Humanitarian aid in urban settings: Current practice, future challenges

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Groupe URD (Urgence – Réhabilitation – Développement)

provides support to the humanitarian and post-crisis sector. It aims to improve humanitarian practices in favor of crisis-affected people through a variety of activities, such as operational research projects, programme evaluations, the development of methodological tools, organizational support and training both in France and abroad.

DG ECHO

is the European Commission’s humanitarian aid office. The mandate of this Directorate-General is to bring assistance and emergency relief to the victims of natural disasters and conflicts by supporting United Nations agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as well as to mobilize and coordinate European civil protection institutions.

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<tr>
<td>ACF</td>
<td>Action contre la Faim</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACTED</td>
<td>Agence de Coopération Technique pour le Développement</td>
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<td>AFD</td>
<td>Agence Française de Développement</td>
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<tr>
<td>AHA</td>
<td>ASEAN Co-ordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management</td>
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<td>AMISOM</td>
<td>African Union Mission for Somalia</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<td>OCHA</td>
<td>UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
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<td>BAC</td>
<td>Battle Area Clearance</td>
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<td>CaLP</td>
<td>Cash Learning Partnership</td>
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<td>CBMAM</td>
<td>Community Based Management of Acute Malnutrition</td>
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<td>CAMEP</td>
<td>Compagnie Métropolitaine de l’Eau Potable (Metropolitan Potable Water Company)</td>
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<td>CCCM</td>
<td>Camp Coordination and Camp management</td>
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<td>CERF</td>
<td>Central Emergency Revolving Fund</td>
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<td>CDAC</td>
<td>Communication with Disaster Affected Communities</td>
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<td>CDC</td>
<td>Centre for Disease Control (Atlanta)</td>
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<td>CESVI</td>
<td>Cooperazion e sviluppō</td>
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<td>CFW</td>
<td>Cash for Work</td>
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<td>CIAT</td>
<td>Comité Interministériel d’Aménagement du Territoire</td>
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<td>CIMIC</td>
<td>Civil-military cooperation</td>
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<td>CNAR</td>
<td>Commission Nationale d’Accueil des Réfugiés</td>
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<td>DiD:</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
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<td>DG DEVCO</td>
<td>European Commission Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation</td>
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<td>DG ECHO</td>
<td>European Commission Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection</td>
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<td>DG RELEX</td>
<td>European Commission Directorate-General for External Relations</td>
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<td>DINEPA</td>
<td>Direction Nationale de l’Eau Potable</td>
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<td>DIPECHO</td>
<td>Disaster Preparedness ECHO</td>
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<td>DPC</td>
<td>Direction de la Protection Civile (Haitian Civil Protection Directorate)</td>
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<td>DRR</td>
<td>Disaster Risk Reduction</td>
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<td>DRC:</td>
<td>Danish Refugee Council</td>
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<td>DTM</td>
<td>Displacement Tracking Matrix</td>
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<td>ECDc</td>
<td>European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control</td>
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<td>EDF</td>
<td>European Development Fund</td>
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<td>ERF</td>
<td>Emergency Response Fund</td>
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<td>ERM</td>
<td>Environmental Resources Management</td>
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<td>EU CP</td>
<td>European Union’s Civil Protection Mechanism</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization</td>
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<td>FEMA:</td>
<td>Federal Emergency Management Agency</td>
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<td>FSNAU</td>
<td>Food security and Nutrition Analysis Unit</td>
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<td>FSTP</td>
<td>Food security Thematic Programme</td>
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<td>FTS</td>
<td>Financial Tracking System</td>
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<td>GAM</td>
<td>Global Acute Malnutrition</td>
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<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender Based Violence</td>
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<td>GRET</td>
<td>Groupe de Recherche et d’Echange Technologique</td>
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<td>HC</td>
<td>Humanitarian Coordinador</td>
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<td>HI</td>
<td>Handicap International</td>
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<td>HWT</td>
<td>Household Water Treatment</td>
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<td>IASC</td>
<td>Inter-Agency Standing Committee</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>Inter Cluster Coordination</td>
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<td>ICRC</td>
<td>International Committee of the Red Cross</td>
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<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced People</td>
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<td>IFRC</td>
<td>International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies</td>
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<td>INSARAG</td>
<td>International Search and Rescue Advisory Group</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISAF</td>
<td>International Stabilization Force</td>
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<td>JOTC</td>
<td>Joint Operation Tasking Centre</td>
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<td>LEMA</td>
<td>Local Emergency Management Agency</td>
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<td>LRRD</td>
<td>Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development</td>
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<td>MCDA</td>
<td>Military Assets for Disaster Assistance</td>
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<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millenium Development Goal</td>
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<td>MDM</td>
<td>Médecins Du Monde</td>
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<td>MIC</td>
<td>Monitoring and Information Centre</td>
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<td>MSF</td>
<td>Médecins Sans Frontières</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>NDMA</td>
<td>National Disaster Management Agency</td>
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<td>NFI</td>
<td>Non Food Items</td>
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<td>NGO:</td>
<td>Non Governmental Organizations</td>
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<td>NRC:</td>
<td>Norwegian Refugee Council</td>
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<td>OCHA</td>
<td>UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
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<td>ODI</td>
<td>Overseas Development Institute</td>
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<td>OFDA:</td>
<td>Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>OSOCC</td>
<td>On Site Operational Coordination Center</td>
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<td>PAHO</td>
<td>Pan American Health Organization</td>
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<td>PDNA</td>
<td>Post Disaster Needs Assessment</td>
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<td>PHAST</td>
<td>Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation</td>
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<td>POU</td>
<td>Point of Use</td>
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<td>PROMESS</td>
<td>Program on Essential Medicine and Supplies</td>
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<td>RTU</td>
<td>Ready to Use</td>
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<td>SAG</td>
<td>Strategic Advisory Group</td>
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<td>SAM</td>
<td>Severe Acute Malnutrition</td>
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<td>TA</td>
<td>Technical Assistant</td>
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<td>TWIG</td>
<td>Technical Working Inter-agency Group</td>
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<td>UNDAC</td>
<td>United Nation Disaster and Coordination</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNEP</td>
<td>United Nations Environment Programme</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>UNGA</td>
<td>United Nations General Assembly</td>
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<td>UN-Habitat</td>
<td>United Nations Human Settlements Programme</td>
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<td>UNOPS</td>
<td>United Nations Office for Project Services</td>
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<td>UNOSAT</td>
<td>UNITAR’S Operational Satellite Application programme</td>
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<td>UNRWA</td>
<td>United Nations Relief and Work Agency</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>USAR</td>
<td>Urban Search and Rescue</td>
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<td>UXO</td>
<td>Unexploded Ordnance</td>
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<td>WASH</td>
<td>Water, Sanitation and Hygiene</td>
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<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Programme</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
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<td>WV</td>
<td>World Vision</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

i. Current thinking

Urban contexts: The most difficult challenge for the next few decades
It is now widely acknowledged that the period we are entering will be marked by “the reign of the cities.” Only half a century ago the vast majority of the world’s population lived in rural environments; now the situation has evolved dramatically and more than fifty percent live in urban settings. All current predictions point towards this proportion continuing to grow larger in the future. And yet the question of what exactly goes towards making “a city” is often not very clear. Cities are a complex mixture of historical and political construction, multi-scale spatial organization, the unique characteristics of urban governance and institutions, the dynamic nature of urban culture and a cash-based economy, demographic mass and social disparities. This city environment is often not well understood by humanitarian actors whose practices are primarily based on their experiences in rural and camp-based contexts.

Fragile cities
It is also increasingly accepted that cities will have to face numerous dangers in the coming decades: classic military operations and new forms of urban warfare, social and economic tensions made even more visible and difficult to manage in times of food and economic crises, natural phenomena of all kinds exacerbated by climate change, new and revived pandemics, technological and environmental disasters, including the repercussions of climate change on rising sea levels and the multiplication of extreme climatic events. There are also new challenges, such as the growing number of people displaced by war or disasters seeking shelter in cities, increasingly organized urban violence, the rapid development of slums, the accelerated urbanization of refugee camps and IDP sites, etc. The kinetics of a crisis (rapid or slow, sudden or predictable, short lived or protracted) determine its impact and how resilient a city can be to that impact.

Support the dissemination and utilization of the knowledge produced by the scientific community in terms of hazards and risks and support the implementation of the “resilient city” strategy.

Urban settings and crises: complex, multi-layered, multi-dimensional and evolving open systems under stress
Cities are complex systems where many different factors interconnect in a relatively limited but densely-populated space. More than just a grouping of houses, they are social, economic and historical constructions. Some cities are relatively small and made of mud-bricks while others are mega-cities where millions of people live in multi-storey buildings and skyscrapers, slums and areas of acute poverty. The weight of these factors in shaping urban systems should be properly assessed. Understanding the impact of the characteristics of crises (recurrent or rare, slow or sudden, natural or man-made, etc.) on the city is essential for the design of a relevant response. Though aid actors have been engaged in urban settings for decades, very little strategic thinking has been devoted to humanitarian aid in these contexts. The sector has only recently woken up to this issue: in the last few years, a number of initiatives have been launched in this area which had previously only been examined by a few institutions.

Develop and support research into the strengths and vulnerabilities of urban systems affected by crises and humanitarian aid in urban contexts
Humanitarian challenges in urban settings:

Several phenomena, which remained until recently “off the radar” for international aid agencies, are important in the urban context:

**Demographics.** The rural exodus can be stalled by conflicts but it is often reactivated during the post crisis era when refugees or IDPs return home. In many cases, post-crisis displacements result in accelerated urbanization. Aid itself often creates complex pull and push factors. If large-scale aid operations are taking place in a city or if it is expected that a large aid agency presence will create job opportunities, this can have a very strong ‘pull’ effect, drawing people to urban areas.

**The modification of urban space.** With the destruction of part of a city by war or natural disasters, the urban map can be modified. Some areas can be left deserted while others can become new centres of urban development. The outskirts of cities can become covered in buildings of all shapes and sizes, with absolutely no overall planning scheme (as is the case around Kabul) and once tented camps can progressively put down roots and transform into an accumulation of mud brick houses (as around the main towns of Darfur). Urbanised areas grew from the bare lands where the early 1948 Palestinian refugees built their tented camps in Gaza. Lack of understanding of the pre-crisis spatial reality of the city, and the lack of proper maps often causes significant difficulties for actors.

**New urban actors:** Disaster-affected and war-torn situations attract all kinds of new players such as gangs controlling the affected population, churches exploiting their distress, social networks linked to the Diaspora, community-based organisations trying to attract assistance for their constituency and private companies looking for business in the aid industry. And indeed, many actors profit from a crisis: war or disaster entrepreneurs, those who manage to rent a house to aid actors or to divert part of the aid often become “big urban players”. There is also an increase in land speculation which often leads to localised inflation of land prices.

**Urban contexts: opportunities to be seized, risks to be managed**

There are many opportunities to be seized in cities: a high concentration of educated personnel, a high level of knowledge of information and communication technologies, openness to the world, monetized economies, the presence of private medical institutions and schools, etc. At the same time, cities are places where rumours spread quickly and where crowds can rapidly get out of hand. They are also places where there is huge potential in terms of market forces and financial mechanisms, many of which the aid sector is only just beginning to get to grips with (cash-based responses and market support programmes, for instance). Currently, humanitarian aid in urban contexts resembles something like “a tightrope walk without a safety net” in the absence of proper policies addressing the “urban equation”.

**Specific contexts require specific skill sets**

As most of the humanitarian sector’s experience over the last thirty years has occurred in camps and rural operations, humanitarian actors are unprepared to meet the challenges in urban settings, such as land issues, the role of municipal institutions, the social fabric behind neighbourhood organizations, etc. Specific research and tools have only emerged recently.

> Make better use of social sciences especially sociology, micro-economy, communication, urban planning, etc., to facilitate the understanding of urban settings. This might mean recruiting specialists in social sciences and urban planning as part of humanitarian teams. Donors should support this evolution in the Human Resources required for the design and implementation of appropriate aid responses.
Support innovations and the use of new technologies appropriate to urban settings

With new technologies being developed in information and communication management for crowd sourcing and consultation with affected populations, utilization of remote sensing imagery coupled with Geographic Information Systems to produce maps, the humanitarian aid sector is better equipped to deal with the complexity of urban settings. But these efforts must continue and their products should be made available to the wider aid community.

Continue to support the development of methodologies and innovations designed to help the humanitarian aid sector to be more relevant in urban settings.

iii. How to improve aid operations

The early part of the response: search and rescue and the much-debated mobilization of Military and Civil Defence Assets (MCDA)

In urban settings, the first response is often from neighbours, relatives and local volunteers, including local Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers. Of course, implementing an organized response to needs depends on the type of disaster and its impact. National and international Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams are commonly the first form of organized response, often supported by national, regional and international armies who mobilize Military and Civil Defence Assets (MCDA) to support the relief response. Over the last decade, significant effort has been made to ensure that deployments of this kind are coordinated: the INSARAG guidelines for USAR teams, the UNDAC methodology for the early stage of coordination and the Oslo and MCDA guidelines for military deployment.

Support for and compliance with the Oslo and MCDA guidelines and, for European actors, of the European Humanitarian Consensus (the main European reference which enshrines the European commitment to these guidelines) should be obligatory.

Further strengthen collaboration between UNDAC and national/regional civil protection mechanisms.

Interventions designed for urban areas: a new set of operational concepts

Urban systems involve networks (water, sewage, energy) and large caseloads, and they are almost completely monetised. Land tenure systems and housing rights are often extremely complex and diverse, even within a single given city. An ICT-based urban culture is developing, while new urban warfare strategies and tactics are emerging. Added-value-producing activities, low paid jobs, Diaspora transfers and the informal sector are key pillars of urban economies that need to be partly harnessed during crises. In urban settings where there are active military operations, natural disasters or an influx of displaced people, there are specific challenges in the health sector due to the scale of the affected population (mass casualty management) and the epidemiological risk inherent to densely populated areas.

Ensure that the operational concepts and methods of aid actors in urban settings optimize all the opportunities and options available in urban settings and that humanitarian programmes are implemented by staff with the appropriate skill sets.

City-to-city cooperation and collaborative agreements between humanitarian agencies and the technical departments of cities should be further strengthened, both in developing countries and in donor countries.
Food and economic security, livelihoods and nutrition in urban settings

Food aid and activities to combat food insecurity are part of all major relief operations in urban contexts. Several humanitarian response strategies have been put in place in urban contexts over the last decades, based on the specific characteristics of each context and crisis: direct food distributions, targeted distributions, supplementary feeding, support to subsidized bakeries, food parcels, canteens, etc. Cash-based operations are increasingly being promoted as an “urban” response due to the fact that cities have monetary economies, households are dependent on cash incomes and the availability of food is often not the main issue. Urban contexts also make cash transfers easier as telecommunications and bank facilities are easily available for urban dwellers.

Entry and exit strategies

In view of the size of the caseload involved, the high level of technical expertise required, the complexity of the coordination systems required, the constraints on the resources available and the complexity of linking relief, rehabilitation and development, engaging effectively in urban contexts and disengaging with a sound exit strategy is anything but simple. It requires tools, methods, systems and, above all, vision.

- Clarify that humanitarian aid in urban settings should be triggered by an identifiable crisis and should not be used to repair the errors or failures of inappropriate development strategies
- Request that exit strategies be developed very early in the process.

Humanitarian aid in urban settings: adapting SOP or exploring different paths?

The characteristics of urban settings should encourage aid agencies to be more creative, to think “out of the box” and revise the humanitarian paradigm:

- Technical solutions do differ between rural, camp and urban settings and a new range of options, appropriate to the specific context, should be developed.
- Participatory approaches should take into account the particular characteristics of urban social fabric. Strategies for coordination with local actors should be more proactive. Links with development and private actors should be established in a more strategic manner.

Urban coordination: clusters or area-based coordination under municipal authorities?

The cluster system, which has become the most common form of coordination, is confronted with huge challenges in urban settings: all the issues related to humanitarian aid and service delivery are intertwined locally. Area-based coordination has to be set up and strengthened at the most relevant level in the urban system: neighbourhood, municipal units, and inter-communal level. In urban contexts this kind of multi-sector geographical coordination could replace the “compartmentalized” cluster system.

- Ensure that area-based coordination involving local and municipal authorities is in place and properly supported
iv. Towards a long term vision of urban resilience

Preparing for the worst and developing the resilience of communities

Prevention should be strategically injected at all levels of urban planning, building standards and service delivery. The aim should be to develop and rebuild safer cities, in line with the “Resilient Cities” approach developed by ISRD. In all contexts, the primary response comes from the local population and institutions, so capacity building in terms of disaster management should be a priority. Experience in many disasters has shown that neighbours, friends and family members help each other, saving thousands of lives when people are trapped under light debris, are injured or are marooned by floodwaters in apartments or on rooftops. Yet, basic knowledge of first aid and individual case management is often extremely low. Major campaigns for first aid training and survival behaviour in the event of a disaster should be launched in order to improve the quality of this initial response. The development of regional capacities for civil protection and emergency response in urban contexts is therefore critical.

- Support the implementation of proper prevention measures (involving development actors and urban planners) and proper preparedness measures (in cooperation with the disaster management community) in line with ISDR’s “Resilient cities” strategy.

- Develop regional capacity and ensure that networks are established at regional levels (European Union, ASEAN, Central and Latin America, Africa and Middle East) and the global level (UNDAC, INSARAG).

v. Conclusion

The aid system finally seems to be adapting to a more fine-tuned approach to urban situations. In order to face the challenges of increasingly frequent crises in ‘chaotic’ urban settings, it is important to support the development of an urban approach.

Over the last two to three years, a great deal of energy and resources has been invested in improving understanding of urban contexts and developing appropriate methods, particularly since the 12/01 Haiti earthquake. This will soon bear fruit; it is hoped that this report will also contribute to this endeavour.

- The recent efforts to make humanitarian responses in urban settings more relevant should continue to be monitored. A stock-taking exercise should be organized in two to three years in order to examine and review achievements and, if necessary, re-focus the research agenda on questions which remain unanswered, or on new issues which have emerged.
Introduction

Rampant urbanization is without doubt one of the major challenges of the current century. Cities are increasingly the scene of conflicts and so-called "natural" disasters, of urban violence and economic and social tensions. The Haiti earthquake of January 2010, the crisis in Abidjan and the war in Libyan and Syrian cities have helped to draw attention to one of the greatest issues facing the contemporary world: its fragile cities and the conceptual and technical difficulties humanitarian actors face conducting operations in these very specific contexts.

Following the earthquake which affected Haiti on the 12th of January 2010, when the difficulties of humanitarian aid in urban settings became obvious (Grunewald & Binder, 2010), the European Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid, DG ECHO, called for an evaluation to be carried out of its operations in urban contexts. The following document, “Humanitarian aid in urban settings: overview and challenges” is a preliminary compendium of existing knowledge on humanitarian aid in cities. It is based on:

- A literature review of past experience, in order to establish a historical perspective of the issue and to take stock of the existing lessons learned on the subject;
- Initial discussions at the European Commission level, especially with DG ECHO staff, but also with other Commission services;
- Broad consultation of stakeholders, including UN agencies (UNDAC, UNHABITAT, OCHA, FAO, WFP, UNHCR), NGOs (MSF, Solidarités International, NRC, DRC, OXFAM, ACF, CONCERN, etc.), Donors (DFID, USAID/OFDA, French ‘Centre de Crise’), Red Cross and Red Crescent institutions (ICRC, IFRC) and specialized agencies (CDC Atlanta, UNDAC, FEMA, UNOSAT)
- Participation in a series of events (UNDAC review retreats, HOPEFOR Conference in Qatar and DANIDA/ODI/DRC sponsored seminar on urban displacements in November 2011, the conference on humanitarian aid in urban settings organized in Geneva by the University, the OCHA strategic policy conference in New York and the seminar on urban crises organized by MSF in December 2011), which helped to share findings and ideas with peers and subsequently to refine them.

The present report is divided into five chapters:

Chapter 1 “A bit of history” presents a historical perspective on the interactions between cities, crises and humanitarian aid.

Chapter 2 deals with the emerging issues linked to urban violence, urban poverty and displacement-triggered urbanization

Chapter 3 attempts to explore some of the specific challenges for humanitarian aid in a generic urban context.

Chapter 4 looks in more detail at the different humanitarian sectors and the challenges faced in urban settings.

Chapter 5 explores some of the key strategic challenges and outlines a number of recommendations.
1. A bit of history

Cities, wars and natural disasters have been inextricably linked since the earliest days of civilization (Braun, 1617). Risk factors have long been exacerbated by two the features of urbanity: increased population density and accumulated wealth (see Box No 1).

Box N°1 - The multiple dimensions of urban contexts

**“Demographic” dimensions:** Cities are places where there is a high concentration of people looking for protection and work. Cities are central to migration flows, whether internal (rural to urban movement) or external (the majority of international migration passes through networks of cities).

**“Historic” dimensions:** The creation and maintenance of the City has been subject to contradictory tensions between immutability and transformation. Archaeology, and notably the use of satellite imagery, has helped us to become aware of the accumulation of urbanity on individual sites, often over a long period, and the changes which may have affected them: displacement, fission, osmosis, etc. Maps of the history of cities are rich in lessons about the adaptability and the inertia of societies.

**“Environmental” dimensions:** heightened population density, pressure on resources, difficulties in terms of managing waste, etc. – cities are affected by a wide range of environmental factors and will be subject to major challenges in the future.

**“Economic” dimensions:** Cities lead to the acceleration of social differentiation, heightened specialisation in professional activities and an increased flow of products being extracted from the countryside. Urban-rural exchanges have been one of the most powerful motors of societal change.

**“Social” dimensions:** Poor migrants from rural communities and young people hoping for greater opportunities move to urban areas, only to find that in the shanty towns of the mega-cities or in the often insalubrious suburban tower-blocks they quickly lose touch with their village roots. The loss of social ties and the breakdown of family-based solidarity can be partly balanced by other social mechanisms such as the creation of neighbourhoods based on people’s origins or the sending of remittances back to home villages.

**“Societal” dimensions:** At the same time, new urban cultures are created, mixing elements related to social ties from villages and new dynamics related to the new centres of power: neighbourhood administration, political parties, gangs, etc. Cities are often characterised by their mixture of ethnic groups and clans, something which is a source of fragility in certain civil war contexts.

**Political dimensions:** “Paris is well worth a Mass”. This declaration by King Henri IV of France summarises the political issues related to controlling cities. National capitals, provincial capitals and regional metropolises are all the seats of political and administrative power, competition over which can lead to armed conflict.

The collective memory of humanity is full of images of ravaged cities. Centuries before the modern era, cities were so badly affected by natural phenomena that they disappeared or were dramatically changed¹. As the growing urbanisation of the planet and increasing numbers of mega-cities accentuate the concentration of the human population in and around cities, it is a matter of urgency to examine these "fragile cities" (Grunewald, 2005) that will soon accommodate over 80% of the world's population, in order to improve the ways in which humanitarian interventions operate in these situations.

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1.1. War and cities:

The anti-colonial wars and conflicts of the decolonisation and Cold War periods largely took place in rural areas. The so-called "ethnic" conflicts which have occurred since the early 1990s are also concentrated in rural areas, pushing urban vulnerability out of view. Whether in Asia (Vietnam, Cambodia and Afghanistan), Africa (Somalia, Angola, Great Lakes Region, etc.) or Central and Latin America (Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador), wars, disasters and humanitarian intervention have often taken place in natural settings: Guernica, Dresden, and Hiroshima were soon forgotten. Even when wars included sieges, as was the case in Cambodia in the 1970’s (the siege of Phnom Penh) or two decades later in Angola or Afghanistan (the sieges of Huambo and Kabul), these wars were still largely fought in rural areas. Refugees and internally displaced people also often settled in camps in rural contexts.

However, as the demographic, political and economic focus of conflicts shifted towards cities, urban wars made their comeback. In the media we saw images of Mogadishu, Sarajevo, Grozny and Kabul; cities in ruins, displaced people surviving in bomb-struck buildings, streets lined with debris and combat helicopters flying overhead. If a village in the bush is destroyed, it is likely to be either swallowed up by the surrounding environment or quickly rebuilt with local materials.

In contrast, a city scarred by war or natural disaster will remain visible for a long time, as the reconstruction process is complex and time-consuming. There is a continuum between cases like Stalingrad, London, Dresden and Nagasaki and more recent cases like Sarajevo, Vukovar and Grozny. It is interesting to review both the old texts on urban warfare and the growing body of literature emerging from more recent situations (Hopkins, 2010) and their humanitarian consequences (Vautravers, 2010).

Urban warfare is a subset of military doctrine, characterised by the use of snipers and artillery resulting in an extremely dangerous situation for civilians. The capacity to display force is a critical element of urban strategy, not only to win battles, but also to limit the numbers of casualties among one’s own military. Urban warfare can have major consequences for civilians: the fighting takes place in the middle of densely inhabited neighbourhoods rather than on a battlefield and combat tactics combine heavy shelling and street-to-street or even apartment-to-apartment search and kill operations. When armed clashes occur in cities, people’s daily lives are directly affected, forcing them to take refuge in cellars, with fear of going out to get water or food. The resilience of city dwellers is often extraordinary, but their suffering can also be extreme.
The key to survival in a city at war will often be a combination of individual coping mechanisms and the ability of institutions to reorganise some semblance of normal life. How can law and order be enforced, food rationing maintained, basic healthcare provided and corpses removed to ensure public health and safety? It is obvious that the level of development of the affected country and the level of existing services is a fundamental variable: Huambo and Kabul were not capable of organising themselves as well as London was when it was bombed by the Nazi regime. In cities devastated by bombs and street fighting, humanitarian workers often face major challenges, whether in terms of security, obtaining supplies to set up their programmes (food aid, etc.) or taking charge of services such as water systems or major urban hospitals.

Box N°2 Cities at war and wars in cities: a historical perspective

History is not linear. However, it is possible to distinguish several principle phases of the relationship between “cities at war and wars in cities”.

WARS BETWEEN CITIES: “Go tell the Spartans, passerby, that here, by Spartan law, we die”. From the Trojan War to the defender of the Thermopylae pass, the first centuries of the history of humanity in Europe is full of stories of battles between cities, the seats of power and wealth. Wars were waged between cities… at least in Europe and the Middle East. We have less information as to events on other continents during this period. However, the Angkorian cities of South-East Asia, the Inca and Mayan pyramids and the monuments on the banks of the Nile show signs that also point towards wars being fought between cities. Urban archaeology in Sub-Saharan Africa is still in its infancy and the traces of unknown cities that have been revealed by satellite imagery appear to show a new geography of the city in Africa. How the draining effect of slavery slowed down urbanisation dynamics linked to the main commercial flows across the continent would be a fascinating area of research at a time when Africa is beginning to be affected by urbanisation.

WARS FOR CITIES: The second paradigm of city-based wars is related to the fortified citadels that were built in the period from several centuries B.C. till the Middle Ages. Fortified towns often had the role of protecting the rural population who would take refuge there when enemy armies and pillaging gangs began to ravage the countryside. The accumulation of wealth in cities and the power that this represented became sufficient reason for attacking and pillaging them; to conquer a city was to seize power. The history of Europe is tragically full of such events: glory for the winners and humiliation, burnt cities and desolation for the losers.

WAR BY MEANS OF THE CITY: The third paradigm of the relationship between cities and conflicts, that of conducting wars in cities as a means of winning wars outright, also gradually established itself as a method of conducting hostilities. Caesar’s victory over Vercingetorix, following the famous siege of Alesia, is an example of this. Central to the German offensive and Soviet resistance during the Second World War was the issue of who would control Stalingrad. The same equation was present in the bombing of London by the Nazis, the destruction of Dresden by the Allies and the dropping of the two atomic bombs on the martyred cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

WAR AGAINST CITIES: The Maoist ideology and its various offshoots led to the appearance of the fourth paradigm, that of war against cities. For certain ideologues, cities were the source of all that was wrong with human societies, the place of perverse trade exchanges and consumerist ideologies, entities which were responsible for sullying an original rural purity. As such, cities were places which needed to be destroyed and represented socio-cultural forces which needed to be wiped out. Just how many Chinese and Cambodian city dwellers were forced to move to the countryside only to lose their lives there, is not known. In its struggle against the MPLA in Angola, Joseph Savimbi’s UNITA regularly used the rhetoric of the rural African population against the mixed-race elite of the cities.

WAR IN CITIES: A whole series of conflicts in recent years has led us to the fifth paradigm, that of the city as a place where confrontation takes place. The battlefields of certain contemporary civil wars have quite simply, and almost inadvertently, been urban contexts. The main phases of the Congo-Brazzaville conflict took place in the city of Brazzaville itself, bringing death and destruction to its neighbourhoods. But another phenomenon, that of population displacement, increasingly brings war to the heart of the city. Armed conflict leads to major exoduses, which create very complex refugee and IDP situations in or around urban centres. Whole areas are changed in the long term as a result, creating new relations between cities and the countryside.
1.2. Fragile cities: urbanisation and destructive natural forces

When a natural disaster takes place in a densely populated urban setting, the level of destruction and the death toll can be very high. This is particularly prevalent in fragile cities. From gathering places, cities can quickly turn into places of desolation. The earthquake on 1st November 1755 in Lisbon, which caused 60,000 deaths (3 tremors, followed by several tidal waves, hit the town), was the subject of correspondence between the French philosophers Voltaire and Rousseau. From this there emerged the idea that "it was not the earthquake that killed people in Lisbon, but the fact that they lived in Lisbon", prefiguring the philosophy of prevention. The earthquake in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1812, which killed 10,000 people, led to the launch of the first major state-run humanitarian operation: food and blankets were collected and ships were chartered. It was also responsible for the first declaration on disaster prevention, as Simon Bolivar proclaimed: "If nature resists us, we shall fight and make her obey us". More recently, the vulnerability of cities remains clear: earthquakes have hit Agadir (1960, 60,000 dead), Managua (1968), Mexico City (1985, 6,000 people dead and 50,000 buildings destroyed), El Ashram (1981) or Bam in Iran (2003, 25,000 dead), Gujarati towns in India (2001), and the earthquake that hit Haiti in January 2010. Flooding caused by hurricane Mitch in Tegucigalpa (Honduras, 1998), Manila (2009) and Pakistan (2011), and the tsunami that devastated the cities of Banda Aceh (Indonesia), Trincomalee (Sri Lanka) and Japanese cities around the Fukushima nuclear plant in 2011 show us just how vulnerable cities are. The United States, and particularly California, which is located on the San Andreas Fault, lives in fear of earthquakes and the arrival of “the Big One”. On 18th April 1906, an earthquake measuring 8.2 on the Richter scale shook San Francisco, causing a huge fire in the city.

Disasters of this kind often hit the poorest people hardest, as demonstrated by hurricane Katrina in Louisiana. These communities live in areas at risk of flooding or on the steep slopes of cities, where landslides are common. What is more, the poorest communities do not have the necessary resources that would enable them to flee should a disaster strike. The term "socio-natural disaster" has been coined to describe this kind of situation: natural phenomena like cyclones and earthquakes take place very regularly, but it is their interaction with human societies that determines whether or not they will cause a disaster. The effects of a tremor are not the same for a Japanese city (which invests considerable resources in earthquake-proofing), as they are for a Turkish town (where construction companies have systematically used poor quality materials).

The multiplication of extreme weather events in the last decade and their impacts on urban settings is very worrying. Hurricanes and typhoons regularly cause devastation in urbanised areas in Asian and Caribbean regions, such as Manila (Philippines) and Gonaives (Haiti) and even caused great damage in New Orleans (USA). Floods can also be very damaging in urban contexts as demonstrated by the 2010 floods in Pakistan and the 2011 floods in South East Asia, when metropolitan Bangkok and surrounding cities were under water for months, causing economic losses in excess of billions of dollars as well as the loss of human life. Though important, prevention alone is not a panacea: for example, in 1995, an earthquake measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale hit Kobe in Japan. Despite earthquake protection measures, more than 6,000 people were killed and tens of thousands were injured. In many of these situations, major relief operations were needed due to the scale of damage; people had to be rescued quickly from under the rubble and provided with the necessary assistance. In most situations of this kind, local aid is the key to survival. Lives are saved by neighbours, thanks to the organisational capacity of the district chief or mayor, and with the mobilisation of the fire service and relief workers from the local branch of the Red Cross. Within a few hours or days, the affected state is usually in a position to mobilise its armed forces, civil
defence agencies, etc. It is only then that the international urban search and rescue (USAR) contingency arrives with their sniffer dogs and emergency field hospitals.

**Box N°3: Risk factors and urbanization (Grunewald & al, 2010)**

- **Urbanization in coastal zones and deltas** (heliotropism and coastalisation) brings greater risks. Whether in Africa, Europe, within island systems or in the Americas, higher urban density near the sea increases the impact of rapid onset disasters (cyclones, tsunami) and sensitivity to rising sea levels.

- **The location of major conurbations in areas with a high tectonic risk**, in both developed and developing countries is a source of great danger. This danger can only be reduced by establishing (and maintaining) earthquake resistant standards, in both urban planning and construction.

- **The location of densely populated human settlements in areas with difficult topography**. More and more slums and informal settlements are being built on the steep slopes around richer and more protected city centres. Landslides frequently occur in these contexts often with tragic consequences. In many situations, vulnerabilities to hazards is very high due to social inequality and the absence of urban planning.

### 1.3. Displacement and urbanization

The oldest refugee camps in contemporary history, the camps in Kassala in Eastern Sudan and in the Gaza Strip in Palestine, began as camps of tents. Gradually, tents were replaced by clay brick huts, and then concrete arrived. The tents of 1947 on the Eritrean border, and those of 1948 on the coast of the Red Sea gave way to veritable towns. And yet, refugee and IDP camps are not supposed to be long term solutions. On the contrary, governments in the countries where these are set up systematically underline their transitory nature and do all they can to prevent them from becoming established in the long term. However, as the duration of displacement is itself linked to the time needed to manage crisis and post-crisis situations, long-term displacement involving a large external population (refugees or IDPs) end up contributing to urbanisation. (Galleg, 2009).

This question appeared during the 80s when Cambodian and Afghan refugee camps were set up on the Thailand and Pakistan borders. These camps became quasi-towns, with their own exchange economy, their services and sometimes even their own police forces. Similarly, in Khartoum (Sudan), the tens of thousands of people displaced by the conflict in the South eventually created veritable neighbourhoods in the city which the authorities have constantly tried to move and control. Involving people who are often from rural areas, these contexts bring new ways of living, new social relations, new economic mechanisms and urban modes of consumption. The longer people stay in urbanized camps or camps in cities, the more difficult it is to envisage their return to rural areas. But the presence of uprooted people seeking refuge in cities without creating camps is another facet of the interaction between “population displacement” and urban dynamics.

In recent decades, there have been a number of different types of situation involving displaced people in cities:

- The creation of camps on unused land and their long term establishment: camps in Kassala in Eastern Sudan, in the Gaza Strip in Palestine and in Dadaab in Kenya;

- The setting up of camps near existing cities, which, over time, become integrated into these either by becoming a suburb or like towns in their own right. Interconnection with a nearby city eventually leads to the urbanization of the camp. This phenomenon has been studied in detail in Peshawar (Toix, 2004). In terms of absorption, Van Duijn and Seaman perceive camps to be an outgrowth of the nearby city (Agier 2008, 2010).
- The setting up of a large number of small and medium-sized camps in the heart of the city. Either the inhabitants are themselves city-dwellers who have been forced to move within the city itself due to a conflict (Mogadishu study) or a natural disaster (Port-au-Prince case study), or they come from rural areas having fled due to the threat of famine.

- The presence of IDPs or refugees in cities without the existence of camps. This is the case in numerous contexts in which being in camps is potentially dangerous for individuals who prefer to find individual solutions and often in secrecy.

*Canapé Vert, Port au Prince, February 2010*

Economic, social, and even political dynamics are taking special forms in urban environments. They are analyzed in chapter 5.

### 1.4. Humanitarian aid in cities: a fast-evolving sector

For a long time, the main operational actors in urban disasters were fire brigades, civil protection teams and specialised Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams. USARs have become increasingly well trained and equipped. Their skills include fire-fighting techniques (including pure fire-fighting, rescue and first aid), engineering skills (in order to be able to enter damaged buildings and organise searches in areas full of unstable debris), detection (dog units, infra-red and micro camera searching devices, etc.) and interaction with deeply affected and worried populations. They have saved many people and have retrieved many bodies, helping the mourning process. In developed countries, specialized teams such as FEMA (USA), MSB (Sweden), *Proteccion civile* (Italy), *Pompiers de Paris* (France) or the Japanese civil defence force represent the first line of intervention in urban disasters. Structures of this kind also exist in many developing countries, but are far less well trained and equipped. Several mechanisms have emerged to provide them with support, assist in rescue operations and coordinate the international response. The UNDAC system is an example of this (Larson & al, 2010). It is based on solid methodology (INSARAG Guidelines), a robust information management and early coordination system (the Virtual-OSOCC) and a capacity to deploy standby staff from OCHA and UNDAC member countries rapidly. It is often able to provide assessment and coordination mechanisms to support national disaster management agencies (NDMA) and international deployed teams. The Coordination of the European civil protection institutions has also emerged as a key tool. The Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) provides up-to-date information on ongoing crises and deployments, while the EU-CP mechanism supports and coordinates the deployment of European Civil protection institutions in the field.

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2 INSARAG guidelines, which provide guidance in establishing USAR response capacity as well as checklists for the minimum requirements of USAR teams deployed in international response operations.
After some initial, challenging operations in Bam (Iran) and tsunami-affected areas in South Asia, the EU CO Mechanism was transferred from the European Commission’s Environment Directorate-General to DG ECHO so that it was more closely linked to crisis response and humanitarian action. Military-Civil Defence Assets (MCDA) are more and more frequently deployed to support relief efforts in large-scale disasters, when civilian capacity is overwhelmed (or expected to be) by the magnitude of the catastrophe. Significant efforts have been made in the last decade to ensure that they are deployed in an orderly manner and limit the risk of negative impacts due to real or perceived encroachment of humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law: MCDA and military deployment as part of a disaster response is strictly regulated by the Oslo and MCDA guidelines developed by donors, military bodies, NGOs and the ICRC under OCHA and the Consultative group for the use of MCDA. These guidelines clearly stipulate the conditions for the deployment of MCDA, including the concept of “last resort” and the required civilian nature of the command and control mechanism that manages the deployment. In urban settings, which can be very sensitive and are capable of becoming extremely tense in a very short space of time, it is even more important to respect these rules. The European commitment to these guidelines is established in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, which guides the actions of DG ECHO.

Over time, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, NGOs and UN agencies have developed their capacity to conduct operations in large-scale sudden onset disasters (ALNAP/Provention 2008). The development of Emergency Response Units (for health, water and sanitation, shelter, etc.) coordinated by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies and supported by major Red Cross societies (especially the European ones, with the support of DG ECHO) represents a significant step towards improved readiness and reactivity, which are two essential characteristics in the response to urban disasters.

Surviving in the ruins of Port au Prince (February, 2010)

The relatively recent engagement of aid agencies in cash-interventions is one of the most promising areas for humanitarian aid in urban settings. The work of the Cash Learning Partnership (CALP), supported by donors such as DG ECHO, should also be commended. The most significant progress made, however, has been primarily in connection with the Haiti earthquake of January 2010. The humanitarian aid sector has learned that the nature and magnitude of disasters are affected in a particular way by the nature of urban contexts and therefore that the urban factor should influence aid strategy. The creation of the IASC Taskforce on humanitarian aid in urban contexts (IASC, 2011), the growing number of conferences and articles (Grunewald, 2005, Setchell, 2009) as well as the development of guidelines and technical notes on the subject are the result of these changes.

3 Together with VISA and IFRC
4 Conference “La ville face aux crises”, 26th April 2011, Paris, Groupe URD
Conference « IDPs in urban contexts », 1st December 2011; Copenhagen, DANIDA
5 ACF Guidelines on vulnerability assessments in urban contexts, NRC Guidelines on shelter in urban contexts.
2. Humanitarian challenges in urban contexts

2.1. The characteristics of humanitarian aid in urban settings

All crises have numerous characteristics:
- The kinetics of the crisis: rapid onset or slow onset, predictable or not, short lived or durable;
- The frequency of the crisis: some crises are frequent, others rare. This frequency often leaves its mark on the collective memory of the town’s inhabitants.
- The geography of the crisis: localised or global, affecting the entire city or only one part of it, affecting one country or more than one country,
- The type of city: capital city or rural town, residential, commercial or industrial, high or low density, suburban or inner city, etc.

Urban settings also have their own specific characteristics which affect the crisis:
- Demographic weight (the “demography factor”);
- Urban mobility
- An “offer and demand” context offering job, economic and cultural opportunities in many sectors

2.2. The “demography factor”

One of the most striking characteristics of urban settings is the size of the population concerned: the “demographic factor”. In a city, everything is “big”. Population figures often run into six figures. The impact of disasters or wars can be huge, overwhelming local capacities. The scale of all urban variables (demography, density, etc.) combined with politics can make cities very explosive. The evacuation of part or all of a city as part of a preventative measure can have such important political, logistical and security implications that national and town authorities often hesitate before engaging in such actions. Contamination scenarios are often frightening in view of the risk of rapid spread of epidemics in urban contexts. The quantities required to respond to urban needs are enormous while the logistical constraints are often very difficult. The cost of reconstruction is far beyond the capacity of most agencies and often greater than the national budget of the affected country.

This “demography factor” can be an asset when it comes to communicating with the population for hygiene messages, issuing warnings and reassuring people. However, it can also have a negative effect when, for example, panic spreads.

*Camps in Carrefour, Port au Prince, 2010*

6 ALNAP/Protection Guidelines, UNHABITAT guidelines
It is relatively easy for individuals to disappear into this urban mass and certain groups who want to go unnoticed can remain undetected: displaced people in Colombia who fear retaliation or Afghan insurgents who enter cities to conduct guerrilla warfare. Vulnerable groups who cannot voice their needs can very easily be left out, such as those affected by disability (physical and psychosocial) and those excluded for economic, ethnic and religious reasons.

2.3. **Mobility and access to basic services after the disaster**

2.3.1. **Mobility**

Under normal circumstances, urban populations are relatively mobile, especially the urban poor whose capacity to move in response to job opportunities is critical to their survival. Crises often drastically affect mobility. In analysing the way mobility is affected, it is important to look at different geographical levels as the reality of mobility very much depends on the size of the area we are considering:

- within a neighbourhood to fetch water;
- a daily commute from one part of the city to another to find work;
- city to countryside mobility to look for food;
- permanent return to the area of origin or where the family has its rural roots; etc.

The causes of these different forms of mobility need to be understood: fear, economic reasons, aid-triggered pull and push factors, etc. And their consequences also need to be identified: presence in multiple distribution sites to receive more aid, absence at the time of registration which excludes people from the possibility of receiving assistance, malnutrition problems induced by the extreme mobility of female heads of households who are both breadwinners and carers, as well as women becoming vulnerable to gender-based violence when their husbands are absent. The main categories of “mobile people” of concern to aid actors are refugees, who have crossed an international boundary, and internally displaced people (IDPs)\(^7\), who remain within the limits of their own country. Both categories are increasingly moving to cities and there is an increased tendency for them to remain mobile.

2.3.2. **Limited mobility under siege:**

When it is dangerous to leave one’s house or shelter (especially during phases of active military combat), access to basic resources, such as water, wood and food is immediately limited. This can have very serious repercussions on the resilience of the population and their health and well-being. During the phases of active military engagement in contexts like Kabul, Sarajevo, Grozny, Mogadishu, Abidjan and Misrata, the population tried to reduce these risks to a minimum. Whenever risk reduction did not seem possible, the population immediately reacted by trying to move to less at-risk areas.

\(^7\) The IDP category emerged at the end of the 1980s with the changes in international politics (end of the Cold war) and the increased capacity of aid agencies to engage more in the affected countries in order, among other things, to limit the number of refugees. Internally displaced people are not entitled to asylum and are less of a burden internationally, but it is a highly political category; they are the products of internal conflict, tensions, natural disasters or ecological catastrophes, all of which have something to do with politics. UN Special Representatives for IDPs, Francis Deng and Walter Kilin and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee have promoted better inclusion of IDP characteristics in operational programming, including for protection (Deng, 2006, Kilin, 2008, IASC, 2004).
This pattern has been repeated in many contexts where there has been internal displacement within besieged cities or from cities to their peri-urban or rural neighbourhoods. Every opportunity to fetch water, food or firewood between military operations and periods of heavy fighting is optimised in order to establish stocks which will hopefully last until the next peaceful period. Aid agencies need to be very agile, flexible and opportunistic to be able to provide people with assistance in this kind of situation. Current operational methods, which require lengthy planning and sophisticated accountability, are ill-adapted to these contexts.

### 2.3.3. Trapped in urban contexts affected by natural disasters

When a natural disaster takes place, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for communities trapped by rising water levels or blocked by a mass of fallen earth to move to gain access to basic services or even just to get by and survive. The demolition of buildings grouped together in cities, the blocking of narrow roads (Groupe URD, 2010) and the isolation of certain urban neighbourhoods all create barriers which block people from being able to meet their basic survival needs. Though it is still possible for people to move in certain cases, it is more and more common for people to find themselves blocked on upper floors of their houses by floods (as can often be seen in the media). In these contexts, only large teams with helicopters (army or civil protection forces) or with boats can save the inhabitants of these cities. The destruction or at least the paralysis of basic socio-technical infrastructure (water pumping, electric power stations, hospitals, etc.) often severely limits access to minimal services. These chaotic situations mean that aid agencies need to have the kind of sophisticated technical equipment, which for a long time, only civil protection teams had, but which is beginning to be put in place within institutions like the Red Cross. It is also important to develop alert systems, evacuation plans and regular evacuation exercises.

![Evacuation centre in a market in Cagayan de Oro, Philippines (2012)](image)

### 2.4. Identification, quantification and targeting

Quantitative data are often seen to be essential. However, aid agencies need to show caution when working in urban contexts such as Sarajevo, Huambo, Mogadishu and Kabul. The number of variables is very high and it is very difficult to obtain reliable information. In general, the size of an urban population is known with a margin of error of between 10 and 30%, but very often there has never been an urban census, or those that exist are out of date. Urban actors, aid agencies or even local authorities often do not know how many inhabitants were living in the city before the war or the disaster, how many have died or how many have left.

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8 The recent debate on the number of slum inhabitants in Nairobi (Kenya) where there is far greater access to the field to generate data than in Mogadishu, shows how complex and sensitive these issues are.
The size of movements into and out of, as well as within affected cities is not known with any great accuracy. Estimated or announced figures for the number of people affected by conflicts or catastrophes should be treated with caution due to the sensitivity of the issues involved. Apart from the material difficulties of gathering data immediately after a crisis, figures can be exaggerated or minimised for different reasons by those who provide them. These attempts to influence or manipulate figures in cities can be the consequence of a particular political or historical situation, such as in Dresden during WWII, an uncontrolled demographic situation or administrative negligence which existed before the crisis. Therefore, data should always to be used with a clear indication of methodological limits. However, methods are currently emerging that could help to significantly reduce the margin of error or, at least, make “working assumptions” more accurate: real time information collection and treatment, geo-referencing information and crowd sourcing. For example, analysis of mobile phone calls made in Port-au-Prince has shown that the number of people who moved to the provinces was much lower than the figure announced immediately after the earthquake.

Over and above the total number of affected people, the question is to identify who should be targeted as the ultimate recipients of humanitarian assistance. In urban contexts, the best information aid agencies can often obtain is no more than an extrapolation of limited observations and working hypotheses.

The difficulties involved in identifying vulnerable people in urban areas during crises are linked to the heterogeneous nature of city populations. Identifying vulnerable people within the “invisible” or underground sections of an urban population is difficult. For certain asylum seekers or IDPs, anonymity is vital (De Geoffroy, 2008). Trying to establish how many people are in this kind of situation is a veritable challenge, which raises real protection issues.

Box 4: Data collection challenges in war-torn Mogadishu

Even the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU), one of the most sophisticated tools used to follow any given context, fails to properly acknowledge this limitation. The size of the total population of Mogadishu is unknown. Death rates and malnutrition rates in the city are at best no more than rough extrapolations of limited knowledge and patchy information. One of the main difficulties is to ensure proper dis-aggregation of the data by population strata. The last study on malnutrition rates in Mogadishu’s IDP population did not discriminate between old and new IDPs. The aggregation of the two populations in one single rate is methodologically flawed as the two categories are not discrete. Yet, despite some methodological hiccups, FSNAU is the best assessment tool currently available. In the absence of proper access to the field it does still produce useful assumptions for planning programmes.

Various tools have been used to try to map and quantify the population such as the use of remote sensing data, including very precise satellite images. For example, in order to attempt to quantify population figures, this has been used to attempt to count the huts in the Afgoye corridor south of Mogadishu city (with some data then checked on the ground). However, the results have unfortunately been largely disappointing, due to the uncertainty of family size and the frequent absence of some families.

Targeting

Targeting is a difficult exercise in urban contexts and a simple error can rapidly become a security issue. Urban heterogeneity and scale need to be taken into account, as does the fact that the concepts of “community”, “households”, “poor” and “vulnerable” can mean different things in different contexts. Deciding what targeting approach (self-targeting, community-based, geographical, etc.) to use usually depends on the proportion of the population that needs assistance, the type of programme being considered, trade-offs between targeting cost and accuracy, and the feasibility of targeting options (USAID 2008). Several targeting approaches can be applied simultaneously depending on the programmes envisaged.
- **Self-targeting** is regularly applied, especially for food- and cash-for-work. Given the low wages paid, it is assumed that only those who are really in need will decide to take part in the programmes. This strategy was adopted in Mogadishu and Port-au-Prince.

- **Geographical targeting** (or area and site targeting) appears to be more frequently used than time consuming and sensitive socio-economic targeting. In geographical targeting, aid agencies choose an IDP site or an entire neighbourhood and then provide assistance to its entire population (blanket targeting for a specific area).

- **Community targeting** is the most common approach in rural areas but has proven difficult to apply in urban settings. There is a scientific and operational debate about what constitutes an “urban community”. The scale chosen (city, administrative units within a city) or the criteria used to define an urban community (physical boundaries, historical, ethnic or socio-economic features, etc.) are critical. Opinions differ amongst stakeholders about the appropriateness of using community-based targeting in urban settings as it requires accountable community structures (Groupe URD, 2011).

### 2.5. Limited access to the field for aid agencies:

**In urban conflict contexts**

In many war-torn urban contexts, access remains the most difficult issue. This was the case in Grozny during the first and second Chechen wars, and most recently in Misrata and other Libyan cities during the conflict in 2011. In Mogadishu, and during the first decade of the crisis in Somalia (1991-2000), access was relatively easy, even if at a cost⁹. Up until 2001, access to populations in urban contexts had always been difficult and dangerous, but nevertheless feasible. Agencies had managed to work in contexts like Sarajevo, Grozny, Huambo, Mogadishu, Kisangani, Brazzaville and Kabul while they were under siege despite the inherent dangers involved. However, the launching of the “War on Terror” (WoT) in 2001 drastically changed this situation. Western aid actors were seen as part of the WoT and therefore perceived as potential enemies. Working in certain cities of Afghanistan, such as Kandahar, in Mogadishu or in the northern towns of Yemen now involves new security challenges.

![Security militia in Mogadishu, 2006](image)

However, negotiating and implementing the distribution of items which are indispensable for survival was still done until about 2005 by a limited number of actors who had the capacity and the credibility to do so (Eglelan, Harmer & Stoddard, 2001). The ICRC and MSF are among the very few agencies that have managed to maintain a presence in these difficult urban contexts, together with a handful of very dedicated ‘Dunantist’ NGOs.

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⁹ In 1991-92, aid agencies accepted to work under the protection of armed militias from clans or wealthy politicians and found that they could not extricate themselves from this system. It became the modus operandi of humanitarian action in Somalia and a highly rewarding business for those in power locally.
With the radicalisation of contexts, remote management has become the main operating method. Limited access to the field has been exacerbated by the conflicts related to the War on Terror and the confrontations between Western powers and movements driven by irredentism and fundamentalism. The conflicts between the Taliban and NATO’s ISAF and between Al-Shabaab and the troops of the AMISOM are making Afghan and Somali cities more dangerous than ever.

Not only is there a risk that aid agencies will inadvertently be caught up in conflict, they are also targeted directly: bomb attacks against guest houses and hotels, hostage taking, etc. are now relatively frequent. Most aid actors visiting Mogadishu limit their movements to the airport and the AMISOM base, which is only accessible with an escort. Only a few venture further into the city. In Afghanistan, the international aid community in Kabul and Kandahar is increasingly ‘bunkerised’ – unable to move outside the relative safety of their offices or guesthouses. Remote control mechanisms are activated as the “only solution”. In these situations, the only information available comes from local staff, who are contacted via the Internet and mobile phones or invited to come to meetings in a nearby peaceful country. This means that needs assessments, targeting, programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation are carried out with either indirect control mechanisms (video, photos, triangulation with different sources) or delegated to local actors. In cities, whether in conflict and disaster situations or not, access to certain neighbourhoods is difficult or impossible due to the way they are organised: densely populated areas, interconnected buildings and narrow streets. Aid actors find themselves confronted with difficulties in terms of physical access. And these difficulties can be made all the worse by sudden or recurring crises, for example, if groups with specific interests take over a neighbourhood to carry out illegal controls of areas that are easy to block. Before being able to distribute goods to the population of certain neighbourhoods it is necessary first to negotiate with those in control, whether they are reliable or not.

2.6. City lights, electricity and telecoms

2.6.1. The energy issue in cities: lighting, cooking and heating

The expression “city lights” illustrates the city’s magnetic pull on many rural or poor populations. Since the beginning of the 20th century, city life has depended to a great extent on electricity. Power plants were built to supply electricity to the towns. National companies developed engine-generated capacity and explored options for hydro-power. While power production became a state strategy in many developed countries, in many developing countries production capacity was overwhelmed by demand and power cuts became regular. In addition, with electric networks rapidly decaying, it became necessary to build more generators to supply energy for houses, hotels and shops and energy for water pumping. Indeed, the complex pumping systems with submersible pumps which are used in water field productions and for household wells are totally dependent on electricity.

In many war-torn cities, power plants would have ceased to function without support from aid agencies. The ICRC and MSF made sure that hospitals kept a certain level of autonomy in terms of electricity supply so that they were able to remain operational if the electricity network totally collapsed. The private sector has also invested in energy provision and managed to maintain an electricity supply in parts of cities despite ongoing wars: keeping energy supply functioning at household level was seen as critical for the survival of the city. IDPs, however, rarely benefit from these services as they are relatively costly.
In normal situations, cooking, heating in winter and lighting for work and protection are essential costs which use a significant part of household budgets. In disaster situations they are just as critical, if not more so (especially heating in cold climates), but the resources needed are often lacking. How to cook food in overcrowded camps, slums or public buildings hosting IDP or urban populations during a conflict or after a disaster?

IDP Camp in Mogadishu, 2011

How is the risk of fire to be limited in IDP camps, an issue that can sometimes become an excuse for eviction by local authorities? How should areas be heated to ensure that life remains bearable during cold nights in towns which have been bombed or after an earthquake? How is it possible to ensure that basic lighting is available in shelters and in the surrounding neighbourhoods to prevent attacks, robbery and gender-based violence?

Some experimental approaches have been attempted, including the provision of charcoal during winter in besieged Kabul in the early 90s and the use of bio-digesters to provide electricity in Cité Soleil, Port-au-Prince (by a Brazilian NGO, Viva Rio) and in Kigali prison by the ICRC. Solar lighting has also emerged as a possible solution for the provision of electricity and lighting in refugee and IDP camps in Port-au-Prince, Léogane, and in refugee camps in Eastern Chad.

2.6.2. Information and Communication Technology: a new lifeline for cities

Another characteristic of city life is the desire to access information rapidly. Telecommunications, radios, local press and access to TV networks are important features in the life of urban populations. Mobile phones have become a part of everyday life, both for economic exchanges linked to money transfer systems and for keeping in touch with relatives in Diaspora networks (Somalia, Haiti, etc.). Small businesses selling mobile phone credit, recharging cellular phone batteries or providing access to the Internet are also increasingly available in many cities. These are key assets for the aid system as they allow local actors to report and communicate as well as to set up crowd sourcing mechanisms to help triangulate information, etc.

Selling air time in Port au Prince

The potential of these relatively sophisticated telecommunication tools for alert systems, for communication with disaster-affected populations (both communication “in” with information about aid programmes, and communication “out” with information on needs and difficulties) and for the dissemination of health and hygiene messages remains largely untapped.
The most recent experiments with social network initiatives like Ushahidi, Frontline SMS and Openstreet Maps, which link individuals with web-based geographic information systems (GIS), are very promising. The growing involvement of the free software and open source community through the Crisis Camps network will no doubt create new opportunities for crowd-sourcing, information flow and inter-active communication with affected urban populations.

Box 5: Managing information in urban contexts affected by war and disasters
A few key issues are common to managing humanitarian information in all situations, but these take a specific dimension in urban settings due to the density of the population, the speed with which rumours spread and the volatility of the security situation:
- Quality of information: above all, information needs to be triangulated before it is shared. This is not easy and requires a reliable network that can verify the information at or close to the source. New systems for crowd sourcing (such as Ushahidi) and the mobilisation of expertise such as Crisis Camps (open source development community which creates information-gathering technology) are opening up new opportunities.
- Sharing information: urban contexts are also places where old and new media mix: local newsletters, sometimes just posted on walls, social networks (Facebook, Twitter)
- Managing the expectations created by information: when people understand their options it creates expectations and this has to be understood from the start.
- Protecting information sources against possible retaliation: gathering and sharing information can be very dangerous in urban contexts where it is relatively easy to identify the sources used if it is not presented carefully enough to protect them.
- Linking the information flow to aid decision makers: information about the situation and programmes being run is key to project design, monitoring and evaluation and accountability. Initiatives like the ‘Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities’ (CDAC) project in Haiti have been extremely useful in ensuring the flow of information to and from affected populations (Grünewald and Binder, 2010).

2.7. The environment in disaster-affected or war-torn cities
There are significant environmental challenges in urban contexts, which are difficult to tackle even under normal circumstances. In urban settings, the population frequently has to live in unsafe situations caused by the pollution of the soil, rivers and the air, due to a lack of controls, inappropriate policies and a lack of adequate means to control pollution. Municipal authorities are often very poor at addressing these challenges. A crisis multiplies the effects, increases the scale of the problems and creates a full range of new environmental hazards.

Situations that under normal circumstances are tolerable can become very dangerous. Crises often reveal the key factors of an existing intolerable environmental situation.

Garbage in the streets of Port au Prince

10 Like the “Samizdat” during the Tsarist era in Russia.
In earthquake or flood-affected cities, humanitarian actors are not equipped to deal with the scale of the pollution caused by rubble or sediment accumulation. There is also very little humanitarian actors can do when there is a technological disaster or chemical pollution. Besides small-scale activities at the community level, the responsibility of the humanitarian community is to mobilise the proper institutions, expertise and means which can address these extremely complex problems.

**Box 6: Rubble after the earthquake**

Managing debris from collapsed houses and buildings after a massive earthquake is one of the most complex post-disaster logistical challenges. Indeed, debris of this kind often includes highly polluting materials like paint and plastic. The quantity alone represents a significant physical pollution problem and it is a long-term ordeal in terms of storage and use. The best solution, when feasible, is to use it locally for land stabilisation and levelling. If it has to be transported and stored or used in other locations, proper care should be paid to the type of location and type of use that will be made of it in order to limit the risks involved.

In post-disaster contexts or in situations where active military operations prevent or limit movement, household waste also creates many difficulties. Different situations have been observed, with different problems and solutions:

**Box 7: Managing garbage collection**

**Abidjan:** After a few months of near total paralysis, the streets of Abidjan were covered in garbage and the smell was getting worse by the day. However, when the situation permits, problems of this kind can be fixed relatively rapidly, provided there is the political will to do so. A few days after the removal of president Gbagbo from power, a few bilateral donors provided significant amounts of money to local private companies who, in a very short time, managed to clean up the city. NGOs’ small-scale cash or food-for-work programs were overtaken by the speed of the private operators which used bulldozers, trucks and graders to clean the city.

**Port-au-Prince:** In Port-au-Prince, the environmental situation was already appalling before the earthquake with most of the waste collected ending up in canals or the sea. The municipal system did not function properly and the waste disposal company was only operational in a few richer parts of the city (Petion Ville, Turgeot, etc.). The physical pollution of streets and canals made the risk of floods worse as water was not evacuated through the drainage system. This disastrous urban environment also rapidly increased public health hazards.

### 2.8. Humanitarian coordination and local authorities:

When cities have faced both chaotic urbanisation and a disastrous humanitarian situation, such as in Mogadishu or Misrata, for example, the aid community has had great difficulty in approaching coordination in a way which is appropriate for these specific contexts rather than adopting classic humanitarian coordination. This approach would indeed partly challenge the UN dominated cluster system. It would require strategic inter-sector coordination linked to the city’s administrative units rather than the sector-based coordination of the cluster approach. Above all, an attempt to engage with the urban local authorities is necessary. The difficulty is establishing which local authorities are the right interlocutors for a particular implementing area or type of project. Municipal authorities are key players but have by and large been left aside in most cases by international agencies: Kabul, Mogadishu, Port-au-Prince, etc.

This has been caused by fear of politicisation, the risk of corruption and, more broadly, ignorance about their roles. It is clear that deciding where to carry out aid programmes and even supporting local urban strategy is much easier in secure areas (where the military and security situation is good) and where aid agencies have interlocutors at the right decision-making levels. While some of the NGOs working in Mogadishu have tried to establish a MoU with the Ministry of Health, they have disregarded the municipal level and instead have...
established links at the District Commissioner level, which is able to control, block or facilitate programmes rather than being responsible for urban planning. There are some valid reasons why municipal authorities have generally been overlooked by international aid agencies. Implementing humanitarian programs in urban areas requires a minimum of cooperation, or at least communication with the different actors involved in the same area. Some of the lessons learnt from exercises carried out by UN-Habitat in several peaceful cities will be very useful in devastated urban contexts. However, the gap between humanitarian understanding and urban analysis leads to many mistakes and difficulties. There are interesting examples and experiences that could be further explored: Bogotá municipal authority, for instance, has taken some steps to incorporate special programmes for IDP families leaving the three-month emergency support network. One such project includes a dedicated social protection programme for IDP families, called “Bogotá, a positive city for a better life” within the city’s development plan. Nevertheless, such projects remain mostly ad hoc and their impact has not been evaluated (ALBUJA & CEBALLOS Marcela, 2010).

2.9. Rapidly changing conditions

Cities can go through extremely rapid change; they are not shaped by seasonal rhythms to the same extent as the countryside. The reaction to an event can be very fast and thus challenging for aid operations and their planning frameworks. This was observed in “post-Al-Shabaab” Mogadishu and “post-Gbagbo” Abidjan. Urban systems are so dynamic that after a crisis, they react very rapidly to improvement.

The garbage in the streets of Abidjan

The rapid changes which were observed in Abidjan a few days after Gbagbo’s fall were also similarly apparent in the streets of Mogadishu:
- rapid cleaning of garbage, with the critical question of where it should be disposed of,
- quick resumption of basic private services and economic activities,
- attempts to clean the debris of war, with the difficulties linked to the complexity of battle area clearance (BAC), UXO management and booby trap disposal.

But this sense of “returning to normal” can be obliterated in a matter of minutes by a bomb attack. What access to the affected population are aid agencies willing to accept in this kind of context and what kind of programmes can they implement?
2.10. Legal frameworks for humanitarian aid in urban settings

The issue of the legal framework under which national and international actors can operate in disaster contexts is very important in urban settings as unresolved legal issues can delay or render more difficult relief operations, the deployment of teams and the procedures for obtaining customs clearance.

**War and conflict:** In situations that can be qualified as conflicts (international armed conflict or internal armed conflict), the core texts of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) represented by the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols from 1977 offer a widely accepted legal framework, backed up by several UNGA resolutions. In urban settings, the risks of disproportional military operations, non-discriminatory attacks (which therefore also cause civilian casualties), etc., are very high. Military and civilian authorities in charge of military operations in urban contexts should be better sensitized to these risks and to the way they are dealt with by IHL. Tensions and other situations of violence (see the chapter on urban violence) form a group of situations where the legal framework is less clear and where institutions such as the ICRC have to work under their Right of Initiative and can offer their services in line with Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions.

**Refugees in urban settings:** The legal framework comprises the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Rights of Refugees as well as more recent texts such as the 1964 African Convention on refugees. These legal documents are the foundations for providing assistance and protection to refugees, and should also apply in urban situations. They are interpreted in many ways, however. The case of the Palestinian refugees is even more complicated as they are not covered by the 1951 Refugee Convention but by the Legal framework specifically created for UNWRA. This leaves the door open for many different interpretations: the Palestinian refugees in Jordan have different rights and access to services than those in Lebanon.

**Laws, natural disaster and urban contexts:** The debate on the legal framework of international and national interventions in natural disasters is relatively new. The absence of a “natural disaster” equivalent to conflict-related IHL has been discussed at length over the last few years and more recently as part of the debate preparing for the November 2011 International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The experience of the Tampere Convention (telecom) and the recent developments of UNOSAT and others on the use of satellite images, are also interesting developments in this area. This will have repercussions on the architecture of the aid system as a whole. One of the key elements of the debate is whether or not any international law should be included in national legal systems and how that will relate to the specificities of urban disasters.

- How can we ensure that the overseeing and coordination of relief efforts at national level is properly reflected in legal frameworks (national, regional and international)? What are the legal instruments related to the management of dead bodies (forensic, mass management of corpses, death registration and certificates, etc.)
- What are the mechanisms for managing land tenure in a densely-populated environment (land requisition law under emergency law or state of emergency mechanisms, etc)
- How can national laws ensure that a period of free provision of basic services (for how long and who should cover the real costs) might be necessary after a catastrophic event?
3. Technical issues and challenges

3.1. Urban search and rescue, first aid and disaster preparedness

In sudden urban crises, as well as when a city is heavily bombed, the capacity to react rapidly with professionalism is essential. When the clock is ticking, the capacity to deploy teams who can work alongside the population and National Disaster management agencies, prevent additional accidents and properly rescue people from the rubble, stabilise their health status and evacuate wounded people to field hospitals or health institutions with the proper treatment capacity, is essential. More efforts have to be made in developing and strengthening this capacity.

*Unstable rubbles: the complex theatre of operation of urban search and rescue (Port au Prince, February 2010)*

Civil protection mechanisms must be in place. It is worth noting the considerable cost of deploying international Civil Protection units. The cost of deploying international search and rescue teams needs to be compared to the limited number of people who are saved. Everything that can contribute to improving the local response, even if this requires an initial investment, allows both significant gains in terms of effectiveness and major savings in the long term. National and local Civil Protection units, prefecture and municipal entities, as well as national Red Cross societies and their numerous volunteers need to be given greater support. At the same time, as it is increasingly recognised that the first to respond are the inhabitants of the city themselves, energy and means have to be invested in strengthening their capacity to deal with disasters: first aid training, evacuation rehearsals, pre-positioning of survival kits at household level, etc. all have to be in place before the disaster strikes.

3.2. Health

This section will explore the key challenges of health in war-torn and devastated cities as it represents a key element of the response (PAHO, 1983).

3.2.1. Health issues in an open conflict

Open conflicts in urban settings have a number of consequences in relation to health issues. Managing wounds from bullets and shells requires certain skills and an appropriate surgical set up, including surgeons, anaesthetists and nurses, an energy supply, blood for transfusions and the capacity to provide the required care and maintain basic aseptic conditions. Historically, this was mainly done through the work of hospitals which, for a long time, were far from the active frontline: ICRC and MSF moved closer and closer to the active conflict zones and tried to work in a limited number of health structures which remained accessible during fighting.
An example of this was the transfer of capabilities from the Peshawar hospitals in Pakistan to the main hospital in Kabul in the early 90s. In situations like Mogadishu, all opportunities to replenish stocks are used to ensure that a minimal capacity remains in place to cope with difficult times. However, there is often a shortage of blood for transfusions and fuel for the generators. The capacity to save wounded people is directly linked to the time it takes to provide them with suitable care.

This often depends on the ability to stabilise and evacuate the wounded - two things which become very difficult and dangerous when cities are effectively active battle fields. The result is either a high rate of mortality or people arriving at the surgical ward with high levels of infection, which increases the need for amputations.

This is where ICRC and the local National societies are vital: they often manage the only fleet of ambulances and light vehicles able to enter into the war zone and evacuate the wounded.

Blood availability is also crucial for saving lives and requires a functioning blood bank and efforts to stimulate blood donation have to be supported, on the condition that basic quality control ensures that the risk of contamination by HIV or Hepatitis is kept to a minimum. Without this sufficient availability of quality blood, war or disaster surgery is very difficult.

3.2.2. Health issues in rapid onset disasters

The immediate direct impacts of rapid disasters depend very much on the type of disaster and the context in which it occurs:

- In modern cities where the main building material is cement, earthquakes kill and seriously injure large numbers of people almost instantaneously: crushed limbs, etc. The number of injured people who die depends on the speed with which the rescue teams gain access, the quality of the treatment given (management of “crush syndrome”\textsuperscript{11} - see below) and the speed with which victims can be transported to emergency surgery units. In Port-au-Prince, for instance, gaining access to the injured and then extricating and evacuating them to medical units was difficult and slow due to the fact that the town is situated on hills and the streets were full of debris.

- In old cities where the main building material is mud blocks and where most of the houses only have one floor, deaths are usually caused by suffocation from mud dust.

- Tsunamis, by contrast, either kill people immediately or result in non-lethal and light injuries. The experience after the Tsunami of 26\textsuperscript{th} December 2004 is that many field hospitals dispatched to the affected zones only had to deal with minor injuries and non-disaster related surgery.

Medical care and surgery in disaster situations in urban contexts are complicated tasks, which involve a difficult yet essential “selection” process (triage). Cases found on the ground need to be treated “on site”, to avoid “crush syndrome” for example, but they then need to be rapidly evacuated to medical centres so that major surgery can take place. Surgery in disaster contexts produces a large number of complex cases which, once released from the operating theatre, does not mean they can be released quickly from the hospital: wounds need to be kept open and drained, bandages need to be changed regularly, infections need to be kept under control etc.

\textsuperscript{11} “Crush syndrome” is the effect of a rapid increase in toxins which happens in limbs which have been blocked or squashed and which are suddenly released.
If injured people only get to the medical units several days after a disaster, this can cause a lot of infection-related complications that must be managed. Very quickly, alongside the congestion in operating theatres, post-operation systems also become overloaded, making it difficult to manage all the injuries properly and effectively prevent serious infections, such as gangrene. The “simplest” solution can be amputation.

In recent large disasters in urban contexts close to coastal areas, “sea borne” emergency health assistance systems have been tested. After the Tsunami of South East Asia, a large number of medical boats were mobilised.

Similarly, after the Haiti earthquake, medical boats (US Comfort, TDC Siroco, etc.) attempted to take some of the burden from the medical centres, but very quickly bottlenecks appeared in terms of transportation and the number of beds available. These bottlenecks were reduced by airlifts to take serious cases from the US Comfort to Miami.

3.2.3. Impact of the war on the structure of the national health system:

Health systems are by and large structured around a truncated referral system from village level health posts to national reference hospitals. Larger towns, especially capital cities, usually host the main health institutions, to which cases are referred. They are normally well equipped with functioning operating theatres, obstetric wards, laboratories and curative systems. In war contexts, particularly those that are protracted, this equipment is often partly destroyed, badly maintained and receives limited supplies. The higher level of the reference pyramid is therefore dramatically affected and unable to provide the services it aims to, affecting a wider geographic area. The total or partial destruction of these services often has significant repercussions on the overall health sector nationwide.
Box 8: The hospital set-up in Mogadishu

The top of the public health pyramid in Mogadishu comprises the ICRC supported Keysaney hospital for war traumas, and the SOS hospital for children and mothers. These hospitals host several services: OPD (200 consultations/day), obstetric surgery, nutrition and TB. Well maintained and supplied (DG ECHO support), with Somali health personnel, it played a critical role as one of the few facilities that could manage a high influx of war surgery cases. MSF also supports a hospital in Mogadishu, (Daneele hospital) which focuses on war injuries as well.

3.2.4. Public health issues in congested environments: when the crisis triggers a public health time-bomb

The sanitary conditions in a war- or disaster-affected city represent a major threat due to the twin challenges of sheer numbers and population density, the two key variables of a “contamination equation”. This is, of course, made worse in contexts where there are a large number of IDP camps of all shapes and sizes and high density areas inhabited by poor people. Mogadishu, Manila and Port-au-Prince are no exception; all have numerous public health risks and there is the potential for severe impact due to overcrowded living conditions, poor (or extremely poor) sanitation and the non-protective nature of most of the shelters. TB is often prevalent, due to the way IDP shelters are designed, especially when they are erected in overcrowded locations. Diarrhoea is a frequent problem, sometimes reaching cholera levels. This, of course, is directly linked to the appalling sanitary conditions in which many IDPs live. The risk of cholera epidemics is high; malaria is also a recurring problem, with a lot of seasonal and geographic variations. Measles is also one of the most deadly child killers in cities. In many classic humanitarian operations, IDPs shelter in camps and these camps are often the main recipients of public health programmes provided by aid agencies. However, when health assistance is being provided to IDPs, there is often a need to extend it to the surrounding population. Indeed, the multiplication of health facilities within camps when nearby urban populations do not have access to any health services, is both unfair and a source of security problems. (Crowded IDP camp in Mogadishu (2011)

There is a need to approach this issue more strategically with the development of an “urban health map” which would offer a spatial strategy responding to the health needs of both local urban populations and IDPs in nearby camps.

In addition to the epidemiological risks linked to population density (fast and high-magnitude contamination risks), congestion (spread of acute respiratory diseases), inappropriate sanitation and hygiene (water-borne diseases, cholera, etc.), urban contexts bring other types of public health challenges. Vector-borne diseases are a very complicated health issue which require a specific approach in post-disaster urban settings (PAHO, 1982). Eliminating or keeping the vector population under a certain threshold implies a vigorous public campaign and political commitment from the municipal authorities.
The idea of proper surveillance systems adapted to urban contexts has been promoted by certain authors for more than three decades (PAHO, 1982). They have argued that this is essential for anticipation and rapid reaction, two critical components of health management in urban contexts. Observation of current urban disasters shows that this remains an extremely valid point.

3.2.5. Other health risks in urban crises

Urban settings are also frequently industrial settings. A disaster or a war that affects a city can immediately affect its industry too: radiation and chemical contamination can become terrible health hazards. If the 2004 Tsunami had affected the areas north of Colombo, Sri Lanka, it would have led to terrible pollution in the highly populated surrounding areas.

The fact that cities are focal points which attract people from far and wide means that they are synonymous with the abnormal appearance of diseases: the movement of destitute rural inhabitants from the lowlands bringing malaria to the cities in the highlands, mosquitoes transferred by aircraft bringing dengue fever to European capitals, etc. This can be accentuated when large IDP groups arrive and mix with better protected and thus less immune urban populations.

New pandemics also represent new challenges for urban settings. Due to the frequent proximity of ports and airports and high population density, crisis-affected urban contexts present all the conditions for the rapid spread of imported diseases: SARS and H1N1 have revived the fear of epidemics similar to the deadly Spanish flu which affected the world in the aftermath of World War I, at a time when the world was far less urbanised. A similar phenomenon today would be catastrophic.

3.2.6. The difficulty of managing corpses: forensic issues in urban contexts

The management of corpses, forensic pathology and funeral practices are among the most difficult factors in post-disaster or war-torn cities (PAHO/WHO, 2004). There are environmental hygiene issues (including the management of smells), culturally and religiously sensitive issues, the treatment of trauma linked to events which people have experienced and the challenges of forensic pathology. It is important to state however that dead bodies are not normally the source of epidemics; there is much evidence to suggest that this is a “disaster myth that does not want to die” (De Ville de Goyer, 2004).

Very quickly after earthquakes, tsunamis, floods or armed confrontation, the local population, often with volunteers from the national Red Cross or Red Crescent society, retrieve the bodies which are accessible and lay them by the road so that they can be collected by their loved ones. Cities and their populations can find themselves confronted with dozens, hundreds or sometimes thousands of bodies in various states of decay.

The morgues, when they exist and function, rapidly fill up with bodies even though there is often no electricity to keep them cool, or ice to conserve them. Drastic measures are therefore needed and should be part of the strategic thinking of humanitarian actors.

The bodies that have not been reclaimed by their families after a few days have to be buried in individual or collective graves depending on the scale of the problem. These bodies are rarely identified and the deaths cannot therefore be recorded. This has repercussions in the future in terms of the transfer of property, eligibility to receive funds from State pensions or from the Diaspora, but also in terms of the ability of families to mourn their dead properly.
For its part, the ICRC often supplies body bags and works with the local Red Cross or Red Crescent society. It is nevertheless important to ensure that culturally and sociologically important issues are properly taken into account, especially when mass burials are at stake. In a context like Haiti, where spiritual rites (including voodoo) are part of the culture, or in the Islamic world, the decision to authorise mass burials can also have major psychosocial repercussions (De Ville de Goyet 2000).

3.3. Nutrition and economic security: dealing with the urban cash-based economy

Hunger has often been used as a weapon in wars, forcing besieged cities to surrender through the use of food blockades, though this is clearly not permitted under IHL. Ensuing shortages of food or speculation on the local markets can cause a rapid hike in prices.

- In war-torn situations, people try to stockpile goods each time there is a pause in the confrontation. This is often accompanied by price speculation;
- In drought-affected contexts, the net deficit itself induces price increases which can reach extremely high levels in urban contexts; this is often worsened by speculation;
- Both situations can cause severe weight loss amongst the adult population and dramatic deterioration of the nutritional status of children, especially the under-5 category.

3.3.1. Specific features of urban settings in nutrition, food security and livelihoods

Urban settings are monetary contexts. Households produce a limited amount themselves and therefore purchase their food and non-food items. Households also generally have to pay for basic items such as water, cooking fuel, and for access to services like health, education and transportation. The private sector and traders are thus major players and the urban household economy is highly vulnerable to price fluctuations. For many urban households, access to food is a more serious problem than food availability. The cost of basic goods for urban households can vary depending on the area in which they live, the type of traders they have access to and their capacity to buy in bulk. Indeed, the poorest households often rely on a “day-to-day” strategy for their purchases; they buy food items in small quantities as soon as some cash is available in the household, and consequently at a very high price. The price they pay to a small retailer can be twice as high as the price in the local supermarket. Street food is also a major feature of the urban diet. Urban settings offer more job opportunities than rural areas. Poor households rely on a variety of sources of income and particularly on the informal economy. In rural contexts, agro-ecological factors and types of income/food sources are often used by aid agencies to determine livelihood zones. However, another approach is necessary in urban contexts, where different factors have to be used in defining areas with homogeneous vulnerability, thereby taking into account the heterogeneity of urban settings, and the fluidity of urban dwellers’ livelihoods (Pantaleo Creti 2010).
Urban children are often better nourished than rural children (especially regarding stunting and weight) “due to better socio-economic conditions, especially for women (education, health, economic situation)” (SMITH, L.C., RUEL M.T. & NDIAYE, A. 2003)

Malnutrition rates are rarely above emergency thresholds. However, urban settings present higher malnutrition differentials between poor and better off groups of the city than in rural contexts, and there are often major disparities between households in the same area. In urban contexts, obesity can also be a major nutritional problem, which can be linked to the urban habit of eating “junk food” and very poor quality food in general. Malnutrition crises in cities are often related to the arrival of IDPs with already severely deteriorated nutritional status, or to sieges that block supply chains. In terms of infant and young child feeding and care, the risk of contamination of infant food by contaminated water is high in urban emergencies as exclusive breastfeeding rates are lower in urban than rural settings (USAID 2008).

3.3.2. Tackling food and economic insecurity in urban emergencies

Hunger has been one of the ways war is waged against cities, although this is now absolutely forbidden by International Humanitarian Law.

Food distribution programmes: Amongst the range of food-based programmes, classic food aid distribution (general dry ration distributions), targeted food distribution (supplementary feeding) or conditional food programmes (such as Food for Work or Food for Training) are still widely used. However, the most frequently distributed food rations are not adapted to being cooked in cities. During the war in the Balkans in the 90s, the aid system reinvented the “food parcel system” which had been so widely used to send food to war prisoners during WWII. The ICRC, UNHCR and NGOs distributed millions of these food parcels in all the urban contexts of the former Yugoslavia. Urban households are heavily cash dependent and sell rations to pay for other things like rent or fuel. Frequently, the distributed food aid ended up in the market.

Supporting food delivery mechanisms: Market assistance programs, such as subsidised bakeries (free or reduced flour, cash support for production costs), are also another way of supporting access to food for vulnerable people without disturbing the value chain of basic food items. Indeed, throughout the siege of Kabul in the early 90s, the production and distribution of bread via bakeries subsidised by WFP was a lifeline for the inhabitants of the city. Another interesting approach that has been explored during the response to the Haiti earthquake is the delivery of meals provided by small restaurants. These programmes allow restaurant owners to restore their livelihoods while supporting household food security. The distribution of cooked meals was also central to ICRC’s operations in the early 90s, as wet rations present less protection risks for beneficiaries as they are much more difficult to steal than dry rations. Wet feeding programmes such as canteens or ‘soup kitchens’ thus appear to be a relevant option when there is a significant concentration of people as in camps or urban contexts, but only over a short period (Coutin 2009).
Cash-based programmes: The 3 main types of cash-based interventions implemented in response to an emergency are: vouchers (food or non-food, commodity specific or cash-value), cash grants (unconditional or not) and cash-for-work (Poisson, 2011). Vouchers can help to enhance local purchasing power and encourage local traders to bring in more food at affordable prices. Families are targeted, listed and receive vouchers they can exchange for items on a list from specific pre-identified traders (either the commodities are specified on the voucher, such as 1 kilo of rice, or the value is specified, such as 10 dollars). These traders then exchange the vouchers for cash with the aid organisations. This process transfers the risk from the agencies to the traders, who are better connected and equipped to deal with it. It also limits logistical complexities. However, it transfers the main programming difficulties upstream (needs assessments and targeting) and downstream (monitoring and impact evaluation) in the intervention cycle (Cross and Johnston, 2011). Cash-for-work is another approach that is commonly implemented in urban settings. However, experience has shown that the programmes are time-consuming to set up, which raises questions about their appropriateness in the case of acute or rapid-onset emergencies.

In particular, identifying public works requires complex and lengthy consultation and arrangements with urban stakeholders. In addition, CFW programmes also effectively exclude the most physically vulnerable people (such as the severely malnourished, the elderly, the disabled, etc.) and should therefore be used in conjunction with other types of programmes, such as unconditional cash grants.

### Box 9: CFW and timeliness

In the response to the Haiti earthquake, a great deal of time was spent identifying community works for CFW programmes. The consequence of this was delays in programme implementation which caused delays in delivering assistance to affected households.

Cash grants, which can be more rapid to put in place initially, are increasingly being implemented as an effective emergency response to help households cover their basic needs and support livelihoods recovery. However, the increased use of cash-based programming, which is expected to grow even further in the future, demands a shift in paradigm for the aid sector on many levels. The difficulties include: building internal and external capacity and partnerships (with banking systems, in ICT, with companies) in order to deliver large amounts of cash, adapting/developing monitoring tools, etc.

Urban and peri-urban agriculture programmes: managing food security in urban contexts through urban and peri-urban agriculture is a process that can be traced back to the urban workers’ gardens of the industrial revolution and, in times of war, to the Walker Plan in Switzerland, when all green spaces were transformed into food producing plots. The ICRC made this an integral part of its response in Sarajevo, in besieged Kabul in the early 1990s and even in African contexts such as Huambo (Angola) in its peri-urban ‘barrios’. Seed distributions in Sarajevo, for instance, were important during the years of the siege, and food was grown even on the top of buildings and on balconies.

*Vegetable seller in Kabul*
More recently, NGOs have started to develop ingenious programmes in the slums of Nairobi, in the fast-growing outskirts of Juba in South Sudan and in the neighbourhoods of Port-au-Prince. These programmes are of particular interest in nutritional terms as they make it possible to increase dietary diversity through the growing of vegetables. However, they often have a limited impact on households’ livelihoods, as the level of production is not sufficient to provide greater income.

Nutrition programmes: ‘Classic’ nutritional interventions such as treatment of moderate and severe acute malnutrition for children under 5 and mothers through a Community-Based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) approach, blanket supplementary feeding programmes to prevent deterioration in the nutrition status amongst the most vulnerable, prevention of micronutrient deficiencies through micronutrient supplements, are all implemented in urban settings but with specific challenges. These challenges relate to working with and through urban health and nutrition facilities that often combine private and public institutions. For Infant and Young Child Feeding Programmes, innovative approaches were tested in the response to the Haiti earthquake with the establishment of “Baby tents” to support breastfeeding, counselling and management of artificial feeding including Ready-to-Use-Infant-Formula as an emergency breast milk substitute (Pantella, 2011). These interventions, and more specifically the use of RTU formula, need to be further formalised in urban contexts, where exclusive breastfeeding is less frequent than in rural areas.

3.3.3. Specific challenges in urban contexts

Malnutrition and urban caseloads: Malnutrition is less frequent in urban settings than in rural areas. However, the size of urban populations raises some specific concerns about the magnitude of the problem and therefore on the relevance of the thresholds commonly used to trigger a humanitarian response (15% GAM, 4% SAM)\(^\text{12}\). In Nairobi, for example, this issue was raised by several humanitarian actors (CONCERN, OXFAM & CARE, 2009), who argued that there was an emergency situation in the slums and that the aid community should respond to it. Indeed, due to the size of the population concerned, even a relatively low malnutrition rate (2.6% GAM) corresponds to thousands of malnourished children.

\(^{12}\) Global Acute Malnutrition and Severe Acute Malnutrition
**Vulnerability assessment and monitoring:** In selecting and monitoring project impact, there is a need to further develop assessment tools and methodology adapted to urban contexts. Incomes are often too difficult to calculate. Many livelihoods rely on the informal economy and on day-to-day job opportunities and/or petty trade, and thus do not bring in regular income. Better indicators cited in several studies are indicators related to households’ coping strategies (Creti 2010) and food consumption\(^{13}\) (for example the number of meals per day).

**The fluctuation of prices and the programming of cash-based operations.** Urban dwellers’ households are highly vulnerable to price fluctuation. During the course of a cash-based intervention, volatility in prices can compromise the achievement of the project’s objectives by reducing the purchasing power of the beneficiaries. In such programmes, there is a need to constantly monitor food prices on the market and to have enough flexibility to be able to adapt the amount of cash given, if purchasing power falls below a certain threshold.

**Using market forces in emergencies:** At the lowest level, with small-scale vegetable retailers, to the highest level, with the large grain traders, market forces are extremely robust and able to respond to demand in those urban economies which have been monetised for a long time. For example, small-scale trade was back on its feet just a few days after the earthquake in Port-au-Prince. Harnessing this energy is essential. Cash and voucher programmes at household level, which support demand, can be part of a response. The other part of the equation is supporting supply. Cash transfer programming is also being increasingly used to support supply, by, for example, providing grants to small traders so they can get their shops up and running (re-purchase stock, mend their shops, etc.) thereby fixing the broken link in the supply chain. Facilitating the flow of goods by securing entry points is another aspect, but it is not without side effects. In Somalia, for instance, the military fleet which protects the sea traffic that supplies Mogadishu is seen by some as an act of war. It is important to be able to convince the business community and traders that money is available, that there is demand and that they can do business.

**Rebuilding / supporting urban livelihoods: a new challenge for humanitarian actors**

Recent experiences with the Haiti earthquake have shown how challenging it is to support the urban household economy. Initial attempts to rebuild households’ livelihoods through cash grants (OXFAM, 2011) soon after the earthquake had little impact as the amount allocated was not enough to cover all the needs of households and the priority for Haitians was to cover education expenses to send their children back to school and to reimburse debts (OXFAM, 2010). When entering the post-crisis transition phase, rebuilding livelihoods becomes the priority and the natural exit strategy for aid actors. However, this entails new specific challenges. New options can be identified, such as meat (OXFAM, 2011a), eggs and milk production, in urban settings. In addition, the real issue is to ensure that the affected population are integrated within the urban economy (OXFAM 2011-d): developing new business and creating sustainable jobs, supporting market systems, etc. This involves investigating market systems, identifying employment opportunities and working with the private sector (including microfinance institutions), all of which the humanitarian community is not very familiar.

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\(^{13}\) Establishing the food consumption for an entire household is more difficult in cities, if a number of household members eat outside the household on a regular basis: HH FCS underestimates total consumption. (Creti, 2010)
Constraints in supporting livelihoods in urban refugee or IDP settings

Refugees or IDPs often move from camps to cities, looking for better economic opportunities rather than staying in undignified camp conditions for months or years. However, they often face a number of obstacles in accessing the city’s labour market. For refugees, the law in the country of asylum commonly places restrictions on refugees’ right to work (Grünewald and de Geoffroy, 2008). They have no other option than to work in the informal economy with all the related protection risks (lack of health and safety regulations, lack of social security, low salaries, extended working hours, unstable and sometimes dangerous jobs) (UNHCR 2009). IDPs are normally not affected by special legal constraints, but are most of the time incorporated into the “lumpen proletariat”\(^{14}\) of the cities.

3.4. Water and sanitation: the urban time-bomb

Crises often put existing water and sanitation systems under serious stress, due to damaged facilities and/or the influx of new categories: IDPs or refugees in camps, in public buildings or hosted by families. The result is three types of impact which drive other humanitarian crises (King’s College London, Humanitarian Futures Programme 2009).

- First of all, high-density urban systems with limited sanitation are “high risk areas” in terms of public health. Continual monitoring and epidemic control mechanisms, which are capable of being highly reactive if an outbreak occurs, are “a must”. However, this is very difficult in most of the disaster or war-affected cities and the most important part of the work is usually focused on safe water supply and limitation of sanitation risks.
- Secondly, as with any valuable asset, the provision of clean water and sanitation facilities in slums is an attractive target for corruption, greed, collusion and exploitation.
- Finally, water scarcity can cause an increase in violence amongst different water users. This issue will become even more important if climate change brings about more drought and water scarcity.

These three possible impacts constitute a real “time bomb”.

\(^{14}\) The term was originally coined by Marx to describe the lowest layer of the working class lost to socially useful production, and therefore of no use in the revolutionary struggle.
3.4.1. Water in cities: pipes, public water points and water trade

One of the characteristics of water systems in urban contexts is that the density of populations makes the instant demand for water very high, requiring a supply that is superior to the capacities of local traditional wells. Cities are structured in such a way as to make cost recovery an economically feasible solution, and water is something people are ready to pay for (Kauffmann, 2011). The production and distribution of water via systems that satisfy demand, requires energy (electricity, thermal engine pumps) and a level of organisation, which can either be public or private or a mix of both (Nembrini, 2009). Public water services, water boards, private companies and small business are the key actors in this sector.

One simple but extremely costly option to supply quality water to urban populations is water trucking. In Port-au-Prince, as in many other urban contexts, a constant flow of water trucks has been supplying water to bladders and other kinds of reservoir. The quality of the water treatment is closely and, in most cases, properly controlled. In many war or disaster-affected cities, local surface or drilled wells are part of the solution. Many of these wells are critical components of the supply of water in Kabul, Mogadishu and Kisangani. However, as it is an expensive activity, a clear exit plan must be in place before embarking on water trucking programmes to ensure that they do not go on for months, even after the situation improves.

In situations where services are already poor, an emergency can result in a total breakdown of services until outside assistance is provided. Such reliance may leave local agencies further weakened, lacking adequate resources, and unable to provide an adequate service when outside assistance is no longer available.

Ensuring that the city water system can function is by far the most effective option. But this option often entails solutions that are technically complex, as it is not the simple technology for surface or even deep well digging which is at stake, but the support to distribution systems involving long distance pipes, systems to pressurise the water in the pipe system, elevated tanks, etc. The key stumbling blocks in the functioning of water systems are often to be found in: the power supply (electricity cuts often mean no water), the availability of spare parts to keep the engines functioning and the presence or not of chemicals to properly manage water quality. The typical profile of a WaSH NGO worker is often not appropriate and it is necessary to explore other rosters offering electrical engineers and water network specialists.

These issues are not only present in crisis-affected cities; they are in fact common to all cities. But in times of war or disaster, they should be considered a high priority by aid agencies. The supply of chemicals and spare parts was for instance the first thing requested by the water company in Abidjan, in order to resume water supply to the city.

In order to restore municipal water supplies it is a priority to build partnerships between relief agencies, local authorities and private water suppliers as quickly as possible (Oess, 2009).
Floods in urban contexts often have devastating effects on weak water and sanitation systems. An effort to extract the key lessons learnt from large scale floods in urban settings (Smith, 2009) stresses the following points needing further investigation:

*Floods in Haiti (2010)*

**Box 10: Lessons learnt from floods in urban settings (Smith, 2009)**

**Preparedness**
- Identification of practical measures that can be taken to prevent or reduce the damage caused by floods.
- Recommending how to invest in, and maintain, network supplies in areas that are vulnerable to flooding.
- Identification of practical measures to ensure immediate water supplies for populations affected by flooding, until relief agencies can respond.
- Recommending what practical measures can be taken to reduce flood damage to water supply facilities and infrastructure.

**Response**
Investigation into whether simple household treatment techniques can improve the quality of turbid flood waters. There are no simple treatment methods that can be used to remove salinity from salt water.

### 3.4.2. Sewage, latrines and plastic bags: managing urban black and grey waters

The sewage systems in many cities (if they exist), commonly date back to the colonial period. They have often been upgraded but rarely to the point that they can match the needs of the growing urban population. Therefore, in many cities, a large part of the urban sanitation system is based on individual pit latrines or septic tanks in house compounds, which can be emptied by specialised people (for example, the Bayakou in Port-au-Prince) or by private companies equipped with gully sucker trucks. Poverty, lack of maintenance and wars or natural disasters often leave them in a badly damaged state and this can lead to serious pollution of underground water. In many slums, people have no other choice than to defecate into plastic bags and then throw these away (a practice known as “flying toilets”). Most of the water tables under big cities are polluted, particularly the superficial aquifer, from which poor urban people take drinking water. (Ngnikam et al 2011).

The priority for any initial action should be speed of response, and it is essential that technologies to contain excreta are installed quickly, particularly in public shelters (official or unofficial), that can be overcrowded.
However, huge constraints to urban emergency sanitation exist:

- **Ground conditions:** many sites are situated on steeply sloping ground, have rock close to the surface, are covered with concrete or tarmac, or are subject to frequent flooding.
- **Land ownership:** in contexts where there has been displacement, many camps are on private land and often permission to provide services is not given, limited or at best takes much negotiation—including being asked for payment in order to provide services.
- **Lack of institutional responsibility and lack of legal frameworks for sanitation:** for instance in Port-au-Prince, there was almost no existing regulatory framework for sanitation (see UNOPS’ programme, funded by ECHO) (Groupe URD 2011).
- **No sanitation chain:** particularly no safe final disposal or treatment of faecal sludge.
- **The repair of existing sanitation facilities should be a priority:** urban sanitation responses may typically include both first and second phase options and vary from situation to situation between those who stay in their own homes, those who stay with host families, those who relocate to official shelters and those who relocate to unofficial shelters.

When displaced people move to cities and set up their camps, plastic (bucket) latrines, which have to be emptied regularly, are established, representing a significant health hazard. In many IDP settlements, however, there may often be no latrine at all. For the IDPs who settle in former government buildings, in private compounds or along the road, sanitation remains the number one problem. In Port-au-Prince, the difficulty of digging classic pit latrines and the sheer amount of people led to the importing of thousands of chemical “portaloo” toilets which were extremely expensive to maintain. In certain parts of Mogadishu, it is very difficult to dig latrines because of the sand and the fact that the water table is very high and would be in contact rapidly with the contents of the latrines.

Management of grey water and drainage is essential to avoid the creation of new mosquito breeding sites, due to poor drainage and poor sanitary conditions in camps and overcrowded areas. Waste management also needs to be encouraged (Forster, Tim 2009).

Cholera, a major water-borne disease, frequently occurs during certain seasons (mainly the hot season). Many agencies, such as ICRC, ACF, OXFAM and UNICEF have run regular chlorination campaigns of wells in urban contexts such as in Mogadishu, Huambo and Kisangani, to avoid the potential spread of cholera.

New options have been developed to deal with this challenge: dry toilets (urine-diverting systems, urinals, compost toilets) or collective toilets connected to a biogas digester (Port-au-Prince and Kigali jails), organised systems for the use and collection of ‘peepoo’ bags (tested in the slums of Nairobi), raised toilets in transitional sites (Manila), de-slugging technologies, pre-identified waste disposal landfills and the upgrading of school sanitary facilities (IASC 2010). But this sector still requires a great deal of research and development in order to innovate and develop options for crisis-affected urban populations: the sector of urban emergency sanitation still suffers from a lack of knowledge, strategy and preparedness. The 27th ALNAP meeting background paper highlights that the following innovations are needed for the WaSH sector: de-slugging technologies, pre-identified waste disposal landfills, upgrading school sanitary facilities and community-led total sanitation (ALNAP 2011). All necessary innovations identified are in fact related to the sanitation component of WaSH. Some working groups are currently conducting research on the issue of urban sanitation in emergencies (Johannessen A., Patinet J., Carter W., Lamb J. 2011), (Oxfam, WASTE 2011).
3.4.3. **Hygiene promotion: critical issue and opportunities to explore**

The ‘soft’ component of WaSH programmes is even more critical in urban settings than in rural areas, in order to break contamination cycles. Hygiene promotion should ensure the optimal use, care and maintenance of water and sanitation facilities and can also be a mechanism to involve affected populations in the design and delivery of an effective and appropriate response (Sow, Souleymane & Boughen, 2009). Hygiene promotion in urban contexts is still viewed by aid actors as a real challenge (Brooks, 2011). It is probably necessary to develop new tools and methodologies, like *sanitation marketing*, in urban contexts where the PHAST (Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation) approach seems less relevant (Villeminot, 2010). The specific characteristics of the urban context, such as mobile phone coverage, should be seen as an opportunity for the dissemination of health and hygiene messages.

**Hygiene promoter in Mogadishu**

Humanitarian agencies should continue to explore options such as Household Water Treatment (HWT)/Point of Use (POU) water treatments which encompass a variety of different water treatment methods (physical, chemical and biological)\(^{15}\) used to improve water quality for an intended use (drinking, bathing, washing, irrigation, etc), at the point of consumption instead of in a centralised manner (involving a distribution network).

In a nutshell, the key for the WaSH sector is better preparedness of all stakeholders, especially in the field of sanitation, with engineers experienced in working in urban areas, because there is no “one-size-fits-all” WaSH solution - only “contextual” responses will work (UN HABITAT 2010). Several research projects, such as the WASH & RESCUE\(^ {16}\) (WAter, Sanitation and Hygiene in RESilient Cities and Urban areas adapting to Extreme waters) are trying to develop “urban solutions”.

\(^{15}\) Filter, boiling, Sodis, chemical...

\(^{16}\) A research project under the Stockholm Environment Institute on holistic risk assessment and social mechanisms for learning. It was launched in 2011.
3.5. Camp, shelter, housing, habitat and urbanism

3.5.1. The “camp” debate

Camps: finding a compromise between political sensitivity and a logistical quick fix. Most governments are extremely concerned when camps are set up. Indeed, camps are a double-edged solution in terms of managing uprooted people. On the one hand, they contain the problem; camps have barriers, as long as they are temporary they are easy to control, and their inhabitants remain in a state of vulnerability and dependency. On the other hand, camps can become a threat to security, a danger to public health and a source of social upheaval when they last a certain time.

Tented camp on the beach in Mogadishu (2011)

The policy of most governments has always been to try to limit the “internal development” of camps, especially in terms of infrastructure and materials used to construct houses. They allow tents and straw huts, but not mud or cement bricks! In camps close to cities and in large IDP settlements in protracted crisis contexts, this situation becomes very difficult.

Limits of the usual camp mechanisms: in densely populated urban contexts, available un-used land is rare. In some cases, immediately after disasters (e.g. after the earthquake in Port-au-Prince), affected urban populations spontaneously set up camps themselves, wherever they find empty space, and usually as close as possible to their own house or neighbourhood. This temporary post-crisis phase presents a fragmented situation in the city, with a multitude of different types of situations: family tents often directly on the streets, isolated or grouped camps, self-organised on the basis of neighbourly relations and solidarity systems.

Camp in Port au Prince (2011)

Open public spaces (parks, football fields, etc.) are systematically occupied. When humanitarian aid agencies arrive in the field, they find a situation that is very different to that of formal camps for displaced people, set up by humanitarian agencies themselves. The usual emergency mechanisms of identification and covering the needs via distribution programmes (NFI, tarpaulins, water, etc.) are ill-adapted to this first phase in these dense urban areas.

Risk areas and private land ownership: Adapting the camp system to urban contexts in the immediate post-crisis situation is not without risk. In cities “risk free” space where camps can be set up is very limited. To secure settlements in each place, it is necessary to know the risks and to mitigate these, if they cannot be completely removed. Another issue is the power of private property owners in relation to the lack of public land. When the land tenure law is in favour of private landowners, the transitional phase towards reconstruction is very complex. The possibility of finding other places for the affected population is limited and there are constraints in terms of doing work to establish proper drainage or sewage systems or to dig shelter foundations, etc.
Responding to needs in urban camps or adopting a neighbourhood approach: the way to respond to the needs of IDPs living in camps in urban contexts depends on the distance between the camps and the people’s area of origin. The main difficulty for aid actors is to understand that, if the camp is near the area of origin, the population living inside a camp is the same as the one living around the camp. This affects the links, the exchanges, the solidarity and even the way families are distributed between the neighbourhood and the camp. Humanitarian programmes have to take into account this nearby environment with the scaling up of the needs identified within the camp limits. They have to avoid imbalances between aid distribution between the refugees and IDPs living in the camps and the affected people immediately outside the camps. Another problem for humanitarian actors is the rapid development of ghost camp situations, where some tents may still be occupied during the day by some of the family to give a sense of “presence” and therefore ensure that they receive assistance while the rest of the family gets aid from somewhere else, or is already back in the area of origin. Such “ghost camps” have been observed around El Genina in Darfur, inside Port-au-Prince itself and in areas around Mogadishu.

Issues of physical protection and security: the classic aid response usually takes time to get started, in the meantime urban affected populations often salvage materials from the debris in order to build makeshift shelters. The easiest aid response is therefore to supply people with plastic sheeting, tarpaulins or tents. This provides essential protection from the sun, rain and dust, and if provided in sufficient quantity, also provides a bit of privacy. Yet, life under these tents and tarpaulins is extremely difficult: lack of ventilation makes the shelters very hot, often not fully water tight, therefore causing many respiratory diseases. In addition, these shelters are extremely fragile and vulnerable to damage by strong winds and hurricanes.

Gender-based violence and violence against children: sensitive issues in urban settings

It is therefore important to get people out of these precarious shelters and into better housing as quickly as possible. Due to high population density there is also the risk of potential disputes with neighbours, as well as the spreading of contagious diseases. Protection programmes need to be vigilant about the high risk of gender-based violence (GBV) often associated with chaotic urban settlements, camp life and conflict-related violence. Experiences in the “urban camps” in Port-au-Prince, in Dadaab camp in Kenya and in many other camp situations in or around cities have shown that GBV is one of the most problematic consequences of setting up camps.
Establishing urban camps outside the city – potential for a new crisis?: due to the lack of space inside the city and the fact that humanitarian actors are used to delivering aid in large camp contexts, new camps are often established outside of the city. This strategy, however, brings with it a new set of difficulties. Examples include the creation of Camp Corail, 15 km from Port-au-Prince in Haiti, or the returnee settlements in Afghanistan outside Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif. In view of the resulting chaotic and uncontrolled urbanisation and the negative economic impact on families who risk losing their urban livelihoods, the possible consequences of such a strategy should be analysed with care. Indeed, these cases demonstrate that humanitarian aid can lead to aid dependency and/or new urbanization crises: Camp Corail was set up for between 3000 and 6000 families and is currently surrounded by 60,000 new inhabitants.

3.5.2. From a box to sleep in to a home to live in:

Debates about temporary or transitional objectives: there is currently intense debate within the humanitarian sector about “T”-Shelters and permanent houses. Very often, the technical “kit approach” results in a plywood box unit, which often remains in place longer than expected, effectively prolonging the transition phase. In some areas, agencies are trying to reduce this transition period and move straight from plastic sheeting to building the core of what can later become a permanent house, based on the principle of self-build, adding extensions bit by bit to this central core structure.

However, the shelter debate should be broader and encompass not only the issue of the T-shelter and its shelf-life but also the issue of supporting self-build. In most affected urban situations, many people build their own houses (particularly the more recent inhabitants and the poorest people), so they do not need much assistance in order to re-build their houses. Rather, they need the right conditions to be able to self-build again. The transition issue for them is more to legitimise their settlement, and to receive some aid to help them rebuild the foundations of their house, that they can later enlarge in accordance with their family’s needs and income potential.

With this in mind, no standardised shelter, no matter how it is constructed or however sustainable it is, can be the sole solution in urban areas. Therefore, the debate on technical and structural standards, or types of shelter kits, should refocus on the issue of lack of urban space for building. The re-building process should vary technically and spatially depending on the context. Another technical aspect to take into account is the question of adapting to the soil and land on which the house is to be built.
The debate on transition and issues of urban inclusion: issues such as land ownership titles, urban planning, the administrative framework and basic services delivery should all be taken into account when looking for urban shelter solutions. Humanitarian actors have first to understand these complex factors that affect shelters in the urban environment. Housing issues and service delivery issues are related to urban planning and the local administrative framework, where it exists. The situation in Port-au-Prince is a good example of the possible synergy between urban approaches and humanitarian mechanisms, with the coordination system “logement quartier” working group initiated by UN-Habitat.

The challenge of quantifying needs: It is often difficult to know exactly how many houses have to be replaced in an urban context, due to population density, and the density of built-up areas. To know how many people were living in the same house before the crisis is often a challenge, as it requires disaggregated data, identifying the different households amongst the enlarged families living under the same roof. Some large families rent and live together in a single room. Another difficulty in quantifying need is that some groups, such as refugees, may have been “invisible” before the crisis. Furthermore, many affected people live outside the camps, either taking refuge with a host family outside the city, or remaining in their damaged houses in order to look after them and prevent looting. Another factor to take into account is the link between damaged houses and the new houses to be built. What defines “a house” and how can it be concretely identified in a densely built context, which has been severely damaged or even destroyed? A single room could have been a home for one family, while a single building could have been home to two or more families. Some houses are built with several floors, while others are made up of several flats on different floors, or all on the same level.

In a number of affected contexts, another point is the recurring structural lack of housing before the crisis. In Port-au-Prince, it is said locally that more than about 300 000 persons did not have houses before the earthquake. The problem for humanitarian aid agencies is to decide how to address this issue and how to define exit strategies in such contexts.

Resistance and fragility in architecture in Port-au-Prince (2010)

Retrofitting processes: A war-torn or disaster-affected city is rarely totally destroyed. There are almost always some houses still standing, and these sometimes only require minor structural repairs. The inhabitants of these houses often have a relatively good idea of the state of their house. Provided an appropriate technical assessment is carried out, proper engineering advice is given and access to tools and materials is secured, they can begin to retrofit their houses. Retrofitting provides a lot of employment and economic options and can be launched soon after the disaster.
3.5.3. **Housing policies, land tenure, rights and urban issues:**

**Housing policy issues**

The process of bringing shelter aid to a crisis-affected urban area should not be limited to short-term programmes to ensure quality and sustainability. Shelter programmes have to be designed in line with the main characteristics of the context, i.e. the physical environment, spatial administrative distribution, and the socio-economic conditions of the population. Humanitarian programmes have to be designed to ensure coherence with the local urban framework. Even if the housing sector is often the domain of private actors under private property rights, it has to be regulated in order to sustain coherent and equitable development in the city.

**Land tenure and land-use rights**

Land tenure and property rights are one of the stumbling blocks for aid responses, disaster prevention policies and reconstruction strategies. In cities, the overlap between modern and traditional, written and oral tenure rights held by communities, the State or individuals makes for an extremely complex legal situation. While land and occupancy rights in city centres are often more or less well regulated, this is much rarer in peri-urban areas. Private speculation and the centralising tendencies of the state regularly come into conflict. The different ways to apply property rights, whether legally or illegally, are often context specific and extremely complex, ranging from simple user rights to multi-generation land right transmission.

**Linking humanitarian actions, development and urban strategy: significant challenges**

Shelters and housing are intricately linked to land availability, the regulatory framework, the social system, the environmental context and all the technical services that help the urban system to function. In cities, housing issues exacerbate the multidimensional challenges that shape the strategy for reconstruction. The last large-scale disaster in an urban context, Port-au-Prince, has highlighted how many factors are part of the equation. The difficulties encountered in getting people out of their tents and the visible piles of rubble are a reminder to the aid community of just how complex and inter-related many problems are, and how they must be taken into account in the transition between humanitarian aid, rehabilitation and development in an urban setting. The use of satellite images can help to develop a general spatial overview of the situation and can help to map changes effectively (Sartori, Nembrini & Shaufer, 1999).

3.5.4. **Emergency shelters and NFI distribution**

In urban settings, certain basic items are essential: blankets and bed sheets, mattresses, cooking utensils, washing powder, hygiene products, etc. When people lose everything due to a disaster or a forced exodus and have to survive in an urban environment, these non-food items (NFI) have to be supplied rapidly, and often repeatedly. Since the Balkans war, NFIs have represented a substantial component of the humanitarian aid budget during operations in urban settings where there are often limited options (no natural resources available). For instance, women who have to live in very precarious camp conditions for many months appreciate the hygiene kits linked to family planning and reproductive health activities distributed by different agencies, such as by UNFPA in Port-au-Prince.

Many options have been explored to find suitable items of an appropriate quality and to ensure that these NFIs can be provided rapidly anywhere in the world. Markets have been analysed and stockpiles established in key logistical hubs (in Dubai, for instance).
However, a few issues remain unresolved:

- No simple solution has yet been found in terms of finding energy for cooking and appropriate technologies to prepare food in urban settings. In some contexts, bio-digesters linked to latrines have been tested successfully, such as in Cité Soleil, by the Brazilian NGO Viva Rio or in Kigali by the ICRC (to provide energy to cook for the prisoners in the main Kigali jail). In other contexts, solar or kerosene cookers are being tested to replace wood or charcoal stoves.

- Heating devices and energy supplies remain a headache for aid agencies operating in cities such as Kabul or Ulan Bator. In Kabul, the first solution to be tested on a large scale was the provision of charcoal by ACTED. The most interesting avenue to explore would appear to be in shelter design. In North Caucasus, the “house in a box” developed by the Danish Refugee Council (with funding from DG ECHO and DANIDA) is an interesting idea. In Afghanistan, GERES is using improved insulation and environmentally-friendly heating (by orienting the house and its windows in order to optimize the amount of sunlight which is gathered and conserved).

*Distribution of emergency relief by local NGO in Cagayan de Oro after typhoon (2012)*
4. New challenges in urban settings

4.1. Refugees and internally displaced people in urban contexts

One of the keys to rural communities' resilience has been mobility and often their ability to find shelter behind the walls of a nearby city. The movement of refugees and IDPs has long brought about demographic changes linked in one way or another to urbanisation. Quiet villages on the Thai side of the Khmer-Thai borders absorbed aid actors and illegal refugees and became buzzing towns, like Aranyaprathet. Yet, the issue of IDPs and refugees in urban settings has gone unnoticed for a long time, despite the fact that aid agencies have been dealing with this issue regularly for many years, for instance during the war in Angola (Huambo), in Afghanistan (Kabul), and in the towns of what was Yugoslavia during the war there. Urban displacements in, to or around cities affected by wars, disasters or other forms of crisis have attracted more and more interest from the aid community, (see the issues of Forced Migrations from the Oxford University’s Refugee Study Centre, the regular reports of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, NRC, 2007, Crips & al, 2008), scholars (Lassailly-Jacob & al, 1999; Grunewald & Levron op cit, De Geoffroy, 2009) and the evaluation community (Borton & al, 2005).

Box 11: Crisis-triggered displacement to cities

In Colombia, with the countryside under the control of the FARC and paramilitaries, displaced people leave and hide within the urban mazes of Cali, Medellin or Bogota. They try to lose themselves in the anonymous mass, which protects them. Episodes of drought in the Sahel since 1973 have always led to nomads and small farmers gathering in or around the cities. Each food crisis in Niger has triggered a new exodus towards Niamey, Zinder or Maradi, and international aid has not been able to halt the destitution and displacement in time.

In analysing displacement to the cities, recent research has uncovered many new challenges. Several issues have proved to be essential to understand both the vulnerabilities and the opportunities created by these movements.

Root causes, time frame and the reversibility factor

Short-term and long-term displacements to cities bring about very specific changes within the displaced population. The longer the displacement, the greater the socio-economic and cultural impact, and the less reversible the displacement becomes. Long-term displaced or refugees in urban settings tend to adopt an urban way of life, even if they are part of the poorest section of the urban population, as demonstrated in Khartoum (Pantuliano & al, 2011).
In Darfur, the mainly agro-pastoral populations affected by the conflict moved to areas where they believed they could get assistance and protection: around the main urban centres, including the main administrative cities (Nyala, El Fasher and El Genina) and large market centres (Morlay). The camps around Nyala host 5 times more IDPs than the city’s pre-war population (100,000). The camps around El Genina have become suburbs where 90,000 people live. Assisted there by the international system since 2003-2004, they have progressively lost part of their rural connections. In Chad, Goz Beida IDP sites have become urbanised neighbourhoods with thousands of people unlikely to return to their villages.

**Complex, multi-causal and multiphase displacements**

In many contexts, it is difficult to differentiate who is a rural-to-urban economic migrant, who has been displaced by war or drought, and who is affected by multiple-displacements. Afghan refugees, who adopted an urban way of life in the camps in Pakistan and Iran, became returnees when they went back to their villages of origin. Confronted with a lack of arable land and the gap between their expectations (in health, education, etc.) and the inadequate conditions they found in their villages, they moved to Kabul or other cities looking for opportunities. While the periphery of Peshawar and Quetta became empty, causing an economic crisis for the Pakistani population of the area, Kabul’s informal settlements exploded in size and number of inhabitants, rising from 2 million to an estimated 4 million in 2006 (Boyer, 2010). According to existing data, 93% of the displaced population in Colombia have been displaced to urban areas. Bogotá has a population of around seven million people, including both the largest immigrant and IDP populations in the country, hosting 270,000 internally displaced people (Albuja Sebastián and Ceballos Marcela, 2010).

In Somalia, mobility is the main coping mechanism of a largely pastoral population: movements to cities is part of a very complex set of survival strategies which involve a few family members leaving to join the Diaspora, others moving to greener pastures with their camel herds and the rest moving to aid assisted IDP camps in Mogadishu.

**THE DYNAMICS OF DISPLACEMENTS**

- Crisis reaches a level leading to displacements
- 1st phase of internal displacements
- 2nd phase of internal displacements
- 1st phase of internal displacements
- 2nd phase of internal displacements
- Towards the end of crisis with political moves leading to repatriation
- Returnees
- Resettlement of return to area of origin
- Establishment of more stable camps
- Local integration in the country of first asylum
- Outside the affected country
- End of crisis
- Departure to country of second asylum
- First displacements across an international boundary
- Additional displacements linked to the failure of the reintegration process
- Inside the affected country

*Humanitarian aid in urban contexts: current practices, future challenges*  
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Multiple vulnerability, multiple opportunities

To become an IDP in a city involves risks, but also opportunities. The key factor is the status of the IDP household when it arrives at its final destination. What assets does the household still have? How “alien” is the environment in which it is trying to integrate? Arriving as an IDP in settlements inhabited by people from the same area or ethnic group offers more protection than arriving in an alien, if not hostile, environment. The gender balance of the IDP community is an important factor. While women find it easier than men to gain access to jobs and activities in the informal sector, they are also more at risk of being assaulted.

A central issue is whether IDPs or refugees who move to urban settings settle in camps or in public buildings (very frequent in former Yugoslavia, in the Caucasus and also in Haiti after the earthquake). Their presence in public buildings is often resented by local communities who lose access to these facilities (schools, ministries, etc.). Integration is much easier if there are communities or relations already in place, though this can be a heavy economic burden for the hosts. IDP camps are frequently targeted by aid agencies because they are easy to identify and more or less easy to control. The semblance of uniformity of the camp populations often masks the diversity of situations which exist amongst their inhabitants. The physical aspect of a “camp” makes it often difficult to understand what is really happening under the tarpaulins or the tents. The progressive and sometimes unnoticed transformation of a busy camp into a “ghost camp” (Grunewald & al, 2011) is a frequent occurrence.

Frequently, however, questions are raised about the difficulties involved in identifying the needs of IDPs compared to the urban poor, especially when displacement is of a protracted nature and both categories finally compete for the same rare job opportunities. Access to basic services can also be inequitable between the two categories (Pavanello and Hayson, 2011).

Visibility, discretion and protection

Aid agencies like to identify and profile the populations they wish to serve and assist. Large scale operations under the NRC managed IDMC have made “IDP profiling” their main “visit card”. Counting and registering is one of the prerequisites for designing programmes, fundraising and accountability. However, visibility is a question of risk, if not of life and death, for many refugees and IDPs. There is an inherent contradiction between the requirements of aid agencies (and their donors) and those of people for whom going unnoticed is of key importance for their protection and survival.

New paradigms will need to be developed for these types of situations.
4.2. Displacement triggered urbanisation

Long term displacement often leads to a process of urbanisation or quasi-urbanisation. This process is often not legal and is not recognised until it becomes difficult to reverse. Two different situations have been observed:

**Box 12: Displacement processes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Examples and related issues</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Displacement to camps around cities which became peri-urban settlements</td>
<td>Huge numbers of Afghans took refuge in Peshawar and Quetta in Pakistan (Grünewald, 1999) and the camps, which lasted more than a decade, became part of the urbanisation process of the area. People fleeing civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone gathered around Guékuédou, Kissidougou and Massenta in Guinea (Grünewald and Levron, 2004) on the other side of the border. Since 1967 and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the second wave of refugees has been living in exile and has settled in camps which have become part of cities in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and of course, the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Grunewald and de Geoffroy, 2008). In Darfur, the urbanisation that came with the concentration of IDPs around Nyala (Buchanan-Smith et al, 2011), El Fasher and El Geneina (Calaa and Morley camps) was predicted as early as 2004 (Grünewald, 2004) and will represent one of the most complex challenges that the Darfur and North Sudanese authorities will have to deal with.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

| Displacement to camps which became “quasi-cities” | The oldest camps in modern history are located in Kassala (East Sudan) at the border with Eritrea where refugees have been living since 1947. Immediately after comes the massive Palestinian refugee settlements in the Middle East where the urbanisation process is nearly 100% the result of the refugee phenomenon. The complete process from the early tent camps to the first mud brick houses and finally to the creation of real towns with near skyscrapers has been extremely well documented. |

**Humanitarian cities or urban situations without an urban vision.** In refugee or IDP camps, there is no local, political, technical or administrative governance that can develop a vision and work on urban issues. The camps, set up with a temporary and humanitarian framework are managed by an internationally-mandated coordination mechanism, not by a local or municipal authority. The real governance of Dadaab camps is in the hands of UNHCR while IDP camps in Chad, Haiti or Darfur are managed by the Camps Coordination and Management Cluster (CCMC). National authorities are concerned by land occupation issues when camps are set up. However, in Kenya, it is a district officer, as the representative of the ministry, who is in charge of refugees and not an officer in charge of territory and land issues. In Chad, it is the Commission Nationale d’Accueil des Refugiés (CNAR) which is in charge. Such bodies are often set up to ensure dialogue with the refugees or IDPs and act as an interface between UNHCR (for refugees), the local CCM NGO (for IDPs) and the affected population (Grunewald et al, 2008).
Artificial service delivery: In camps, all the formal social and technical services are delivered by aid agencies. These are often completely funded by UNHCR, by OCHA (CERF, ERF) or donors which insist on respecting the UNHCR or OCHA mandated coordination system. Health, water, sanitation, education, etc. services are provided by a wide range of International (and less commonly, national) NGOs, and are freely accessible by refugees and IDPs. The implementing NGOs report mainly to UNHCR, OCHA, clusters and their donors. These international NGOs have therefore very little incentive to engage strategically with the refugee and IDP institutions, or with national authorities (Jansen, 2011). Questions of governance in urbanised IDP situations are even more complex as the IDPs come under both the control of the local authorities, and the control of their own traditional authorities.

NGO presence in Dadaab (2011)

Distorted and artificial economies: In Dadaab camp in Kenya, or the Palestinian camps in Lebanon, and to a great extent in all situations involving large concentrations of refugees over a protracted period (Burmes refugees in Thailand), the National authorities from the host countries strictly regulate employment options for refugees. The Dadaab case echoes that of the urbanised camps in Pakistan, Lebanon and Jordan. Due to the absence of a formal economy, a private informal economy is established. Food and Non-Food Items continue to be distributed freely to the refugees and much of the refugees’ lives revolve around the rhythm of these distributions. They do not have the right to work according to Kenyan or Thai laws. While the refugees are dependent on the international assistance from aid agencies, a very active illegal but tolerated “private sector” develops, covering many uncovered needs, including in cultural and social sectors: selling electronics and mobile phone air time, managing video parlours and coffee shops, retailing all kinds of products, selling vegetables, milk and meat. This sector is fuelled by money which comes from remittances, incentives from NGOs, and trade with the surrounding communities.

The second feature of the economies that develop in the large-scale long-term camps is a complex economic system between the refugee populations and nearby host communities. This is often favoured by ethnic ties: in Thailand, many of the Khmer camps were located in the Khmer speaking areas of the Thai Kingdom. In Dadaab (Kenya), both refugees and host communities belong to the Somali ethnic group, and therefore share language, culture, lifestyle and even sometimes clan affiliations, with the Somali refugees.

Dadaab new camps created in 2011
The selling of a proportion of the food aid to the local population explains why prices around Dadaab are far below prices in other parts of the Arid Land zone of northern Kenya. However, many of the basic services provided free of charge in the camps are not available in the Kenyan villages. In the rare case that these services are available, they are not of the same quality as in the camps and are relatively expensive.

There is now often good coverage of refugees’ needs but this is less the case for IDPs: the years of experience of many agencies in these camps has made the technical response largely capable of responding to the main physical needs of refugees. Aid agencies now know how to do this well - managing latrines, water distribution points, health posts and medical wards are no longer a major challenge. Yet, the question remains of how best to design sustainable and resource-saving services (in a context of restricted resources) for refugees who may live for many years in these camps.

Though assistance for refugees often covers basic needs adequately, the humanitarian response also needs to address vulnerabilities related to illegal urbanisation. In contexts where displaced people often have no jobs and little future, the high risk of deterioration of the social equilibrium is a significant challenge which the humanitarian sector has so far only addressed marginally. For instance, the lessons learnt from the way in which old refugee and IDP camps have reorganized themselves from the original block system to more subtle spatial organisation which better reflects community life, have unfortunately not been of much use: the new camps built as part of the Dadaab complex in Kenya or Camp Corail in the north of Port-au-Prince have both been set up on a “Roman military camp grid”. Though a grid-system probably makes logistics easy for the aid agencies, it also creates a rather inhuman environment for displaced people.

Exit strategies and Disaster Risk Reduction are often lacking from humanitarian assistance strategies. While the entry points for the deployment of assistance to these refugee camps are relatively obvious and well-defined (civil war, inter-clan confrontation and droughts) the “exit points” are more problematic. The same issues exist in long-term camps such as in Dadaab (see box 14), where Kenyan law does not allow refugees to work. In this context, aid agencies are, to a certain extent, legally forced to maintain aid assistance, and refugees have no other option than to take part in the informal economy.

What future for returnees accustomed to urban life? UNHCR aims to provide one of three durable solutions for refugees: return to country of origin, resettlement in a third country or local integration. For refugees, the number of individuals accepted by embassies for resettlement in third countries is reducing, and since returning home is often a difficult option, existing refugee camps are likely to become large concentrations of people (with all the associated problems), without the perspective of becoming real cities with all the opportunities that usually accompany city life. The Afghan populations that spent years in the camps in Pakistan or Iran adopted urban lifestyles. When they had to move back home under the pressure of the Pakistani and Iranian authorities, they moved to cities: there was no place for them in their villages of origin (agricultural land had been taken up by demographic growth) and they did not want, after years in quasi cities, to return to rural life and its hardships. Kabul and other Afghan cities saw their populations explode with this influx of former refugees. Similarly, IDP camps are a growing problem: in Chad around Goz Beida and in the IDP camps close to the main cities of Darfur, long-term displacement has made displaced people adapt to urban life. To what extent can this issue, which is often well understood by the aid agencies, be transformed into programmatic strategies and advocacy?
Box 13: Dadaab, North East Kenya

Dadaab used to be a small district town lost in the arid land of Eastern Kenya, some 100 km from the Somali border. This dry and resource rare place has now become a silent satellite town to one of the biggest UNHCR operations in the world, with the establishment of Somali refugee camps linked to the 1991-93 war in Somalia. From the small original site, the Dadaab refugee complex has become a multi-site system with several camps: Ifo (45,000 inhabitants living in roughly 10,000 huts and open since September 1991), Dagahaley (34,000 refugees in nearly 7,000 shelters in operation since March 1992) and Hagadera (45,000 inhabitants, created in June 1992). These camps host mostly Somali refugees but also a handful of Sudanese and Ugandan refugees, and completely outnumber the small Dadaab district town. The result of this protracted displacement is therefore an “urbanised” context with a very vibrant economy, physical characteristics very similar to many large Kenyan or Somali towns. The recent drought in Somalia and the difficulties to access the affected areas due to al-Shabaab’s policies brought about another large influx of refugees into Kenya, many of them arriving in a very weak physical state with high levels of malnutrition. New sites (Ifo 2 and Ifo 3) have been set up to host these new arrivals, and the aid community is massively involved in providing assistance to them. In 2011, the Dadaab refugee complex is now the third biggest “city” in Kenya (after Nairobi and Mombasa) and the second largest grouping of Somalis in the world (after Mogadishu). After nearly 20 years of existence, the old camps now display some of the characteristics of becoming urbanised. Some social groups have clearly demarcated their private spatial occupations, creating a clear division between private and public areas. Reinforced fences surround many of the plots, some of which now have concrete buildings inside, (most of the houses being more “houses” than traditional huts or shelters built with aid tarpaulins). These plots clearly form streets, just like in a city, even if the density is actually more comparable to a large rural village. Another early sign of urbanisation is the fact that market activities are concentrated at certain focal points, thereby creating a dense economic urban area. These vibrant market places offer many things that aid does not provide, such as electronics, khat (for chewing) and various services such as videos, barbershops, mechanical repair shops and even taxis. Some items distributed in the camp (food or NFIs) are also sold, unopened, in these markets.

In Dadaab, the Somali refugees have managed over the years to keep and develop very strong relations with the Diaspora in the West (many of them having transited through Dadaab camps during the process that brought them from Somalia, via Kenya, to a third country of asylum).

4.3. Modern times and urban violence

Urban violence is nothing new: thieves and robbers who haunt the dark streets of cities are the heroes or villains of many stories and legends from ancient and medieval times. However, in recent decades the world has changed and so has urban violence. With less and less conflict in the world and more and more people in urban contexts living very close to the poverty line, and easy access to light weaponry, urban violence has become much more organised, and much more lethal. Urban violence has gone from being a symptom of a crisis to being a way of life and a pillar of an illicit economic system. Different dynamics have been identified, the oldest of these being linked to territorial control. For centuries, organised groups or gangs have tried to exert their control over urban space and fought against the groups from nearby neighbourhoods. Some of these groups became famous in the USA until the Deportation Laws of the 1990s facilitated their expulsion to Central America. The street gangs who were expelled from the USA then reorganised themselves. The famous “Maras” and other gangs are the result of this process. But from mere street gangs, these groups evolved: easily recruited as “hit men” by criminal entrepreneurs, they started to build a fortune of their own.
They also negotiated stronger positions with organised crime networks and are now fully part of both national and cross-border illicit economies. These groups have heavy weaponry and are able to resist normal police forces. They have also become key actors in political corruption, paying off policemen and politicians locally. In view of the size of the illicit economy and the low wages in developing countries, the temptation of corruption is great...

**Humanitarian challenges resulting from urban violence:** Mortality and morbidity associated to urban violence have been on the rise and, in some contexts, have reached “open conflict threshold”. Humanitarian organisations such as ICRC and MSF have started to get involved, or explore how to get involved, in these contexts. During the Chimeres gang war in Haiti, the ICRC organised health operations with ambulances and war surgery in the same way that they would have done in the case of a conflict. More recently the military operation against the main gangs in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, which enabled central government to regain control of the slums, is an indication of the “similarities” with traditional conflict-related military operations and military-supported police operations in terms of “humanitarian risks”. In these “infra-IHL situations”, qualified by the ICRC as “other situations of violence” there are nevertheless needs that are, to all intents and purposes, “humanitarian needs”.

**Is engaging with a new brand of actors feasible?** Carrying out programmes in these contexts remains highly problematic. The actors of violence often see no interest in allowing aid actors to be present in their areas, nor do they trust them, as the gangs fear infiltration by the police. In addition, these areas are often places where life has little real value. Yet, as demonstrated by aid agencies operating in Cité Soleil or in upper Fontamara in Port-au-Prince, gangs and their families are also part of the local communities and can therefore sometimes see an interest in having humanitarian assistance reaching the populations they control. This can indeed strengthen their social prestige.

### 4.4. Emerging urban challenges: illegal slums, widespread poverty

**Recurring and permanent crises for 70% of urban slum populations:** in emerging cities and in poor areas of chaotic urbanisation, one huge and critical social problem is the situation of slums. In some cities, slum populations represent more than 70% of the overall city population. Poverty, displacement, social marginalisation, insecurity, health issues, ecological issues, illegal economies, etc. are among the multiple factors that create and maintain a permanent social crisis. The “slum issue” is debated within many different international circles: urban experts, city development planners, political scientists. This specific aspect of the “urban equation” is indeed interconnected with all the other aspects of social, economic, political, security and land planning issues. When an external crisis occurs in this type of urban slum area, it causes a great deal of damage, and it is very difficult for foreign humanitarian actors to fully understand the situation.

*Slums in Manila (2012)*
Whatever the impact of the crisis, it is extremely important to understand the complexity of the context: its history, legal and illegal frameworks, local power relations, livelihood strategies, etc. The housing issues in slums are inextricably linked both to the local living conditions and internal functioning.

In slums, access to the population is often difficult for aid agencies: issues of acceptance, security problems, high levels of crime and drug consumption, the presence of armed gangs of all kinds and acute levels of poverty, makes resource rich agencies an easy target (Kauffmann, 2011).

**Humanitarian challenges in dealing with slum populations and their needs**

For humanitarian organisations, these situations represent a serious challenge especially in terms of “entry points” and “exit strategies”. Are poor nutritional status and limited health and water services (structural poverty inherited from the failure of development), sufficient reasons to trigger humanitarian interventions? Or should the intervention be only event-related, due to spill-overs from violence, as in post-election Kenya, or the uncontrolled impact of natural disasters like large-scale landslides, as in Peru?

What entry and exit strategies can be adopted when the scale of problems in Southern Asian slums is such that all the humanitarian sector wouldn’t have enough resources to tackle them all?

**Poverty, economic crises and urbanisation:** For centuries, poverty and destitution in many rural areas of the world have led to mass movement to cities, as people go in search of security, jobs and opportunities. In many instances, these opportunities have only partly materialised and people have had to settle and live in very precarious areas, where land tenure is insecure and access to services almost non-existent. These dynamics lead to the setting up of informal slums. Many slum inhabitants have amazing resilience, but their day-to-day situation remains extremely precarious.

Additional issues are linked to the growing impact of economic crises on these urban settings. In the countryside the effects of the price crises have been partly buffered by local production and households’ capacity to produce for themselves and thus to create food stocks. But such coping strategies are less possible in urban settings where the majority of the population depends on procured food items for its daily consumption.
Skyrocketing prices have, for centuries, triggered massive social turmoil, which at times have led to political regime changes; one of the best known examples is the French Revolution. Fear of hunger demonstrations in cities is probably at the origin of many price control mechanisms and food aid (including for instance the massive US food aid to countries like Egypt over the last 20 years). Several experimental programmes are currently exploring the sector of social protection networks and food security safety nets (OXFAM 2011b; OXFAM 2011c). These situations underline the significant difficulty in defining precise intervention and selection criteria in urban settings. Should the decision to intervene be linked to vulnerability and therefore relate to objectively measurable indicators (anthropological, socio-economic) or should it remain event-based and therefore triggered by specific incidents affecting the city?
5. Areas for improvement

5.1. Entry points and exit strategies in densely-populated areas.

One of the characteristics of humanitarian aid in urban settings is that it often concerns very sizable populations. Programmes therefore need to be on a large scale to make any impact. Entering into these densely populated areas to save lives and reduce suffering implicitly means that there should be a way out of delivering humanitarian aid continuously. This is not that simple and the LRRD process has to be thought through right from the start, when the deployment and the intervention are planned. It is essential to create links rapidly with development agencies, municipal authorities and multilateral donors. Only their know-how and their means can ensure that programmes “beyond emergency” can be shaped, planned for and implemented.

Food distribution in Port-au-Prince (2010)

The first step towards ensuring that this is feasible involves a strong engagement of the humanitarian community (or at least part of it) in the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) or Post Conflict Needs Assessment (PCNA).

5.2. Methodological challenges: space, scales and maps

The analysis of urban settings in which humanitarian aid is more and more frequently deployed requires a specific set of analytical methods and tools in order to accurately assess the needs on the ground, and share the analysis amongst actors.

Systemic analysis and mapping processes are the two key tools that have to be better mastered by humanitarian actors who engage in urban settings.

5.2.1. Systemic analysis

Urban settings are complex and open systems and therefore should be analysed as such. Identification of the systems’ limits and of how porous they are is the first step. This is more and more complicated as the creation of poor urban peripheries and chaotic urbanisation make it difficult to define what is “inside” and what is “outside” a given urban system. Urbanisation is often not linear and in most cases is multi-phase.

Once the system is identified, the second step is to identify the different types of units and elements that constitute the system and, importantly, their inter-relations. Geographic and administrative units, socio-economic and ethnic elements have to be identified and qualified (density, type of population, socio-economic level, etc.). Their inter-relations, often in terms of flows of people, of labour, of money and of goods, but also in terms of political domination and socio-economic exploitation, have to be clarified.
5.2.2. Multi-scaled and multi-factor mapping

Mapping all these dimensions is essential to understand situations, to communicate this understanding amongst stakeholders, and to plan activities. Production and utilisation of different types of maps (multi-scale maps, multi-factor maps and historical maps) should therefore become a routine part of humanitarian operations in urban settings.

Vulnerability and resilience are not randomly spread over a city and its urban population. They have physical, economic and social drivers. To understand these drivers and to map them offers powerful keys to understand how the city functions, the vulnerability and resiliency of its population and to identify opportunities to minimise the former and optimize the latter. In addition, the impacts of events often follow certain geographical patterns: Properly developed and utilised maps can go a long way in helping to understand the spatial evolution of urban settings and the factors behind it.

Mapping risks is also a “mission critical” piece of work in prevention, preparedness, reaction and post-crisis operations. Cities are often erected in areas where there are multiple, multi-factor and multi-form risks. However, they are rarely randomly spread out; their distribution can usually be mapped out.

5.3. Multi-stakeholder, multi-sector and multi-level coordination

Urban issues are by essence multi-sector and multi-layered, involving a large spectrum of actors. At the national level, the array of actors comprises: the central state’s ministries, regional and local representations of the state, elected MPs, municipal councils and mayors, municipal services, private service providers, local churches, mosques and temples, community-based organisations and local charities. At the international level, there are: international civil protection teams under UNDAC, UN agencies, Red Cross and Red Crescent institutions, development and humanitarian NGOs, development and humanitarian bilateral and multilateral donors, city-to-city cooperation, private foundations, the private sector and the military. Ensuring that these actors coordinate with each other is a daunting task.
Several areas seem to be particularly weak:

- **The transition from primo-coordination to OCHA-led coordination**: While coordination between civil protection bodies seems to function relatively well thanks to the V-OSOCC/OSOCC system, the transition to OCHA-led coordination is not necessarily easy. This is largely due to the fact that UNDAC-led coordination is designed to engage with National Disaster Management Agencies (NDMA) and with Local Disaster Management Agencies (LEMA) from the start, while OCHA deals mainly with international agencies and has proven its difficulties to link with national actors (GPPI/Groupe URD; 2010; Grunewald & Binder, 2010).

- **Civil-military coordination remains difficult**, despite efforts to develop and disseminate guidelines and to organize common exercises. Though MCDA is now universally recognised, political agendas often trigger military deployment beyond the “last resort” concept.

- **Coordination with the private sector remains elusive**. Despite the fact that it can offer many opportunities in terms of urban services and urban economy (ISDR, 2008).

### 5.4. Protection and gender: complex challenges

Protection in urban settings covers many issues. Some are classic protection issues related to breaches of **IHL or refugee law**. In most cases, the ICRC, UNHCR and specialised institutions (NGOs, UN specialised bodies) are fully mobilised, even though they do not necessarily come up with the expected results. Protection of IDPs under the UN Guiding principles for the protection of IDPs (Deng, 2006, Kälin, 2008) is an area still under development. The most recent product, the IASC operational guidelines for the protection of persons in situations of natural disaster (IASC & Brooking, 2011) complements the existing protection toolbox which has so far been largely focused on conflict situations.
It articulates the list of issues and related recommendations around several themes:

**Box 14: Protection issues in humanitarian aid in urban settings**

Classic protection issues linked to IHL and human rights:
- Lack of safety and security
- Gender-based violence
- Abuse, neglect or exploitation of children
- Forced relocation
- Family separation
- Inadequate law enforcement and restricted access to a fair and efficient judicial system

Protection issues related to socio-economic rights:
- Unequal access to assistance and services, and discrimination in aid provision
- Loss or destruction of personal documents and difficulties replacing them
- Inadequate access to employment and livelihood opportunities
- Lack of property restitution and access to land

The work of the African Union in 2009 led to a new legal framework to deal with IDP protection on the continent. This is a very promising development. However, whether or not it can be applied in many urban contexts remains to be seen.

Many of these protection issues are linked to gender and to child protection. Women and children are indeed often especially vulnerable in urban contexts; prostitution and gender-based violence on the one hand, child labour and child trafficking on the other.

However, implementing protection programmes in a densely populated environment is difficult. To be seen as an “informant” for aid agencies doing protection work can entail high levels of personal risk for individuals. The social stigma attached to being a victim of GBV can make case reporting and follow up very sensitive.

*An IDP camp in Mogadishu (2009)*

The relations between communities, the police and the judicial system are often very difficult and confidentiality in case management is not only essential, but can be a question of life or death for the concerned persons or the informants. The Protection Cluster has developed a large toolbox of file and data management mechanisms in order to preserve confidentiality.

The articulation between protection and other sectors is an important factor in urban settings. Access to health (especially when rape has been committed), counselling (if there is a risk of psychological trauma, for instance after torture, hostage-taking or arrest) and livelihood support (when social exclusion is a risk), are important complementary measures to a pure protection response.
5.5. Ageing and disabled populations in cities in crisis

The humanitarian community is still gaining experience in responding to the needs of the elderly in situations of crisis. The ageing population is often extremely vulnerable because it is cut off from all the “village and community solidarity mechanisms” that normally exist in rural contexts. Recent efforts to develop specific programmes by agencies such as HELPAGE are paving the way to new approaches focusing on the specific needs of this category of person. Methodological tools are also being developed (MAZURANA & al, 2011).

In addition, as mobility is often a central element of urban survival strategies, those with reduced mobility are therefore less equipped to survive in a disaster-affected or war-torn city. This factor applies to the ageing population, but also to disabled people in the wider population. Disabled people were present before the crisis and, in most instances, very little was done for them.

Elderly IDP in Bogota (2003)

Even under normal conditions, cities are not easy contexts for disabled people to live in. They are further at risk during and after the crisis and see their number often drastically increased as a result of the crisis itself. Efforts are being made to develop guidelines and programmes to ensure that these often highly vulnerable groups are more properly taken into account and supported (HI, 2010) in all the aspects of their life in crisis-affected cities. This means paying specific attention to access to medical services, including specialised support (for chronic diseases, psychosocial support, or physiotherapy), social services (including support to means of survival) and housing (adapted shelter design).

5.6. Build back better, but how?

The vulnerability of cities is first and foremost the expression of their political, urban, economic and social construction. This vulnerability is revealed in times of conflict or disaster. It can also take different forms depending on whether the war or disaster affects the urban agglomeration directly or indirectly.

Then comes the time to rebuild - the stakes are high, because the resources and policies used to rebuild cities after disasters are extremely costly, often complex and always uncertain. In Kabul, haphazard unauthorised reconstruction (with no master plan) is the reality on the ground, in the face of political indecision, corruption and competition between donors. The debate, especially within international financial institutions, hinges on technocratic visions that ignore people, the diversity of human society and the existence of the informal sector. By the time this realisation hits home, there may be nothing left but a disfigured, unmanageable city.
Reconstruction budgets are huge, political issues complex and the risk of corruption is high. Some cities, such as Beirut and Managua, have rebuilt themselves with very little international aid, practically no town-planning blueprint and mostly on a private basis with support from the diaspora. The absence of proper urban planning can have catastrophic consequences: disfigured landscapes (depriving the city of the opportunity to develop a tourist industry), disorganised services and disregard for building standards and disaster-proofing. Rebuilding cities flattened by earthquakes or destroyed by bombing poses different questions (Deprez and Labuttat, 2010) such as who will do the rebuilding. Building and public works

Box 15: The case of Kabul
The reconstruction of Kabul is currently one of the most complex issues of post-Taliban Afghanistan (BOYER, 2010). As of early 2002, with its heavy concentration of international aid, Kabul acted as a magnet for many agencies arriving in Afghanistan. Then, at the beginning of 2003, when it was realised that aid was staying in Kabul and not contributing towards rebuilding the rest of the country, there was a massive flow of funds to the countryside. Many issues needed to be dealt with, such as where to find water, how to manage sewage, refuse collection, the establishment of health and education services, the collection of roof taxes and so on. The few major donors who have taken an interest in the subject (UN HABITAT, World Bank) have found themselves blocked by internal disputes within the municipal authorities and by the constantly changing situation, with new problems arising practically every day. Another classic phenomenon, the clash between traditionalists and modernisers, is in full swing: some want to make Kabul into Manhattan, with skyscrapers, huge shopping centres and motorway interchanges, or even to create a “New Kabul” on the outskirts of the old Kabul, others seek to improve living conditions in the existing city and to preserve the image of a city on a human scale in a country whose population is still below 20 million.

The case of Grozny, North Caucasus
The reconstruction of Grozny, which has begun in some areas although the conflict is by no means over, is being influenced by motives. There are undoubtedly important technical and town-planning issues to consider: whole districts need to be bulldozed because incessant bombing has weakened the infrastructure and foundations of buildings. Rebuilding the city as it was would mean rebuilding the ugly barracks of socialist Grozny, but how can you consult people about what they want when they do not recognize the existing government? In destroyed Chechnya, as in Ingushetia and Dagestan, NGOs are trying to provide solutions to the need for shelter, as spending the harsh winter under tarpaulins or tents in a city in the north Caucasus is a dreadful ordeal (Cosgrave & Grünewald, 2005). Innovations such as the "house-in-a-box", a temporary structure made of wood and plywood, aim to improve living conditions in the short-term.

contractors are effective in these situations, with plenty of interaction (not to mention collusion) with the interests of local politicians and developers.
5.7. Build back safer and be better prepared

5.7.1. Prevention

Disaster Risk Reduction activities have been part of the intervention tool box in many rural areas for many years (ISDR, 2002). Current predictions estimate that two thirds of the world’s population will be living in urban contexts within two to three decades (by 2015 there will be 23 cities with populations of over 10 million, 19 of these in developing countries). The stakes are therefore high for disaster risk reduction, disaster preparedness and climate change adaptation (Wamsler, 2006). The number of agencies involved in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) grew significantly (ISDR, 2004), including from the private sector (ISDR, 2008). The reference for DG ECHO Disaster Risk Reduction strategy, the Hyogio Framework for Action, specifies that disaster risk is compounded by increasing vulnerabilities related to various elements including unplanned urbanization. Thus, urban risk reduction is recognized as one of the five priorities for action of the Hyogo Framework for Action. There have been very interesting exchanges in relation to urban disasters between the DG ECHO office in Bangkok and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) and between the DG Office in Managua and regional disaster reduction platforms.

The Latin America and Caribbean Region (LAC) is particularly rich in disaster preparedness initiatives. DG ECHO has clearly identified that risk prevention in urban settings should primarily be the responsibility of urban institutions and the development agencies which support them. However, in specific contexts, where risks are extreme and the size of the impact is very high, it engaged in DRR activities in urban settings. The regional work done by DIPECHO in the Andean region, bringing together cities from 6 countries (Lima, La Paz, Cusco, Bogota and Caracas) through UNDP is a very important milestone in DG ECHO involvement in tackling urban resilience. The specific work done on Lima Metro is another example of concrete engagement with research bodies, municipal authorities and National Disaster Management institutions in order to identify, map and mitigate disaster risks and develop the capacity to react. This includes, among others, policies to make hospitals and schools safer (ISDR, 2007).

Projects and processes are being carried out in larger urban centres in the LAC region which deal with the different risk issues that exist in many urban areas. The various activities and efforts that have been funded by the European Union Disaster Preparedness Programme (EU-DIPECHO) over the years have contributed to learning in the urban risk field and the development of a conceptual and methodological framework for addressing urban disaster risk. The DRR programme’s consultations with members of academia, NGOs, UN agencies and international corporations and the integrated neighborhood approach developed by UN-Habitat for the post-earthquake response in Haiti have been useful contributions to the ongoing development of an approach to urban risk.

There is still a lot of work to do, as shown in Port-au-Prince and Cagayan de Oro. DRR should be strategically injected at all levels of urban planning, building standards and service delivery. The long term aim should be to develop and rebuild safer cities, in line with the “Resilient cities” approach developed by ISRD.
The quality of building and longer-term thinking about urban renewal usually suffers in post-crisis contexts. Obviously, earthquake resistance is a key issue though ensuring conformity with building regulations is a constant struggle. The extra cost involved in limiting the risk of collapse when tremors occur is undoubtedly high, but the benefits can only be assessed when the next earthquake comes along.

As part of their “Make your city resilient” campaign, ISDR and UN-Habitat are promoting a checklist of 10 essential actions which are useful for DRR programming in urban settings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ten-point Checklist - Essentials for Making Cities Resilient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essential 1</strong>: Put in place organization and coordination to understand and reduce disaster risk, based on participation of citizen groups and civil society. Build local alliances. Ensure that all departments understand their role with regard to disaster risk reduction and preparedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essential 2</strong>: Assign a budget for disaster risk reduction and provide incentives for homeowners, low-income families, communities, businesses and public sector to invest in reducing the risks they face.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Essential 3</strong>: Maintain up-to-date data on hazards and vulnerabilities, prepare risk assessments and use these as the basis for urban development plans and decisions. Ensure that this information and the plans for your city's resilience are readily available to the public and fully discussed with them.</td>
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<td><strong>Essential 4</strong>: Maintain up-to-date data on hazards and vulnerabilities, prepare risk assessments and use these as the basis for urban development plans and decisions. Ensure that this information and the plans for your city's resilience are readily available to the public and fully discussed with them.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Essential 5</strong>: Assess the safety of all schools and health facilities and upgrade these as necessary.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Essential 6</strong>: Apply and enforce realistic, risk compliant building regulations and land use planning principles. Identify safe land for low-income citizens and develop upgrading of informal settlements, wherever feasible.</td>
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<td><strong>Essential 7</strong>: Ensure education programmes and training on disaster risk reduction are in place in schools and local communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Essential 8</strong>: Protect ecosystems and natural buffers to mitigate floods, storm surges and other hazards to which your city may be vulnerable. Adapt to climate change by building on good risk reduction practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Essential 9</strong>: Install early warning systems and emergency management capacities in your city and hold regular public preparedness drills.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Essential 10</strong>: After any disaster, ensure that the needs of the survivors are placed at the centre of reconstruction with support for them and their community organizations to design and help implement responses, including rebuilding homes and livelihoods.</td>
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5.7.2. Response preparedness

In sudden urban crises, as well as when a city is heavily bombed, the capacity to react rapidly with professionalism is essential. When the clock is ticking, the capacity to deploy teams who can work alongside the local population, prevent additional accidents and properly rescue, stabilise and evacuate wounded people from under the rubble is essential. More efforts have to be invested in developing and strengthening this capacity. Civil protection mechanisms should be in place.

It is becoming increasingly recognised that the first people to respond in an emergency are the inhabitants of the city themselves. Energy and means should therefore be invested in strengthening their capacity to deal with disasters: first aid training, evacuation rehearsals, pre-positioning of household survival kits, etc. should be in place before disaster strikes.

It is worth noting the considerable cost of deploying international Civil Protection units. They need to be self-sufficient for an appropriate period and require a lot of equipment which is expensive to move from one location or region to another. In Haiti, the cost of deploying the fifty or so international search and rescue teams needs to be compared to the limited number of people who were saved. In addition, even if tremendous progress has been made to speed up the deployment, including standby teams and standby logistical arrangements (especially with the involvement of MCDA), rapidity still remains an issue when the clock is ticking for victims trapped under the rubble. Everything that can contribute to improving the local response, even if this requires an initial investment, allows both significant gains in terms of timeliness, effectiveness and, major financial savings in the long term. National and local Civil Protection units, prefecture and municipal entities, as well as national Red Cross societies and their numerous volunteers, all need to be given greater support.

Confronted with large-scale disasters affecting urban contexts, national and regional institutions have certainly not remained idle. The rise of regional bodies to prevent, prepare for and respond to crises of all kinds is one of the most striking features of the last few years. The creation of the Asian Humanitarian Association (AHA) based in Jakarta, the most recent HOPEFOR initiative which will result in the creation of a Centre of Excellence on Civil-military coordination for disaster response in Qatar, the emergence of a West African capability for disaster response based in Senegal, the strengthening of the European mechanism for civil protection currently hosted by DG ECHO in the European Commission, all demonstrate the strength of this regional dynamism. These initiatives should be supported and encouraged on the condition that they continue to work on the basis of recognised procedures (INSARAG) and principles. The recent publication of the Standard Operating Procedures for Regional standby arrangements and coordination of joint disaster relief and emergency response operations, known as SASOP (ASEAN, 2011), is a clear indication that the importance of such procedures and principles is widely recognised.
Conclusion and future challenges

Crisis in urban settings have been ignored for too long

As urbanisation proceeds apace, people in cities increasingly find themselves faced with the destructive effects of conflicts and natural disasters, combined with the threats of urban violence, acute poverty and pandemics. The strategies, methods and skills needed to cope with these situations are still being developed, because for a long time the humanitarian aid community largely disregarded the specific characteristics of urban challenges. Cities are also increasingly the home of refugees and IDPs who find safety in anonymity, often unnoticed and illegal, in search of better opportunities.

Finally recognised

Things have recently changed and UN agencies, Red Cross and Red Crescent institutions, NGOs and donors have come to realise that if they do not rapidly learn how to work in and manage urban disasters (or disasters in urban settings) they will lose some of their relevance. Several research projects and policy-oriented projects have been initiated, bringing together academia, operational agencies, policy makers, think tanks and donor agencies. Aid agencies have to explore how to engage with urban civil society in order to ensure that technocratic solutions do not override community consultation. Permanent monitoring and stock-taking of developments in aid practice in urban settings will be essential, and good practice should be shared across the sector.

The rise of regional and national disaster management mechanisms

At the same time, the emergence of regional and national capacities is a key feature of the last few years. The development of the European Civil Protection system (now incorporated within DG ECHO), the ASEAN agreement on disaster management and emergency response (ASEAN, 2011), the work done by REDLAC in Latin America or the new HOPEFOR initiative of Qatar, Turkey and the Dominican Republic, all demonstrate the dynamism of these regional mechanisms. They will be part of the future and the aid system will have to adjust and develop coordination mechanisms with them.

Build Back Better and Build Back Safer?

President Clinton, speaking about post-tsunami reconstruction in South Asia, said it was necessary to "build back better". Beyond this slogan lies the reality; urban settings are increasingly vulnerable and their populations more and more at risk. In urban areas, how that ‘triple B’ is interpreted and transformed into real strategies, in order to make cities more resilient, will be crucial. It will determine whether more harmonious, more human and safer cities emerge or whether tomorrow’s urban time bombs are activated.
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TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF HUMANITARIAN AID

INNOVATING

EVALUATING

DISSEMINATING

EXCHANGING

ANALYSING

TRAINING

PROVIDING SUPPORT

INFLUENCING