



Human  
Settlements  
in Crisis

# HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS, AND THE ROLE OF UN-HABITAT

Strategic Policy on Human Settlements in Crisis and  
Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction Framework

**UN**  **HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



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Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction Framework

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# CONTENTS

<b>HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS, AND THE ROLE OF UN-HABITAT</b>	<b>4</b>
Foreword	4
Introduction	6
<b>STRATEGIC POLICY ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS IN CRISIS</b>	<b>7</b>
1. Introduction and Overview	7
2. Mandate of UN-HABITAT	8
3. The Strategic Policy	8
4. Role and Responsibilities of UN-HABITAT	10
5. Substantive focus and implementation approach	11
6. Financial Implications	14
<b>SUSTAINABLE RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION</b>	<b>15</b>
Introduction	15
<b>ANNEX I</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>MANDATORY DOCUMENTS</b>	<b>32</b>

# HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS, AND THE ROLE OF UN-HABITAT

## FOREWORD

I am pleased to forward this publication to all staff working within UN-HABITAT. It contains our “*Strategic Policy on Human Settlements in Crisis*” guiding our engagement in humanitarian operations. Additionally, you will find the “*Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction*” (SRR) framework which is a base document, evolved through several in-depth consultations both within UN-HABITAT, and with our partners for implementing the policy. The Disaster Post-conflict and Safety Section continues to develop guidelines, indicators, and programme methodology. Our objective is to create a normative framework that allows UN-HABITAT to monitor both our own work and that of others in promoting sustainable urban development from the earliest possible opportunity in post crisis situations.

This approach reflects my own position that the victims of crises, whether the crises are human-made or the result of natural hazards or climate change induced vulnerabilities, need not be characterized as human liabilities. Rather, treating victims with dignity and respect, encouraging and supporting their role in their own recovery process, creating opportunities for their emergence from under the humanitarian umbrella into full self-reliance, is the core principle inherent in the SRR framework.

I would draw your attention to the specific roles and responsibilities outlined in the Strategic Policy on Human Settlements in Crisis as we all have obligations and responsibilities. Moreover, as I am now one of the Principals within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in addition to my responsibilities to the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, I call upon staff from the entire Agency at all levels, to do your part.

Furthermore, you will note the reference to partners in both the attached documents. In order to succeed and maintain the credibility of this Agency, it is imperative that those UN-HABITAT partners engaged in our work become familiar with our approach and assist in the implementation of our mandate. This requires commitment and diligence in strengthening our partnerships with humanitarian agencies and to ensure we fulfill our role in supporting their mandates as well.

Finally, whilst I recognize that we have extensive experience working in crisis conditions over the years, we have sometimes done so in the absence of appropriate methodologies, approaches or monitoring mechanisms. With the following strategy framework, this gap in our normative system is being addressed. With the tools now

being produced to assist you in its implementation, I will be counting on your input to meet our reporting obligations both internally to our Committee of Permanent Representatives, and Governing Council delegates, as well as externally through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs, to the Secretary General, and the General Assembly. Finally, this approach, in line with our Medium Term Strategic and Institutional Plan, illustrates a key element of our Enhanced Normative and Operational Framework which is to draw in all UN-HABITAT staff to address sustainable development at the most critical moments.



Anna Tibaijuka,  
Executive Director, UN-HABITAT  
Under-Secretary-General, United Nations

## INTRODUCTION

In November 2007, UN-HABITAT's Committee of Permanent Representatives endorsed the *Strategic Policy on Human Settlements in Crisis*, concluding a four year policy development exercise undertaken in consultation with partners and through two successive Governing Councils (20 and 21). The process began with the development of the "Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction Framework" – a conceptual framework articulating two key principles; the first - in times of crisis, the highest possible development gain can be made in the shortest possible timeframe, and the second - a set of strategic interventions in an emergency phase, if integrated in sustainable development goals, can both reduce the period of crisis and build a platform for early recovery and development.

Linked to the Medium Term Strategic and Institutional Plan, the following documents create for the first time in UN-HABITAT a normative framework for measuring the efficacy of its work both on reconstruction of settlements damaged by war or natural disasters; as well as its performance in reducing vulnerability and assisting governments in ensuring more resilient cities. This last point also links to UN-HABITAT's normative agenda embodied in the Medium Term Strategic and Institutional Plan in the forthcoming new Campaign on "Sustainable Urbanisation".

A set of programme development and programme monitoring tools and guidelines have been under development during 2008 that will assist UN-HABITAT in our work on disaster response and risk reduction. These will be published and circulated throughout the organisation and to the network of partners already implementing all or part of the Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction approach.

With the invitation from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to UN-HABITAT to join as a full member in May 2008, our commitment to the humanitarian community and its commitment to UN-HABITAT are now as formalised as they can be. What remains is the challenge of providing consistent, coherent, and collaborative support in coming years. The Strategic Policy, the Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction Framework, and the forthcoming guidelines are all tools intended to assist UN-HABITAT achieve this, not just as a programme – rather as a reliable partner Agency within the humanitarian community.

Finally, none of these documents defines UN-HABITAT as a post-disaster life-saving, organisation. Those mandates are already well defined and resourced with our partners in the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, and its operational body - the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. By virtue of our membership in these bodies, it is clear that the humanitarian community see the value added by having expertise on shelter and human settlements within the planning and response system – for the reasons outlined above and in the detail given below.

# STRATEGIC POLICY ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS IN CRISIS

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This policy document articulates UN-HABITAT's role with regard to human settlements in crisis. It responds to Resolution HSP/GC/20/17 and supporting documents produced in response to Resolution HSP/GC/19/9 in relation to "Post-conflict, natural and human-made disaster assessment and reconstruction". Further, this policy has been developed as an integral part of the UN-HABITAT's Medium Term Strategic and Institutional Plan (MTSIP). The new plan articulates a specific provision for urban resiliency and vulnerability reduction in Focus Area 2, whereas post-crisis recovery and reconstruction is addressed under Focus Area 3.

The policy has also been developed as part of the process of UN reform on humanitarian affairs led by the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) and its coordinating body, the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The Humanitarian Review and Reform process resulted in a new cluster-based planning and coordinating system that draws on both humanitarian and development actors in an integrated response and

The ECHA review process has recognised the unique niche of UN-HABITAT as an important agency in the humanitarian arena. Through its focus on housing, land and settlement planning, UN-HABITAT provides a cross-cutting approach that reduces vulnerabilities and risk both before and after disasters. The cost of sustaining displaced people in conditions of dependency can be enormous if early measures are not taken to plan and provide for sustainable shelter, infrastructure and services, and for restoring livelihoods. UN-HABITAT's unique approach to disaster management, reconstruction and recovery is based on its long-standing experience

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