only solid bases from which to develop an effective and appropriate intervention.

- **Limits to 'codified' learning:** Learning from a crisis, as well as normalcy, are feasible to the extent that they are context-specific; by definition, they cannot be applied elsewhere *a priori*. In this sense, it is not possible to 'codify learning' – it immediately becomes out-of-date (Elliott and Macpherson, 2009). Planning the exact ways in which we should respond to future crises therefore becomes ontologically unfeasible. The international community should not overestimate the scope of its actions, or its impact.

- **Variable motivations:** The motivation to learn cannot be standardised and decontextualized – regardless of how genuine the intention to alleviate suffering and damage in any crisis. Indeed, crisis-affected people's beliefs and behaviours are often not contextualised during an intervention (Smith and Elliott, 2007). In any kind of aid provision there are political interests at play, and operations are not always consistent with humanitarian principles (Prendergast, 1996).

- **Variable learning processes:** The learning process is not the same across organisations or individuals (Smith, 1995). Each of the entities that intervene has a unique understanding and approach to quick crisis management. Attempts to standardise humanitarian tools, or to add bureaucracy in an effort to face crises faster, cannot eliminate the diversity

in the process of learning or its societal effects. Such attempts can even cause damage, or contradictions that are socially risky. In the same vein, studies have shown how informal networks have provided more successful solutions to post-crisis challenges than formal networks (Heilmann and Muse, 2013), not just in Haiti.

- **A compartmentalised system:** The knowledge acquired from both periods of historical continuity and complex emergencies is, in effect, an accumulation of experience. It cannot be divided into different compartments, contrary to how the humanitarian system is currently structured. For instance, lessons which seem to apply to the livelihoods sector may inform the water and sanitation sector. And vice versa – lessons learnt in housing reconstruction may not apply or inform the same sector in future crises. As a result, post-crisis recovery mechanisms and sustainability can be neither mainstreamed nor compartmentalised *a priori*.

- **Unpredictable interactions:** The type of interaction between actors involved in politics, society, enterprise, or the media is neither predictable nor reproducible – but it can, to a limited extent, be looked at objectively within an emergency. Social networks as well as cities are in constant evolution, and will link up with external humanitarian actors in different ways in times of crisis. They themselves are 'creative' during crises (Dawes *et al.*, 2004), reshaping their interests according to the duration and intensity of these disruptive events.

- **NGOs' responsibilities:** Although fragile countries such as Haiti have struggling institutions and corrupt ruling powers, the humanitarian system cannot limit its own actions and development to adopting 'best practices'. Similarly, it cannot attribute humanitarian failures to endemic factors – often described as structural rather than political – such as national instability, chronic poverty, or societal violence. Humanitarian programmes are indeed fully active in Haitian society, as active as local communities. For instance, urbanisation should not be tackled as an inevitable economic and political risk (CIAT, 2014) because it depends on human actions and decision-making for urban planning and improving quality of life – and humanitarian NGOs are part of that decision making, as well as that responsibility.

- **Treatment differs by social group:** The extent and quality of learning, during and after emergencies, depend on the social and economic status of the areas or people hit by a crisis. Some crisis-affected people enjoy political privileges, and the way they are treated after a disaster may become the object of political concern (eg. Dawes *et al.*, 2004). For example, after the World Trade Centre attacks on September 2001 in the United States, most of the victims and families affected came from the middle and upper-income classes, which are less used to sharing private information such as details to ensure they are eligible for assistance. This illustrates how behaviour that is linked to social status can affect post-crisis compensation mechanisms and relief provision.

- **The length of a crisis dictates the type of aid provided:** Their longstanding experience with intervention, as well as with reshaping humanitarian practices, means that INGOs are finally becoming less subject to the 'tyranny of urgency' (MSB, 2015) – that is, limiting their actions to the provision of emergency relief. As a result, they are more likely to engage appropriately with long-term development efforts, which is essential to reconstruction. Nonetheless, INGOs should not automatically turn humanitarian projects into development projects in a protracted crisis; rather, they should carefully assess the needs of groups with a longstanding vulnerability. Vulnerable people may, at times, be unable to secure their everyday livelihood even as they face the challenges of being displaced over the long-term.

- **Knowledge is split into 'internal' and 'external':** To learn from a particular crisis, it is not possible to distinguish between internal and external knowledge – there is no clear-cut separation between them. The knowledge that can be acquired and preserved is a combination of national and international inputs. This assumes that aid and social actors' practices intersect, and cannot work independently from each other.

Conclusion

Seen as a way to translate lessons into rigid policy, learning can be harmful when it neglects the local specificities of a future response. On the other hand, solid plans for coping with future crises, as well as open communication, can help to assuage public concerns (**Box 2**).

Box 2. Open communication and mutual trust

There is an evident and fundamental link between the way crises are dealt with – an experience that can be used to later 'learn' – and the public management of disaster-related information during or after a crisis.

In this regard, scholarly debates have questioned the need to share information about pre-crisis hazards with the public (Dawes *et al.*, 2004). This is because they may cause alarm about environmental consequences, in addition to producing 'moral panics' – a term that describes collective concerns about an external threat that are created by the media, politicians, or others (Critcher, 2008). Nevertheless, the dissemination of useful information in the first few days after a crisis preserves the value of human rights. Denial of this information would, in effect, endanger lives and well-being. In reality, however, political concerns or the political will to shape public opinion on a particular manner (Franks, 2013) have often been prioritised over this human right.

Denying access to and open dissemination of detailed information to the public during a crisis has also proven to limit responses over the longer-term. It can lead to a lack of accurate and up-to-date information that can be later used to reconstruct infrastructure, services, and human relationships. Scholars have emphasised how public involvement and open communication during crises contribute towards building mutual trust in community life (Dawes *et al.*, 2004).

In the whirlwind of international aid provision, and the criticism towards it, tangible achievements and successes are hard to find. Post-emergency scenarios risk being viewed as meaningless, and with an expectation that they will produce a particular result. As a humanitarian actor coming into an area affected by crisis, building historical trust over time at a local level – and therefore marking early intervention with a sense of continuity – may be able to challenge the 'trickle-down imperialism' (Schuller, 2012) of the NGO system in Haiti, according to which economic policies favour the wealthy or privileged through *laissez-faire* capitalism and favouritism.

Generally, a difficult lesson to be learnt from a historical look at emergencies is the value of quickly identifying problems and further risks during a crisis. Implementing this would involve changing the hiring system for humanitarian workers to employ international or local staff who have an in-depth historical, political, social, and linguistic knowledge of the areas in need of intervention (Anderson, 1999).

Nonetheless, improving operations and knowledge of the local context, as well as improving the external actors' contribution to informal networks and resources, can only happen if INGOs are able to maintain and nurture their local connections in a disaster area regardless of the scale of a crisis. This implies an ongoing presence rather than *ad hoc* interventions. But this can go either way: it may end up being detrimental to the relationship with local people, or may strengthen those same relationships through long-term development efforts and historical trust.

In the best scenario, INGOs should advocate for having a greater say in donors' priorities and action plans – and they should do this after acquiring in-depth knowledge of specific circumstances in each location where they work. When that happens, it may also be possible to witness actual solidarity, rather than talk of 'do-no-harm' and 'best practices'.

References

ACAPS (2016) *Protection in Haiti after Hurricane Matthew.*

Anderson, M. B. (1999) *Do no Harm. How Aid can support Peace – or War,* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc.

Bailey, S. and Harvey, P. (2015) *State of Evidence on Humanitarian Cash Transfers,* London: Overseas Development Institute.

Belloni, R. (2005) *Is Humanitarianism Part of the Problem? Nine Theses.* John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Boston, MA.

Calhoun, C. (2004) "A World of Emergencies: Fear, Intervention and the Limits of Cosmopolitan Order", in *Social Science Research Council,* 35th Annual Sorokin Lecture presented at the University of Saskatchewan, pp. 373–395.

Calhoun, C. (2008) "The Imperative to Reduce Suffering: Charity, Progress, and Emergencies in the Field of Humanitarian Action", in Barnett, M. and Weiss, T. G. (eds.) *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, pp. 73–97.

Comité Interministériel d'Aménagement du Territoire (2014) *Les Cahiers de l'Urbanisme du CIAT*. Haiti. Bibliothèque Nationale d'Haiti.

Critcher, C. (2008) Moral Panic Analysis: Past, Present and Future, *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 1127–1144.

CU Boulder Today (2010) Haiti Earthquake a Reminder That Disasters are Preventable, CU-Boulder Expert Says. Accessed 19 October, 2017.

Dawes, S.S., Cresswell, A.M., and Cahan, B.B. (2004) Learning from Crisis. Lessons in Human and Information Infrastructure from the World Trade Center Response, *Social Science Computer Review* 22 (1): 52–66.

Elliott, D. and Macpherson, A. (2009) *Policy and Practice: Recursive Learning from Crisis*. Paper presented at the OLKC Conference, Amsterdam, 26–28 April, 2009.

Fassin, D. and Pandolfi, M. (eds.) *Contemporary States of Emergency*, New York City, NY: Zone Books.

Franks, S. (2013) *Reporting Disasters: Famine Aid Politics and the Media*, C. Hurst and Co-Publishers Ltd.

Garcia, C. and Trabaud, V. (2015) *La Reconstruction d'Habitats en Haiti: Enjeux Techniques, Habitabilité, et Patrimoine.* Plaisians, France: URD Publications.

Habitat for Humanity (2016) *Investing in People and Business in Haiti. Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Training Report*, Toronto, CA.

Hage, G. (2009) "Waiting Out the Crisis. On Stuckedness and Governmentality", in Hage, G. (ed.) *Waiting*, Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, pp. 97–106.

Heilmann, S. G. and Muse, Y. Y. (2013) "The Use of Informal Networks to Resolve Logistics-Related Issues in Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Response: A Context Analysis Perspective", in *Journal of Business and Educational Leadership,* Vol. 4, No. 1.

Killing, A. and Boano, C. (2016) "Reconstructing the City. The Potential Gains of Using Urban Planning and Design Practices in Recovery and Why They Are So Difficult to Achieve", in Sandersson, D., Kayden, J. S., and Leis, J. (eds.) *Urban Disaster Resilience: New Dimensions from International Practice in the Built Environment*, London: Routledge, pp. 35–53.

HIRC – Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program (2017) *Haiti Land Dispute Country Conditions*. Accessed 23 October, 2017.

Lu, X. et al. (2012) *Predictability of Population Displacement After the 2010 Haiti Earthquake,* 109 (29): 11576–11581.

MSB (2015) *Early Recovery Road Map Linking Relief to Recovery and Development*.

Pyles, L. and Svistova, J. (2015) "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Haiti Earthquake Recovery in New York Times Articles: Implications for Social Welfare Policies, Practices, and Education", in *Critical Social Work* 16 (1): 59–77.

Prendergast, J. (1996) *Frontline Diplomacy: Humanitarian Aid and Conflict in Africa*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publications.

Provost, C. (2011) *Haiti One Year On: A Look at Aid Progress Reports*. The Guardian

Save the Children UK (2016) *Field Report in Haiti*.

Schuller, M (2012) *Killing with Kindness. Haiti, International Aid, and NGOs.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Schuller, M. (2016) *Humanitarian Aftershocks in Haiti*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Senat, R and Boano, C. (2017–forthcoming)

Smith, D. (1995) "The Dark Side of Excellence: Managing Strategic Failures", in Thompson, J. (ed.) *Handbook of Strategic Management*, pp. 161–191. London: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Smith, D. and Elliott, D. (2007) Exploring the Barriers to Learning from Crisis. Organizational Learning and Crisis, *Management Learning* 38(5): 519–538.

Thomas, A. (2017) *Two Steps Back: Haiti Still Reeling from Hurricane Matthew*. Refugees International: Washington, DC.

Turner, B.A. (1976) The Organizational and Interorganizational Development of Disasters, *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21: 378–397.

World Bank et al. (2016) *What Did We Learn? The Shelter Response and House Recovery in the First Two Years After the 2010 Haiti Earthquake,* Washington DC.

Zolo, D. (2008) *I Signori della Pace: una Critica al Globalismo Giuridico,* Roma, Italy: Carocci.

The UCLP was established on the assumption that the humanitarian sector can learn from responses to previous crises, assimilate this learning, and improve the way it responds in future. This paper by Estella Carpi of UCL questions this assumption. It challenges us to articulate what we mean by 'learning', and to examine the conditions necessary for change if learning is to take place. Importantly, it also draws our attention to the limits of what can be learned from urban crises. Drawing on recent crises in Haiti – as well as the structure and culture of the international humanitarian system – Carpi outlines reasons why the sector is poorly structured to learn from crises in an effective manner.