URBAN RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

An enabling institutional and policy framework to support resilient urban recovery at scale and the renewal of the social contract in urban crisis contexts

Policy Brief March 2022

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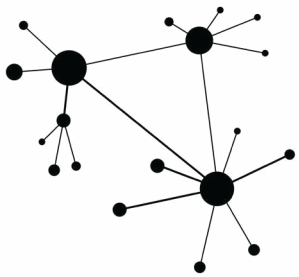

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Content

A Collaborative Response to Increasingly Urbanised Crises

1. The Urban Recovery Framework (URF) is a key instrument to enhance response to urban crises. The aim of the URF is to create an enabling environment for more effective recovery in urban areas, affected by natural or man-made crises, including conflict. It clarifies institutional and multi-level governance arrangements, policies and plans, the coordination mechanisms and the financing instruments needed to drive and steer the implementation of immediate and medium-term urban recovery interventions while laying the foundations for longer-term resilience. The basis of the framework is urban profiling, an analysis tool that supports a better understanding of displacement patterns, integrates various sectoral assessments of damages and pre-existing vulnerabilities into a spatial analysis of the city. The tool also helps to unpack the complexity of urban areas and systems, preparing the ground for a tailored granular area-based response. As such, the URF is a tool to work across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. It also helps to implement the New Urban Agenda in crisis settings, building back better and supporting cities to gain ground towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and other global agendas such as the Paris Agreement, the Global Compact on Refugees, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

2. The URF is intended as an important addition to the toolbox developed in support of the "Joint Declaration on Post-Crisis Assessments and Recovery Planning" of the European Commission, the United Nations Development Group and the World Bank signed in 2008. The declaration sought to mobilize these institutions and resources to "harmonise and coordinate post-crisis response frameworks to enhance country resilience to crisis, by answering recovery needs of vulnerable populations and strengthening the capacity of national institutions for effective prevention, response and recovery". The declaration outlined a common platform for engagement at global and national levels, as well as methodologies for needs assessments and recovery planning following disaster and conflict. Building on the declaration, the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Union released the "Joint Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessments (RPBAs): A Practical Note to Assessments and Planning" in 2017. The note outlined a joint approach to identify and address recovery and peacebuilding requirements as well as longer-term strategy elaboration in countries facing conflict or transitioning out of a conflict-related crisis.

3. Since the joint declaration was released in 2008, there has been an increase in the number of natural and man-made crises, particularly in complex and high-density urban settings. This includes conflict-induced damage and destruction in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, natural disaster impacts such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the 2019 cyclone in Mozambique and large-scale influxes of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to cities as observed in Lebanon, Somalia and Colombia. These challenges have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in impoverished and underserviced urban areas, and on urban economies and activities, owing to lockdown measures. Even as recently as March 2022, the conflict in Ukraine continues to impress upon the international community the severe consequences of urban warfare for civilians, with the fighting causing damages to residential buildings and critical infrastructure and services, and displacing hundreds of thousands across and between cities. Humanitarian needs in urban and protracted displacement crises are enormous and will continue to grow because of climate change-related disasters and continuing state fragility in some locations.

4. Urban disasters and conflicts cause disruption to productive sectors, service provision and institutional management systems, which often has ramifications in surrounding rural areas and at national scales, taking into account also the growing share of urban economies in the national GDP. For instance, the conflict damages in Syria's largest city and vital economic centre, Aleppo, has severely affected the national economy. The recent collapse in the energy sector in Lebanon was aggravated by the destruction of the national energy company, *Electricité du Liban*, in the 4 August 2020 blast in Beirut. Urban crises impact, in other words, exceed the extents of physically affected areas. Crises unfolding in cities therefore have to be understood and responded to by both addressing the suspension in access to, among others, livelihoods, protection mechanisms, services and housing for large populations at the local levels, by addressing and understanding the critical impact such

events have on systems and economic activities at regional and national levels, and by improving the countries overall abilities to respond and bounce back from crises.

5. While pre-crises functionality and productivity of urban systems and economies can vary greatly in cities affected by crises, it is important to recognise that cities are often governed by both formal and informal systems, as well as multi-level governance and multiple municipal mandates. Crucially, these formal and informal systems work interdependently for the provision of essential services and the response to the basic needs of vulnerable populations (e.g., for water and electricity provision). Moreover, in some contexts, local governance models have emerged that are sustained by *de facto authorities* who are not aligned to the central state, adding extra layers of complexity. Governance structures and management systems are also often affected directly by natural and man-made disasters. In Haiti, for example, the 2010 earthquake caused government buildings to collapse, severely reducing officials' capacities to respond to the emergency. Notably though, local authorities, stakeholders and service providers are the first responders to urban crises. This requires external aid actors to acquire a granular understanding of the governance structures in place and align with locally initiated responses or leverage existing capacities and knowledge.

6. Responding to the overwhelming scale and destruction from urban crises is costly. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), for instance, the huge financial resources that need to be channelled into recovery reflects the scale of destruction of its cities: $30 billion for destroyed houses in Syria, $8 billion for 16 cities in Yemen and $88 billion for Iraq of which $1 billion for Mosul alone. Furthermore, member states of the United Nations have spent over $13,5 billion after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, while well over $90 billion was spent in Afghanistan on reconstruction after 2001, notably with varying success. This money was spent in the context of state retreat, deterioration, or slow recovery, while eroded municipal capacities caused systemic challenges in urban basic service provision. The resulting inequitable access to rights and services are recognized stressors on social cohesion and can constitute major impediments to peace.

7. Most of the finance instruments to support recovery are tailored to support national governments and national budgets, and often fail to directly support local governments and service providers. These financing instruments need to be supplemented by blended financing streams, including mechanisms to mobilize the private sector, and the tangible and intangible assets held by communities and local businesses.

8. Displaced people, both the internally displaced and refugees, increasingly seek refuge in urban areas to access basic services, livelihood opportunities and shelter as an alternative to camps. In order to maintain their social networks and livelihoods, many displaced people prefer to stay as close as possible to home, moving from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, before moving onward to other cities or crossing international boundaries. The pull and push factors for movement from and to cities during crises are complex and are not solely related to security, but also to the functionality of urban systems, access to basic services, education, health and livelihoods. As such, the return of displaced persons to locations where the political, security and safety conditions have been partially or fully achieved, depends on successful urban recovery. Arab States carry the largest burden of displaced populations globally, both in terms of cross border and internal displacement. Other regions, too, may see similar burdens in the months to come. In the first weeks of March 2022, over 3,6 million people were displaced to neighbouring countries, from Ukraine.

9. Urban crises response requires capacities from humanitarian actors that lie beyond their traditional mandates and *modus operandi*. This includes the strengthening institutions and the coordination of recovery activities across sectors, critically, applying a localised perspective to resilience interventions. Most international humanitarian organisations are not configured to apply this kind of approach, neither at the onset of a crisis, nor as it becomes protracted. Furthermore, discussions on urban recovery may need to address sensitive issues, for example about the degree to which decentralisation and local public service delivery is supported vis-à-vis the role of central authorities. This requires a more longitudinal and incremental planning process which the traditional humanitarian response architecture scarcely allows for.

10. The emergence of a growing number of complex, multi-faceted and protracted crises affecting cities, has prompted international, national and local partners to develop and pilot new tools and ways of working that are more attuned to the specificities of urban crisis contexts. In recent years, several urban profiling and analysis tools have emerged to guide needs overview and response planning in cities, and urban response methodologies have been formulated, in particular "area-based approaches" (ABAs). International humanitarian organisations increasingly recognize ABAs as critical tools for spatial coordination, prioritisation and sequencing of activities at lower administrative levels. ABAs are also promoted within several humanitarian clusters under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) cluster system.

11. While area-based approaches have been developed specifically to identify priority interventions with the greatest impact in the context of enormous needs and competing humanitarian funding requirements, these approaches have often been applied by only a limited number of partners at a sub-city level or applied as a parameter under humanitarian cluster strategies as ad-hoc coordination mechanisms.