



## Mapping the Way Forward

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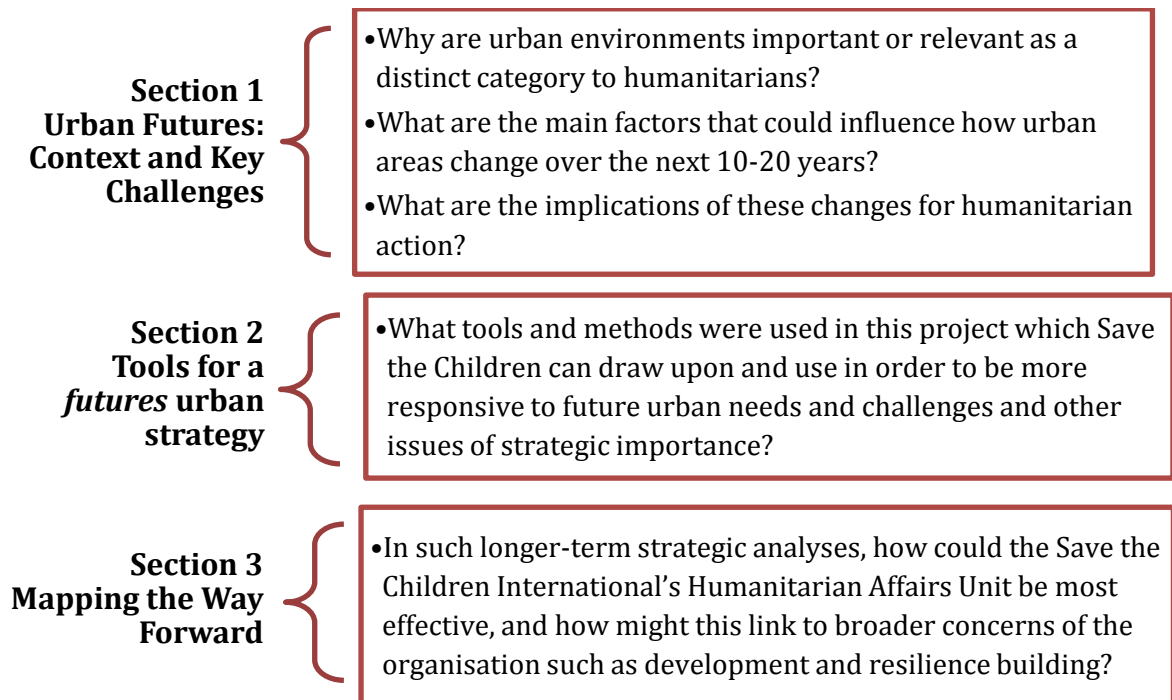
### Urban Futures Project Final Report

### Executive Summary

The Urban Futures Project is a case study of the processes and methodologies that Save the Children International's (SCI) Humanitarian Affairs Unit (HAU) can adopt to support a more futures-oriented strategy and operational approach across the organization. Urban humanitarianism was chosen as the topic for this project in light of the emergence of urban resilience as a distinct category of humanitarian action and as a horizon issue that humanitarian organizations will increasingly confront in the future.

To that extent, *the Urban Futures Project* is not about one challenge; it is about an approach to longer-term strategic planning. It is about myriad challenges that humanitarian planners and practitioners will have to face in the foreseeable future. Such challenges might concern widespread availability of artificial intelligence and robotics, the intensification of climate change, virtual economies and paradigmatic shifts in the concept of governance. While so many of these will clearly affect the urban space, each of these challenges and a host more will – individually and collectively – affect not only global vulnerabilities and opportunities, but also the work of organisations such as Save the Children and the constituencies which they seek to serve. In an age increasingly marked by rapid change, complexity and uncertainty, the Urban Futures Project offers insights into perspectives and related methodologies that should help Save the Children and others think and plan strategically about the future.

The Report is organised into three Sections which answer five core questions:



**Section I Urban Futures: Context and Key Challenges** consists of two parts.

**Part 1** answers:

**1) What is distinct about the urban context for humanitarians?**

**Part 1** defines the urban context for humanitarians and what aspects of the urban environment are of relevance to humanitarian organisations. It argues that

- **Urban spaces are best defined as hub-like spaces**, where human, economic and informational flows arise from within and without, interact, and subsequently influence both one another and the individuals living within these hubs;
- The main defining flows and processes that shape urban spaces are **demographics, domestic capital, international capital, governance and regulatory processes, and violence and criminality**;
- **A key challenge for humanitarian organisations will be tapping into these processes** in order measure them, anticipate changes and understand their impact on vulnerability;
- In so far as the urban context is defined by an increased intensity of factors that humanitarians already experience in rural or camp contexts, the challenges posed by urban environments may highlight pre-existing weaknesses in tools and practices currently used in rural and camp environments; **adjusting to the urban context may therefore demand more than the adaptation of current tools: in order to be effective in future urban**

environments, Save the Children will need to re-think and re-design tools and practices.

**Part 2** answers:

- 2) What are the main factors that could influence how urban areas change over the next 10-20 years?
- 3) What are the implications of these changes for humanitarian action?

**Part 2 provides snapshots of the future urban environment**, organised as 12 stand-alone thematic briefings. The 12 themes were identified as the most significant sectors or phenomena shaping the future of urbanisation, based on discussions with 30 experts working in urban planning and risk analysis, futures studies, geography, anthropology, health policy, conflict analysis, education, child well-being and development and humanitarian policy. These snapshots were produced through information gathered during the interviews as well as extensive research of current urban literature, and trends literature around key sectors. The briefings provide an overview to the thematic issue and its possible impact on the future urban environment, as well as implications for humanitarian organisations such as Save the Children. Please find below a short description of each briefing topic and key headings for the recommendations that are described in the full text.

- **Information and Communication Technology:** ICT will drive transformative changes, providing extraordinary means of monitoring potential urban risks and early warning through local and global monitoring systems. Save the Children will need to ensure the **use of appropriate data** by authorities, **review prevention and preparedness plans to take account of potential grid collapse, address language differences in diverse urban communities through ICT** and **deal with the challenge of 'noise', or inconsistent messaging;**
- **The Built Environment:** As one looks to the built environment in a futures context, there are myriad possibilities that will transform human-made surroundings and the ways in which human activity is undertaken, including the emergence of 'smart' cities and 'slumscapes.' Some of the consequences of built environments for humanitarian action in future urban contexts lead to the recommendations that humanitarian organisations **recognise built environments as continua** that can challenge traditional notions of 'slums', **be prepared for and contribute to 'off-grid' solutions for power, water, healthcare and sanitation** and **scale up their capacity to monitor urban mobility** in order to **manage the impacts of mass migration;**
- **Demographic Dynamics:** For those who chart demographic change, there can be little doubt that the future may witness unprecedented movement of peoples around the world, and such movements will clearly impact urban landscapes. Save the Children will need to **support assistance that links physical and virtual needs and opportunities**, alter their

starting points for **gathering disaggregated data on the movement of families and youth between densely populated areas and more sparsely populated areas, and establish reliable internal cross- and multi-border information sharing networks.**

- **Environmental Change:** Environmental change may be one of the most significant drivers of change of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Yet, the extent of this change and its humanitarian impacts are still a matter of great uncertainty and controversy. In the face of great uncertainty, humanitarian organisations can anticipate and mitigate new challenges in urban environments by **embracing more strategic approaches that identify short- medium- and long-term environmental hazards, focusing on child-sensitive environmental risks in urban areas, creating multi-layered monitoring networks and hubs for environmental change, and using creative approaches to share knowledge, including specific, dedicated initiatives to ensure coordination between environmental scientists, urban planners and families and children;**
- **Health:** There is an underlying assumption that urban populations will be healthier than their rural counterparts. Yet, this is rarely true, mostly due to the different types of health threats faced by urban populations, such as pollution. The threat of these hazards will necessarily intensify in an urban future in which relative socio-economic determinants of health become more complex, health risks become more concentrated and the challenge of meeting higher levels of dependency become more acute. Humanitarian organisations such as Save the Children will need to **address the quiet crises of non-communicable disease, develop new and sustainable partnerships to improve health care delivery, including with the private sector, utilise far more effectively ICT innovations for health such as advanced telemedicine, and integrate approaches to health and livelihoods.**
- **Water:** The impact of limited water resources on urban resilience and vulnerability can be enormous, for reasons that are well known: it is a resource not only essential for human survival and health but also for industry, innovation, sanitation, energy, and transportation. To prepare for the potentially disruptive impact of the limited availability of clean water in urban settings, Save the Children will need to **combine local innovative practices with advanced technologies to purify water at the family level, scale up local innovations to deal with water shortages, create a risk map for water-transmitted diseases, and identify the special vulnerabilities faced by coastal towns and cities.**
- **Food security and nutrition:** Food security is a particularly significant issue for urban areas given the traditional dependence of urban dwellers on food that is produced from afar and delivered through supply chains that are vulnerable to disaster. This may change for the better, as enhanced urban capacities for agriculture and green spaces may be able to support an urban ecosystem that provides residents with 'homegrown' produce. Save the Children may need to consider **harnessing genetic engineering of foods, including the creation of meat substitutes, training urban dwellers for small plot usage, using**

**individual unit monitoring systems to measure nutrition status, and creating early warning systems for nutrition.**

- **Economic evolutions and revolutions:** As one looks to urban futures, the revolution in economic functions and processes foretells of changes that will alter the purpose and physical structures of urban areas. Save the Children will need to prepare for the urban future by anticipating and adapting to changes in how economies evolve, **highlighting yet again the importance of using an integrated approach to urban resilience, disaster risk reduction and development programming.** Approaches that Save the Children can take include looking at **non-employment and its potential psychological impacts on the poor, understanding new dimensions of inequality, and anticipating the consequences of villegisation and a growing informal sector.**
- **Education:** Education is one of Save the Children's strongest areas of humanitarian programming. The challenge for Save the Children will be to adapt its approach to urban education services in humanitarian contexts so that it capitalises on the evolution of education, which will be shaped by greater internet connectivity and the delivery of teaching primarily through a virtual environment. Save the Children should look to **interrogate its assumptions about the benefits of education and how it is delivered, engage new educational authorities, build the resilience of a virtualised educational environment,** and help to build evidence for **the most effective forms and types of education** in a world where basic education will be more widely available.
- **Governance:** The enhanced presence and influence of local and national authorities is a well-noted feature of urban areas that distinguishes it from 'typical' rural humanitarian response contexts. In future urban contexts, political power at the city level may fracture as population density increases, or homogenise as greater resources and support are provided from national and international institutions to help city governments manage their increasing responsibilities. Save the Children will need to **work significantly on its collaboration, particularly with development professionals and local community groups, and identify or support government institutions as holders of critical data,** as well as **carry out a power analysis of the places in which it wishes to work in order to identify elites and political entrepreneurs.**
- **Informal Sectors:** The informal sector, difficult to define yet omnipresent in the lives of the urban poor, will be crucial to understanding vulnerability and identifying appropriate ways of rehabilitating after a disaster in the future. Save the Children will be more effective in future urban settings if it recognises that **a geographical approach to delivery may not be ideal, given the fluidity of the informal sector and its increasing importance, that informal power brokers are crucial and must be identified, and that Save the Children needs to review its core values and strategies, including its rights-based approach, and articulate how this informs their engagement with informal sectors.**

- **Security:** Crime and violence are commonly understood as both a cause and consequence of deprivation and instability, and it is likely that the scale and nature of future urban security issues will continue to reflect future trends in urban socio-economic inequality. Save the Children will need to prepare to **operate in unfamiliar states of conflict, deal with new actors in insecurity, and adapt to the impacts of cybercrime**, particularly on young people.

## Section II Tools for a futures urban strategy answers:

### 4) What tools and methods were identified and used in this project which Save the Children can draw upon and use in order to be more responsive to future urban needs and challenges?

The Urban Futures Project has been informed by a speculative, *futures*-oriented methodology intended to identify and demonstrate new tools and approaches for use by the HAU. The Project has consisted of four main phases, and observations from each of these phases have been drawn on to inform the design of a set of tools and methods for use by Save the Children.

**Phase 1: Tapping internal expertise:** During this phase, HFP worked with the HAU to coordinate a Consultative Group consisting of individuals from multiple country and regional offices with an interest or expertise on urban issues. HFP carried out 18 interviews with members of the Consultative Group in Phase 1, and continued liaising with the Consultative Group for further references on urban resilience and response, as well as follow-up Skype calls to discuss current Save the Children approaches to urban strategy.

**Phase 2: Exploring the future with Save the Children:** The HAU convened at its London-based office a futures workshop, designed and facilitated by HFP and SAMI Consulting, a horizon-scanning consultancy group. At this workshop, 15 participants from across Save the Children regional and country offices engaged in an exercise using the '3 horizons' framework, an approach that endeavoured to have workshop participants think about the urban landscape in 2050 and identify key trends and challenges Save the Children would need to consider in the medium-term.

**Phase 3: Horizon scanning with urban experts:** HFP carried out 30 interviews with a wide range of experts on the future of urbanisation and its humanitarian implications. Experts included academic researchers, such as urban planners, *futures* researchers, anthropologists, geographers and public health researchers, as well as leading researchers at research and policy institutions carrying out significant work on the urban theme. The purpose of this phase was to identify the key drivers and trends that would shape urban environments in the next 10-30 years, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

**Phase 4: Mapping the Way Forward:** In this current and final phase of the Urban Futures Project, HFP has pulled together the lessons learned from the prior three phases to provide a

three-section document that maps out key drivers of future urban issues for humanitarians, describes tools that the HAU can employ to support more strategic thinking around future urban humanitarian action, and identifies core recommendations for the HAU to develop as a flexible and future-oriented brain trust for Save the Children International.

Two tools and a third approach to tool development (heuristics) are outlined in Section II. The tools are provided fully in the Annex:

### **Tool 1: A Consultative Process for Future-Fit Strategy Development**

This Tool describes a holistic consultative process which Save the Children staff can undertake with themselves, external experts and children, to identify future strategic priorities. This process draws on the Delphi method, an innovative technique for consulting a range of stakeholders, and includes a brief futures exercise for an HAU analyst to run with Save the Children staff and child beneficiaries. In this application of the Delphi method, the iterative consultative process builds consensus around strategic goals and processes amongst children, Save the Children staff and external experts. This process supports the creation of a Future-Fit Strategy, i.e. a strategy that enables Save the Children to be fit for the future by identifying horizon issues for children in a particular country or region, anticipating what programming is needed to address these issues, and outlining ways of working that allow Save the Children to be more innovative, collaborative and adaptive.

The process described in this tool is targeted at country-level and regional-level offices within the Save the Children family. However, it requires a skilled external facilitator to coordinate the Delphi questionnaires, analyse the results, and facilitate each stage of the process, including the final workshop in Stage 5. It is envisioned that this role would be filled by an analyst based at the Humanitarian Affairs Unit, who could in turn pull the learning from this process up into global strategic planning processes.

### **Tool 2: Shared Urban Futures: A scenario exercise for humanitarian and programming personnel**

One of the key findings from the Urban Futures Project is that greater coordination and collaboration between development and humanitarian personnel is necessary for Save the Children to effectively build resilience and respond to a humanitarian disaster in an urban context. This 5<sup>th</sup> scenario exercise presents participants with a set of scenarios for the future and asks them to consider which is the most plausible and preferred future for them as a group. Engaging in this exercise allows development and humanitarian staff to discuss how they analyse potential scenarios differently or similarly and then build a shared preferred future by drawing on their own unique set of strengths and talents.

## **An Approach to Heuristics:**

This report recommends that Save the Children devote the time and resources to innovate new heuristic tools that its staff can use to make better real-time decisions in the context of unexpected challenges. Specifically, Save the Children can:

- Develop context-specific indices to provide a 'representativeness' heuristic to urban staff for assessing disaster impact or resilience
- Develop scenario exercises, to be undertaken with staff and children, which enable Save the Children staff to become more cognitively available to speculative and horizon topics that can shape their future urban operating contexts.

**Section III: Mapping the Way Forward: Recommendations for a futures-oriented Save the Children International** provides a list of recommendations for Save the Children ordered under seven main themes, illustrating how observations from a project on urban futures and resilience can demonstrate the role and operational structure of a dynamic, futures-oriented SCI brains-trust.

### **A multi-layered, interactive and externally engaged HAU**

Save the Children's strategic approach to future humanitarian challenges, including urban risk, rely on analysis that is relevant to a particular geographical area while also informed by broader research on thematic issues. Marrying these two perspectives—thematic and geographical—is a key challenge to analysis units such as the HAU. A similar challenge lies in ensuring that global strategies are adequately informed by, and follow, realities and perspectives from low- and middle-income countries. In discussion with experts from a range of policy organisations, HFP identified a number of steps the HAU can take in order to build a multi-layered structure that not only balances across global-regional-local-thematic perspectives, but provides a conduit for interactive dialogue and cooperation across these:

- **Organise Advisory Panels to consult with Save the Children on specific thematic topics.**
- **Pilot and develop further the draft consultative process to ensure a holistic approach to developing *future-fit* country, regional and global strategies.**
- **Carry out annual regional reviews of core issues and how they are being approached within the region.**
- **Reach out to slumdweller associations, local credit unions, and other local organisations and structures that are key to understanding power structures, risk and vulnerability in urban areas.**
- **Spearhead stronger engagement and partnership with regional organisations.**
- **Develop innovative interactive communication mechanisms with vulnerable populations that go beyond standard accountability practices and seek to engage such populations in planning and strategic processes before disasters occur.**



## **Resilience and the HAU**

Save the Children's approach to urban resilience and response is currently inhibited by a strong internal divide between humanitarian and development policy and programming. Many experts interviewed during Phase 3 of this project felt that this divide would crucially limit Save the Children's capacity to engage effectively in urban resilience building. While the HAU is naturally placed on one side of this divide, there are many opportunities it can take to build a cohesive approach to urban environments that reflects a more holistic approach to urban risk and vulnerability. Specifically, HFP feels that the HAU can:

- **Define what resilience means for children, and for Save the Children as an organisation.**
- **Coordinate strategic planning sessions at the global level between humanitarian and development managers at senior levels.**
- **Develop activities and opportunities for humanitarian and development professionals within Save the Children to analyse and debate shared issues.**
- **Use data and analysis from development personnel as baseline measurements for use in humanitarian work.**

## **Innovation monitoring and exploration**

The changes and dynamics discussed in [Section I](#) point to an ever-pressing need for humanitarians to innovate and move beyond out-dated ways of working in order to reduce disaster risk more effectively and build resilience in urban areas. ICT is of course a significant mechanism for innovation on which Save the Children can focus its efforts. However, innovations can also be sought through other means, for example by adopting new methods from fields such as epidemiology or anthropology, or by innovating new ways of positioning Save the Children's assistance for different urban users. In this context, HFP feels that the HAU can operate as an engine for innovation within Save the Children International, playing a core role in monitoring innovation across Save the Children, broadening the impact of these innovations, and exploring unidentified opportunities for improving core practices and products. Some of the ways in which the HAU can achieve this are:

- **Cultivate a culture of innovation through the creation of an incentive structure or award scheme.**
- **Monitor innovation and develop a self-assessment tool.**
- **Design or commission a broader toolkit of futures exercises and practices for Save the Children country and regional offices to use.**
- **Support a stronger 'marketplace' or repository for innovative approaches and experiments across Save the Children offices.**
- **Provide a dependable resource for best practice by acting as a curator of the aforementioned repository.**

- **Focus greater attention on ICT and ICT-based innovations for urban and peri-urban areas.**

### **Interpreter and Knowledge Curator**

[Phase 1](#) of this project found that most Save the Children staff, especially at the regional and country levels, rarely have adequate time to read relevant research, build relationships with external experts and researchers who can contribute to their thinking, both in terms of new ways of dealing with the present and of preparing for the future. During [Phase 3](#), several experts mentioned that many 'urban myths', i.e. mythologies and unproven assumptions about urbanisation and urban risk, were perpetuated through readily available and accessible sources of information, such as Wikipedia pages. In order to get information that would be more sensitive and accurate, the HAU can play a valuable role as an interpreter and curator of information and analysis, specifically by engaging in the following:

- **Develop specialist analyses around thematic topics.**
- **Identify and develop key indices.**
- **HAU as the source of intriguing questions.**
- **Support the work of the Humanitarian and Leadership Academy.**
- **Broker between communities and researchers to create empowering opportunities for disaster-affected populations.**
- **Build an internal contacts log of global expertise.**