The Urban Dimensions of Humanitarian Action:
Understanding urban risk, reshaping humanitarian response, building urban resilience
Non paper
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Preamble

This non-paper forms the basis for discussions on an 'urban track' towards the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 (WHS), which should result in key recommendations for both the humanitarian and development communities. The overall aim of the urban track is to ensure those addressing humanitarian needs in urban crises are 'fit for purpose' in prevention and response. The paper takes a broad view of urban crisis: towns and cities affected by shocks – whether natural or human-induced, slow onset or acute – and towns and cities receiving large influxes of refugees and internally displaced people – again whether by disasters or conflict.

The paper demonstrates how addressing urban risk and enhancing response is a cross-cutting theme of relevance to all four WHS priority themes: 1) Humanitarian effectiveness; 2) Reducing vulnerability, managing risk; 3) Transformation through innovation; and, 4) Serving the needs of people in conflict. It is also relevant to the debates emerging around Habitat III, the UN conference on housing and sustainable urban development held every 20 years, which will also take place in 2016, and on the proposed urban goal for the SDGs. The paper sets out the context of an urbanising world and the challenges this poses for humanitarians, development actors and governments in addressing humanitarian needs. It identifies gaps that require further analysis and poses questions for debate. It is envisaged that workstreams and activities will coalesce around a number of core issues, leading to credible and pragmatic recommendations that will be taken up at the Summit.

This paper takes as its premise the **need to reshape humanitarian action in urban areas** so that it takes into account the complexity of cities (spatial, social, political, cultural, environmental, economic), maximizes humanitarian effectiveness, builds on the capabilities and opportunities present in cities (including through the use of technology), ensures accountability to affected people, avoids doing harm in the short and long term, and fast tracks sustainable recovery to limit the need for humanitarian assistance and prevent the rebuilding of vulnerability and risk in recovery and reconstruction.

There is likely to be a tension at the heart of all debates around urban areas and humanitarian action: the chronic poverty affecting so many of the world's urban dwellers and underpinning their vulnerability requires long-term urban development solutions. Humanitarian response is, theoretically at least, short-term in nature. Humanitarians cannot fix a city's existing problems, but when they respond in urban areas, they can operate in a way that better supports city systems, limits further disruption to urban development trajectories and promotes greater resilience to future crises. They can also take steps to engage urban development actors in cities most at risk, and benefit from their expertise when a crisis hits.

Background

Urbanisation as a global challenge for government, humanitarian and development actors

As the UK's Humanitarian Emergency Response Review (HERR)[1] acknowledges, *'The concentration of populations in urban areas will change the nature of many humanitarian disasters'*. The world urban population is estimated to increase from 3.5 billion today to 6.2 billion in 2050. Almost all **population growth** will be catered for in fast-expanding urban areas and concentrated in small to intermediate-sized African and Asian Cities.

Of particular concern is the fact that over the past forty years, the urban population in lower income and fragile countries has increased by 326 percent.[2] With these growth rates projected to continue, the crises of tomorrow are likely to be more urban than rural. What this means for humanitarian actors is that they are increasingly going to be called upon to work in urban contexts that are prone to violence and disaster and where public authorities have difficulty delivering basic services, security, and welfare.

Huge numbers of urban dwellers are already exposed to a variety of hazards: roughly one billion people live in slums, representing one third of the population of the developing world. Slums accumulate acute and structural vulnerabilities and show low levels of resilience to withstand different shocks and stresses. As a result, extreme weather events, earthquakes, epidemics, fires, industrial accidents, financial crisis and/or related escalating prices of basic commodities[3] can easily engender a humanitarian crisis. Urban risk is composed of a complex set of inter-related factors: slum dwellers often live on land exposed to hazards and without adequate protective infrastructure, suffer from poor housing conditions (e.g. sub-standard housing and insecure tenure), and lack access to basic services (e.g. adequate clean water, sanitation, energy, transport and drainage), and adequate healthcare, food security, education and employment opportunities. This context reinforces vulnerability to shocks. The informal nature of these settlements (including their governance structures) limits opportunities to reduce these vulnerabilities. Elsewhere in the city, lax enforcement of planning legislation and building codes puts other more wealthy populations at risk. The interdependence and density of urban infrastructure and social systems, the interconnectedness of urban sites and the multiplicity of hazards makes compound events a present danger.

Political violence and civil wars increasingly ignite in cities, as they are the locus of, on the one hand, political and economic power and assets, and on the other social tensions and inequalities. Cities have always been the theatre of combat, but this trend is intensifying with urbanization. Urban warfare has been a constant feature of recent conflicts, and of humanitarian operations. At the same time, **refugees** and **internally displaced persons** (IDPs),whether displaced by conflict or natural disaster, are

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[1] *P Ashdown et al, 2011, 'The Humanitarian Emergency Response Review', (page 9)*

[2] See Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and Norwegian Refugee Council report *Global Estimates 2014: People Displaced by Disasters*, September 2014, p. 9.

[3] *Saving Lives Today and Tomorrow, Managing the Risk of Humanitarian Crises, UN-OCHA, 2014, pg. 11*

increasingly drawn to cities and towns, where there may be better access to housing, basic services, education, markets and livelihood opportunities than in camps or rural areas. Today approximately half of the world's estimated 16.7 million **refugees** and at least 33.3 million **IDPs** are thought to live in urban areas.[4] Displacements often become protracted and return, even if it materializes, is often only partial. Massive influxes often stretch the absorption capacity of host communities and existing urban services and infrastructure, causing tension. Protracted displacements also reshape towns and cities, physically, socially and economically, sometimes adding entirely new neighbourhoods or sub-cities that then impact the pre-existing urban system.

Outside of warzones, many cities around the world have levels of violence exceeding those in conflict zones[5], which has led to new debates on the need for humanitarian action in situations of violence other than conflict. Large influxes of displaced people into areas affected by violence can also trigger further crisis, such as civil unrest, food/fuel riots, xenophobic, and identity-based and gang violence. Women and girls face particular risks in urban areas, including increased vulnerability and exposure to discrimination, harassment and sexual and gender based violence in public and private spaces.[6] Young men are particularly affected by gang violence in urban areas.

Urban issues and the World Humanitarian Summit

The following section of this paper examines urban issues in light of each of the four themes of the WHS, explaining how an urban lens should be applied, setting out the challenges with the current state of the system, and presenting a series of questions that require further discussion. The aim of this section of the paper is to challenge existing ways of organising and thinking about humanitarian action in urban areas and stimulate discussion on how the challenges outlined could be addressed in the run-up to the World Humanitarian Summit. Ultimately, debates and discussions held over the coming year should coalesce in a series of recommendations that will be taken up at the Global Consultation in Geneva in October 2015 and then at the Summit itself in May 2016. This will include presenting these in the Secretary-General's report, which will feed into the Summit. These could be recommendations for a change in the way that the humanitarian system operates the development or adoption of new approaches and initiatives, and potential further research. A core focus will be a small number of catalytic actions, which will make a significant change in how to prepare for and respond to future, urban humanitarian crises

While each theme is treated separately, there is clear overlap. As noted in the WHS *Scoping Paper for Theme 2 on Reducing Vulnerability and Managing Risk*, 'exploring how to improve the management of risk in urban areas will need to be closely linked with improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response in urban areas, addressing the specific challenges of serving people's need in urban areas affected by conflict and developing innovations to tackle problems faced in urban response'.[7]

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[4] UNHCR (2013), IDMC January 2014.
[5] Moser C, McIlwaine C (2014). 'New frontiers in twenty-first century urban conflict and violence' Environment and Urbanization 26(2): 331-344.
[6] Technical Support Team 'Cities and Human Settlements' Brief for Open Working Group SDGs, December 2013
[7] www.worldhumanitariansummit.org accessed 03.11.14

Humanitarian effectiveness

The *Initial Scoping Paper – WHS Theme 1: Humanitarian Effectiveness* suggests that the humanitarian sector consider a 'shift toward building specialized capacity and expertise to meet people's needs in urban environments of different types and of non-camp type situations' in response to 'global trends of rapid urbanization'.

The humanitarian community is not yet 'fit for purpose' to deal with the urban challenges described above. Experience, approaches, tools and skillsets of humanitarian agencies are still mostly grounded in rural or camp settings, and donors tend to frontload emergency assistance at the expense of recovery planning. Humanitarian actors struggle to deal with the complexity of towns and cities and to take full advantage of the capabilities present in urban areas, as outlined in multiple reviews of recent high profile urban crises (Kenyan election violence 2008, Haiti Earthquake 2010, Philippines Typhoon Haiyan 2013 and the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East). Coordination mechanisms do not necessarily complement or enable existing urban governance arrangements, and the knowledge and expertise of people and institutions specializing in urban development and urban planning do not often inform the early stages of humanitarian action.

How should humanitarian effectiveness be measured in urban contexts? Beyond the number of lives saved, and the quantitative fulfilment of identified sectorial needs, humanitarian effectiveness in urban areas could be measured in the time it takes for communities to pick up their lives and restore minimum livelihoods. This would therefore mean measuring the impact of humanitarian interventions on maintaining/restoring urban systems (governance, markets, infrastructure) and on contributing to longer-term planning to reduce risks and build resilience. This type of understanding of effectiveness should result in moving away from monitoring of goods delivered, to an assessment of impact (e.g. from delivery of tents to developing a menu of shelter solutions). Immediate solutions could also be borrowed from development or macro-economic approaches. In short, the challenge is to align meeting immediate needs and saving lives with the fast-tracking of recovery and strengthening resilience.

Questions for further debate

- To what extent does the current institutional set-up of humanitarian agencies, their procedures and capacities allow them to maximize their effectiveness in urban areas?
- Are area-based approaches the best way to support local capacities and urban governance systems? If so, how would the system's collective assessment, programming and coordination tools need to change?
- What modalities for collaboration and coordination between local authorities and service providers (including water utilities and other private sector providers), and humanitarian actors have proved successful in past responses?
- How do we get into a position whereby local actors (local governments, civil society and the private sector) can respond to crises themselves for all but the most catastrophic events.

- How could urban crises be integrated in to the Transformative Agenda? Does the humanitarian system require a different set of procedures, standards and guidelines when responding to an urban emergency?
- Humanitarian action can impact negatively on fast recovery and longer-term development. How can the humanitarian-development divide be bridged to ensure the best solutions are applied as early as possible to shorten the crisis and strengthen resilience while saving the maximum number of lives? What role should urban development actors be encouraged to play, and at what stage of a response?
- Do institutional triggers need to be in place to minimise the relief phase and ensure that the shift to supporting/restoring/improving urban systems happens as soon as possible?
- What type of leadership profiles are required in the humanitarian system at country level in an urban response and what other type of urban expertise is needed?
- How can humanitarian agencies support municipal authorities to take the lead when urban areas are affected by crisis? Is a mechanism needed to surge in administrative and technical support to municipal authorities to deal with crises?
- Housing, land and property issues are key to ensuring an effective and sustainable response, as well as providing protection. How do we improve understanding of the full range of tenure options and integrate this into response? How do we improve our understanding of how land and property values are affected by humanitarian action? How do we overcome regulatory barriers to post-disaster housing provision?
- An improved understanding of the complexity of urban economies, including informality, market mechanisms, and people's engagement with these is a pre-condition for enhanced humanitarian effectiveness in urban areas. An understanding of the importance of cash as opposed to relief items is also needed. How can humanitarian actors be supported to improve their understanding of the urban context and to tailor responses accordingly?
- What rights claims are presented in cities? Do humanitarian agencies have the right tools and frameworks to help prioritise scarce resources, for example between those resident in a city before or after a shock, or to support host and relocated community residents?
- What responsibility and technical skills do humanitarians have for working alongside pre-existing informal and formal governance systems through large-scale urban response and reconstruction programmes?
- How can we ensure humanitarian response takes into account pre-crisis acute vulnerabilities, people directly affected by the crisis that sparked the response, and the nature of specific vulnerable groups in urban areas?
- How can we integrate understanding of the way families in urban areas take decisions and qualify their own needs, with the way that humanitarian needs are assessed?

Reducing vulnerability, managing risk

The discussions around this theme provide the opportunity to build on current work amongst the disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate and development communities on risk and resilience and ensure that this informs humanitarian action. For example, the UN Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, has proposed a stand-alone goal on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements:

'Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'. Similarly, the zero draft of the post 2015 framework for DRR recommends the mainstreaming of 'disaster risk reduction measures appropriately into multilateral and bilateral development assistance programmes, including those related to poverty reduction, natural resource management, <u>urban development</u> and adaptation to climate change'. And the IPCC Special Report on Climate concludes that 'The most effective adaptation and disaster risk reduction actions are those that offer development benefits in the relatively near term, as well as reductions in vulnerability over the longer-term (high agreement, medium evidence)'.[8]

There is much work that remains to be done if these commitments are to be operationalised – the WHS scoping paper for this theme notes the insufficient attention to the challenges and complexity of managing risk in urban settings. At the most basic level, there is a need to better understand the risks, and likely scope of future urban humanitarian crises, (in particular where vulnerabilities are exacerbated by informal/unregulated urbanization, weak urban governance and fragile urban systems) so there can be better prevention, preparedness and response. This is particularly critical in urban areas, given that they are characterised by interdependencies, and shocks in one system can generate impacts elsewhere. Areas for further research could include improving understanding of how urban densities shape vulnerabilities (and trade-offs for example in climate change mitigation), and of how urbanisation (both planned and unplanned, or a hybrid of the two) exacerbates vulnerabilities and increases exposure (with implications for UNFCCC loss and damage debates[9] and eventual payments). Other areas for research could include improving understanding of how sudden or protracted influxes of refugees and displaced people impact on city systems and economies.

In urban areas that are characterized by large scale, acute and structural vulnerabilities, reducing vulnerability and managing risk should be maximized in prevention, preparedness, response, recovery and reconstruction. We need to understand under what conditions political will and availability of financing in the early days of a crisis response can be harnessed to address some of the underlying structural causes of vulnerability, to fast track recovery and ensure progress towards more sustainable, equitable and resilient cities. There is also a need for a much better interplay and alignment between humanitarian and development efforts (including macro-economic interventions), and a change in the business model, to ensure these are no longer seen as sequential, but parallel interventions. Urban resilience, understood as the ability of any urban system to withstand and recover quickly from any plausible hazard, provides a useful framework to develop this alignment, as it is a multi-hazard, multi-stakeholder approach focused not only on protecting lives and assets, but also on ensuring continuity of services and quick recovery. Efforts are underway to build consensus on what urban resilience looks like. Recognising these efforts were likely to be duplicated, nine agencies announced a new alliance for urban resilience at the World Urban Forum in Medellin, in April 2014.

Questions for further debate

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[8] IPCC (2012). 'Summary for Policymakers'. In: *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation*. Cambridge University Press. Page 15.
[9] Dodman D, Archer D (2014). 'Towards an urban agenda on climate-related loss and damage' IIED Briefing, available online:
   http://pubs.iied.org/10718IIED.html

- How can we promote a shared understanding of urban resilience, and what the resilience of the most marginalized groups would look like?
- How does resilience enable or constrain the meeting of other goals such as equity, sustainable social and ecological development and scope for radical or transformative development pathways?
- Dominant urban development paradigms are repeatedly associated with the drivers of local disaster risk. How can humanitarian action contribute to the realigning of development towards sustainable pathways? Who should be included in determining desired trajectories for humanitarian action – understanding that the pre-crisis city and its development pathways may have been highly inequitable and unsustainable?
- How fit are current international humanitarian, development and donor aid structures for supporting institutional adaptation in cities to reduce future risk? What type of new partnerships and hybrid funding arrangements might be appropriate?
- How appropriate are existing linkages between international, national and local humanitarian actors to facilitate interventions in small-scale and everyday risk events, where aggregate impacts may be more significant than catastrophic disasters but individual event thresholds remain currently below the radar of the international community? Should this be a place for international humanitarian actors to avoid, to partner local actors or to expand into?
- What data is needed to be able to prioritise the most vulnerable cities for preparedness and resilience interventions? Could INFORM be enlarged to provide city level data?
- What components (institutions, policy instruments, financing and implementation modalities) would make up an 'urban recovery framework' that can align humanitarian and development action and promote effective decision making?
- How can strategic urban planning approaches contribute to realizing greater resilience in response, and locating where preventative action is necessary? What kind of advocacy is needed to ensure that urban planners and urban development experts are able to inform decision-making in the early stages of a response?
- What kind of planning is feasible at the onset of a crisis, so as to provide a quick analysis of the urban context, support high-level strategic decisions and localize urgent interventions?
- How can municipalities and civil society be better supported to address the rising risk of humanitarian need in urban areas?
- How does weak urban governance undermine resilience and enhance vulnerabilities? What is needed to reverse this?
- Do we have a good understanding of the vulnerability of urban systems and their critical fragile points? What does it take for the system to collapse?
- Are we in a position to define the absorption capacity of cities and neighborhoods for rapid inward increase in population through migration or forced displacement?
- Do we understand how families assess risk and exposure to hazards and weigh these against affordability, access to education and livelihoods, basic services and infrastructure, and security (e.g. tenure)? How does dependency on market systems influence coping mechanisms and vulnerabilities?

- How can we monitor vulnerabilities and exposure and use this information to be better prepared for humanitarian crisis and its impact in urban areas?
- How do we generate understanding of the political economy and the governance of risk in urban areas
- What lessons can be learnt from alternative forms of urban governance such as networked citizens and community movements? Can these forms indicate ways of enhancing the institutionalisation of a more inclusive and sustainable development? How might humanitarian work including disaster risk reduction and reconstruction best interact with these actors and their vision?

Transformation through innovation

As noted in the Initial Scoping Paper – WHS Theme 3: Transformation through Innovation, 'Innovation is not a specific technology or idea, but a way of thinking that can be used to solve problems by applying ideas, products and services, processes, positions and paradigms that may be effective in other sectors or areas, as well as by supporting creative thinking about how to use resources more efficiently. Successful innovations are those that result in improvements in efficiency, effectiveness, quality or social outcomes/impacts.'

As widely acknowledged, the operating environment for those providing humanitarian assistance has changed dramatically over recent decades – and this change includes the growing humanitarian need in urban areas, as outlined in the opening section of this paper. The humanitarian system must adapt to respond to the 'changing dynamics of humanitarian needs' and to do so in a way that demonstrates 'increased creativity, innovation and out-of the box solutions.'

The density and the proximity of people and skills in urban areas, and the fact that urban economies are mostly cash-based (in both 'formal' and 'informal' sectors), make them fertile ground for innovation, which humanitarian action should capitalise on. Urban areas are also often centres of growth and drivers of national development, and it is particularly important that humanitarian response supports a return to development trajectories that are sustainable and equitable. There is a need to maximize the potential of cash transfer programming, taking into account lessons learnt from the 'food security' sector, and other technological innovations. Initiatives such as crowd sourcing and GIS-based mapping of needs (including through the use of on-line digital volunteers) are developing fast, so as to support evidence-based decision making and to establish baselines for monitoring of the response. However, existing mapping tools still fall short of effectively documenting and analysing urban dynamics. And despite major advances in information technology, accurate data on fast-growing cities is scarce. This is especially true for low income areas, where the shortage of useful information often reflects and reinforces the social and economic marginalization of the poor.

Questions for further debate
- What kind of tools do we those responding to urban crises need to achieve an understanding of the state of urban systems (for example governance, market, infrastructure and social systems), the links between people's location and their access to livelihoods and markets, and the population's own coping mechanisms?

- What scale is the humanitarian sector comfortable at working and how might this be augmented through strategic collaboration with other humanitarian or development actors including the science and research community? Can such partnerships be used to better reveal linkages between local urban places at risk or experiencing loss and the transfer of risk or loss between sectors and across urban systems networks? Can we better manage urban systems to anticipate contagion and the potential for complex emergencies?

- What kind of science can support this and how far can formal science usefully interact with local knowledge to enhance risk and loss accounting and visualisation? Can these mechanisms be used to hold humanitarians to account and enhance accountability to local stakeholders? Can enhanced accountability also include long-term impacts and outcomes of humanitarian interventions on social and ecological sustainability as well as social resilience? Can new assemblages of data collection and analysis tools including census data, Demographic and Health Surveys, statistical bureaus, remote sensing, local knowledge and formal science be oriented to contribute to long established challenges in urban risk management such as proof of property ownership or use post-disaster? What institutional forms would be needed to enable such information hybrids to be effective and legitimate? What role should humanitarian donors and actors play in shaping these institutions and knowledge generation agendas?

- How can we build better on local coping mechanisms to fast track recovery? What trade-offs are there between fast recovery and sustainable reconstruction?

- What role can the private sector play in helping to establish disaster safety nets in the absence of state capacity and resources? Is there a role for private financing schemes, insurance products and collaborative risk management funds?

- How can technology be used to get regular feedback from urban populations, and to streamline communications between affected populations, local authorities and service providers, and international actors?

- What types of innovation can be harnessed to identify the most vulnerable displaced populations, and to undertake protection activities amongst widely dispersed populations living amongst host communities?

- What promising practices in urban areas should be shared with a wider audience? For example, collaboration between local civil society and municipal authorities for disaster preparedness and response; collaboration with the local private sector to provide goods and services.

- How could changes in donor financing encourage a response to urban crisis that minimises the relief phase, and incorporates an urban development perspective from the outset?

- What are the consequences for sustainable reconstruction of the rise of international for profit private sector actors in urban response and reconstruction? Can these new actors provide opportunities for local training and market development? or do they distort markets and extract local capital including that targeted by humanitarian aid?

Serving the needs of people in conflict

Urban warfare has been a constant feature of recent conflicts, and of humanitarian operations (such as Liberia, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Republic of Congo, Libya and Syria). Populations have suffered heavily. There have also been prolonged sieges of cities, such as in Angola and Libya, or the takeover of neighbourhoods by various militias resulting in forced displacement of populations.

The humanitarian consequences of fighting in cities includes a high number of casualties, damage to infrastructures and systems (such as water infrastructure and health or education systems), and displacement within or beyond the city. Conflicts in cities can weaken social cohesion, and exacerbate gender-based violence (including domestic violence), particularly when the homes are destroyed, and people are forced to find shelter elsewhere.

Urban areas are often conceived as a place to escape from conflict; as such they can be affected by rapid population influxes from other areas of the country, or neighbouring states. The arrival of large numbers of people has an impact on host communities and neighbourhoods, and can put a critical strain on service provision, even in areas where services were previously meeting needs. There is a need for greater understanding of the 'absorption' capacity of neighborhoods, cities and host communities (e.g. strength of the urban systems, status of the housing market, pre-existing social fragmentation/cohesion). Where families affected by disaster or conflict settle in already deprived areas, the additional stress on inadequate basic services can also exacerbate social problems.

Despite these challenges, urban areas usually offer better access to services (notably health and education services) than the surrounding countryside and greater livelihood opportunities, although more work needs to be done to understand push factors, and also the ability of poorer communities to access these services. This analysis is important both in terms of stabilising communities in crisis-affected areas as long as possible and understanding what needs to be prioritised to open the possibility for return.

For humanitarian actors, cities present both challenges and opportunities: they are usually easier to access than the countryside and the concentration of the population can simplify logistics. However, people affected by fighting may be dispersed amongst a wider population and be highly mobile. It can therefore be difficult to identify those who are most in need of assistance or protection. A common approach is needed to assess the strain on host communities and qualify the needs of urban refugees/displaced so as to promote responses targeted towards the most vulnerable, whilst avoiding parallel service provision.

Although not specifically referred to in the WHS thematic scoping papers, there is growing concern that in some cities, violence has reached levels that a humanitarian response is required. Endemic violence also impacts on the ability of actors to respond to needs generated by other forms of crisis.

Questions for further debate
- How can we best locate and respond to the needs of urban refugees and displaced people?
- What are the most serious protection concerns (taking into account the different needs and vulnerabilities of women and men, girls and boys) emerging in urban areas characterized by urban violence, the lack of rule of law, acute inequalities and social fragmentation?
- What types of resources are needed to ensure the protection of vulnerable refugees and displaced people in urban areas?
- What are the potential efficiency and cost benefits of serving the needs of the displaced in urban areas, rather than in camps?

- What steps should refugee agencies take to ensure they are meeting the basic needs of urban refugees and protecting the most vulnerable?
- How can displacement monitoring tools move beyond a quantitative monitoring of displacement to analyse push and pull factors?
- Do we understand how informal governance systems operate in urban areas where formal authorities have little or no control?
- How should humanitarians engage with armed non-military groups (ex. criminal gangs) and gain access to the areas they govern? How can humanitarian organizations be better adept at understanding the dynamics and impact of the violence in these contexts? What is the criteria for intervention and how can humanitarian organizations add value to existing mechanisms implemented by country authorities, civil society and community groups?
- How do we work best with Local Authorities and community leaders in neighbourhoods which are dominated by armed and violent groups and/or by organised crime (sometimes deriving their income from basic services and rent)?
- Can camps that will inevitably become cities be pre-identified and approached as nascent cities? Can the political obstacles of such an approach be overcome?

Progress made so far

The IASC took a major step forward when it adopted the **"Strategy on Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas"** in 2010. The associated action plan has been largely implemented and a review is under way, in order to identify the next possible steps. Selective agencies have upgraded their approaches to urban response and equipped themselves with improved tools.

There is a growing **'Community of Practice'** (ex. ALNAP www.urban-response.org) that allows online discussion of the key challenges of operating in urban areas and the exchange of good practices and new tools. There is also a community of practice being rapidly set up to explore how to respond to Ebola in urban settings.

A series of consultations focusing on the 'Humanitarian Dimension of Urbanisation' have been held in 2014: during the World Urban Forum, the ECOSOC Humanitarian Segment, the Harvard Conference Design for Urban Disaster, four DFID consultations in London on urban humanitarian crises, and the IRC's Ditchley Park conference on the future of humanitarian action in urban areas.
Habitat III, also in 2016, will offer opportunities to integrate necessary action into a global inter-governmental agreement.

Next steps

The next step is for a diverse group of experts to help identify a set of potential recommendations on urban risk and response, which could be developed for the Summit. These would need to be developed and tested through consultation, including the five regional WHS consultations taking place before September 2015 and a specific meeting on urban response.

Activities supporting this in the coming months include:

- Literature review by the Development Planning Unit on urban humanitarian crises to be circulated in December 2014
- Launch of DFID Urban Humanitarian Crises capability building fund by IIED in early 2015
- IRC-DFID advocacy and learning partnership to produce advocacy briefs and hold side events at regional consultations in 2015
- Online consultations: engaging in WHS-led consultations, using existing platforms (ex. ALNAP);
- Broadening the Community of Practice;
- Targeted surveys / local dialogues targeting primarily Local Authorities, and local humanitarian actors, using existing networks: UCLG, ISDR Resilient Cities Campaign, Rockefeller 100 Resilient Cities, Country Offices ECHO, interested HC/RCs, etc;
- Consultations with key international organisations focusing on urban resilience/development, urban humanitarian and recovery response, etc. organising specific events (where possible as part of broader already planned conferences);
- Expert Group Meetings, representing all key stakeholders (including local authorities) to develop recommendations for the World Humanitarian Summit (ex. 1 EGM/Region + 2 global ones);
- WHS Secretariat 'Urban Resilience Task Force' (tbd) to help mainstream the urban dimension across the 4 themes of the World Humanitarian Summit and consolidate messaging;
- One final global event to validate, vision, recommendations and action plan prior to the Summit.

Feedback

This paper is meant to be a living document. All comments and suggestions (including in track changes) are more than welcome. Kindly send your inputs to Filiep Decorte. Chief Technical Advisor, UN-Habitat New York Liaison Officer (decorte@un.org) and Lucy Earle, Social Development Adviser, Humanitarian Response Group, Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department, DFID (L-Earle@dfid.gov.uk). Periodic updates will be shared.