What's missing?

Adding context to the urban response toolbox

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Acknowledgements

Contents

List of acronyms

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Performance & Accountability in Humanitarian Action
ACF	Action contre la Faim (Action Against Hunger)
CSO	Community Service Organisation
DFID	Department for International Development
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GECARR	Good Enough Context Analysis for Rapid Response
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPPAC	Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict
HLP	Housing, land and property
IAHE	Inter Agency Humanitarian evaluation
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICA	Institutional and Context Analysis (UNDP) / Integrated Context Analysis (WFP)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IPACS	Integrating Peacebuilding and Conflict Sensitivity
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KII	Key Informant Interview
HQ	Headquarters
JIPS	Joint IDP Profiling Service
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
MERV	Monitoring System for Development-Related Changes
MHCUA	Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation

MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
QAS	Qualitative Assessment Scorecard
RCRC	Red Cross Red Crescent
R&D	Research & Development
RSA	Resilient Systems Analysis
SRAF	Situation and Response Analysis framework
STRESS	Strategic Resilience Assessment
UMVAT	Urban Multi-Sectorial Vulnerability Analysis Tool
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
URAF	Urban Response Analysis Framework
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USAGT	Urban Situation Analysis Guide and Toolkit
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit
WRC	Women's Refugee Commission

Section 1:
Introduction

Despite increasing recognition of the need for context-relevant in humanitarian response, particularly in urban areas, there is little clarity of what this looks like or how to achieve it. In order to explore whether 'context tools' can help improve humanitarians' ability to think and act more effectively in urban environments, this paper asks the following questions:

- What is context?

- Do we need to understand it to respond more effectively to urban crises? If so, why?

- What are 'tools to understand context'? How do these differ from one another, and from other sorts of analysis?

- How can humanitarians use these tools most effectively?

Section 1: Introduction

Recognition of the need for humanitarian response to be 'context-relevant' has been increasing. It has featured in discussions around the World Humanitarian Forum (see Knox Clarke & Obrecht, 2015b) and in initiatives to improve humanitarian response in urban areas, such as the Global Alliance for Urban Crises (GAUC, 2015). It comes up in discussions on coordination, accountability, localisation, and effectiveness and is now broadly accepted as something humanitarian response should be striving towards.

Despite this awareness, there is little clarity about what context relevance looks like or how to achieve it. For urban humanitarian response, context relevance requires grappling with complex, interconnected environments. Although the number of crises in urban areas has risen in the past decade, urban humanitarian responses are still criticised for lack of context relevance, just as they were in post-earthquake Haiti in 2010. Humanitarian response may not always be relevant to the urban context because little is done to understand it. The humanitarian sector requires a cultural shift to recognise the value of understanding context.

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Responding to increasing calls for humanitarians to engage with the complexity of urban environments, systems and stakeholders, ALNAP's 2016 paper 'Stepping Back: Understanding Cities and their Systems' argues that understanding urban areas is important in improving response to urban crises, and offers some examples of the sorts of issues and actors humanitarians should better understand. The question remained, however, of how humanitarians can obtain the information they need to understand urban contexts and use this to improve their response.

In the research process for 'Stepping Back', a number of tools were identified that had the potential to meet this need. Described as 'context analysis', 'urban profiles, 'situation analysis' etc, these tools were different in many ways but similar in that they all sought to improve understanding of context.

In order to explore the potential of this growing body of tools, this paper addresses the following question:

Can tools to understand context improve humanitarians' ability to think and act more effectively in urban environments?

This main question is broken down into a number of sub-questions:

- What is context?

- Do we need to understand it to respond more effectively to urban crises? If so, why?

- What are 'tools to understand context'? How do these differ from one another, and from other sorts of analysis?

- How can humanitarians use these tools most effectively?

Using context tools to understand urban areas is a relatively new practice for humanitarians. A number of relevant tools were identified during the course of the research, and this paper is largely based on learning from them. The paper is based on a literature review of over 400 documents, 76 key informant interviews (KIIs) and a detailed study of 25 tools. ALNAP also organised a learning exchange and participated in other events that have contributed to this paper. The full methodology can be found in Annex B.

This paper is aimed at three main audiences:

1. Operational humanitarians who are unfamiliar with tools for understanding context, what they offer and where to start.

2. Operational humanitarians already using these tools but facing common challenges and wanting to learn from the experiences of others, and to understand the differences between tools and how they complement each other.

3. Those who support operational humanitarians, such as donors and policymakers, who want to understand the evidence behind these tools and what is needed in order to use them and their analysis most effectively.

Bite-size material highlighting the most relevant issues for each audience can be found at: **https://www.alnap.org/our-topics/urban-response.**

Following Section 1 which introduces the topic and research question, Section 2 asks what 'context' means, and whether there is a gap in current understanding. Section 3 explores the possibility of using tools to improve the understanding of context. Section 4 looks at using context tools, including decisions about the scope of analysis, methodologies, when to use these tools, roles and responsibilities, audience and outputs. Section 5 considers how to support the use of context tools, including relationships, individual and organisational factors and funding. Finally, Section 6 draws out conclusions, reflections and recommendations. Annexes include a detailed methodology, and summaries of each of the 25 tools examined.

Section 2:
Making the case for context

- Context is the environment and circumstances within which something happens and which can help to explain it. It exists outside any situation which may have occurred, and is broader than the experience of any individual or group.

- Understanding context can improve urban humanitarian response by informing and improving programming, building on what already exists in the urban environment, and having a holistic, and ideally shared, view of what's happening and how things are interconnected

- Urban humanitarian response to date has frequently been disconnected from context, demonstrating a lack of action. There is an urgent need to address this gap.

Section 2: Making the case for context

What is context? Why is it important to understand it, particularly in urban humanitarian response? Do we already understand context or is there a gap to fill?

2.1 What is context?

Despite the widespread rhetoric about the need for 'context-relevant' or 'context-sensitive' humanitarian response, the research identified surprisingly few definitions of 'context'. In the absence of a common definition, the term is used inconsistently to mean a variety of different things.

Figure 1: What is context?
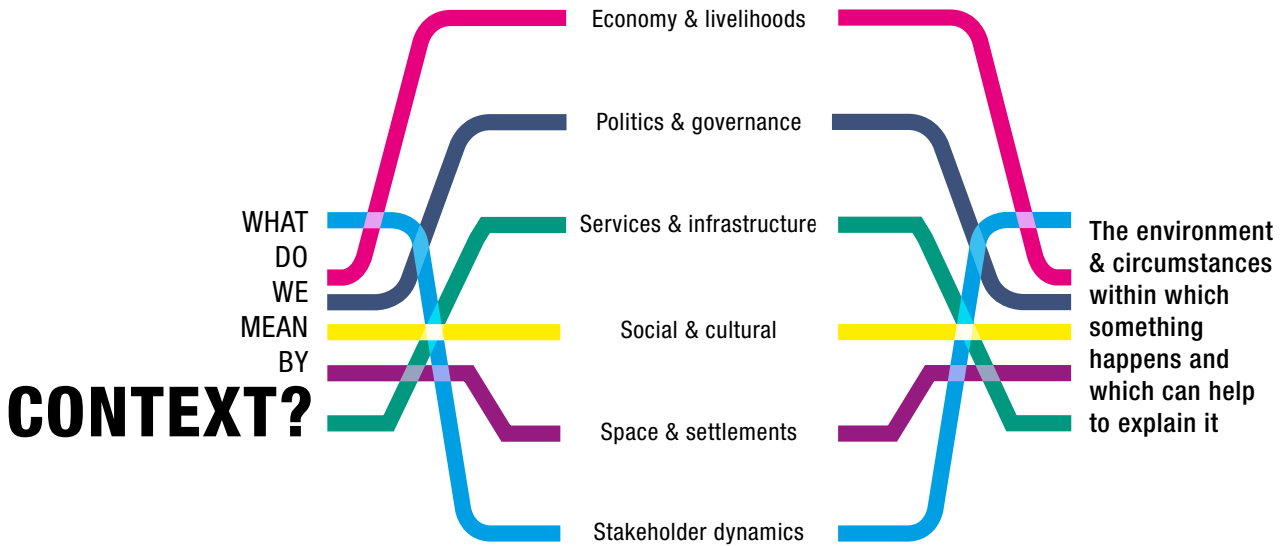
WHAT DO WE MEAN BY **CONTEXT?**

Economy & livelihoods
Politics & governance
Services & infrastructure
Social & cultural
Space & settlements
Stakeholder dynamics

The environment & circumstances within which something happens and which can help to explain it

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So, what is context? For the purposes of this paper, context can be defined as the environment and circumstances within which something happens and which can help to explain it (adapted from Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.; Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.; Kamatsiko, 2016; ACAPS, 2013; van Assche 2007; Nash et al., 2006; Saferworld, 2004). Context exists outside any situation which may have occurred, and is broader than the experience of any individual or group. For example, when a city is affected by an earthquake, the earthquake and its impact are the situation. A household may have had their shelter and workplace damaged impacting their housing and livelihoods and may have needs which humanitarians can help to address. However, the context is broader than this. While, in a way, it includes these things because it is influenced by them, context also includes the various dynamics within that city such as land tenure, relationships between municipal and national government, waste management services, among others. Context gives meaning to what has happened and helps to explain its significance.

In an urban environment, the context includes six interconnected areas – economy and livelihoods, politics and governance, services and infrastructure, social and cultural, space and settlements, and stakeholder dynamics (see Figure 2, as well as Table 2 in Section 2.3.4).

2.2 How is context distinct from needs, situation, conflict and population?

Helpful to understanding context is to consider how it relates to situation, needs/vulnerabilities, conflict and population data/trends. This section explores how these terms are similar and different to context, and how understanding one can help us understand the other, as illustrated in brief in Table 1.
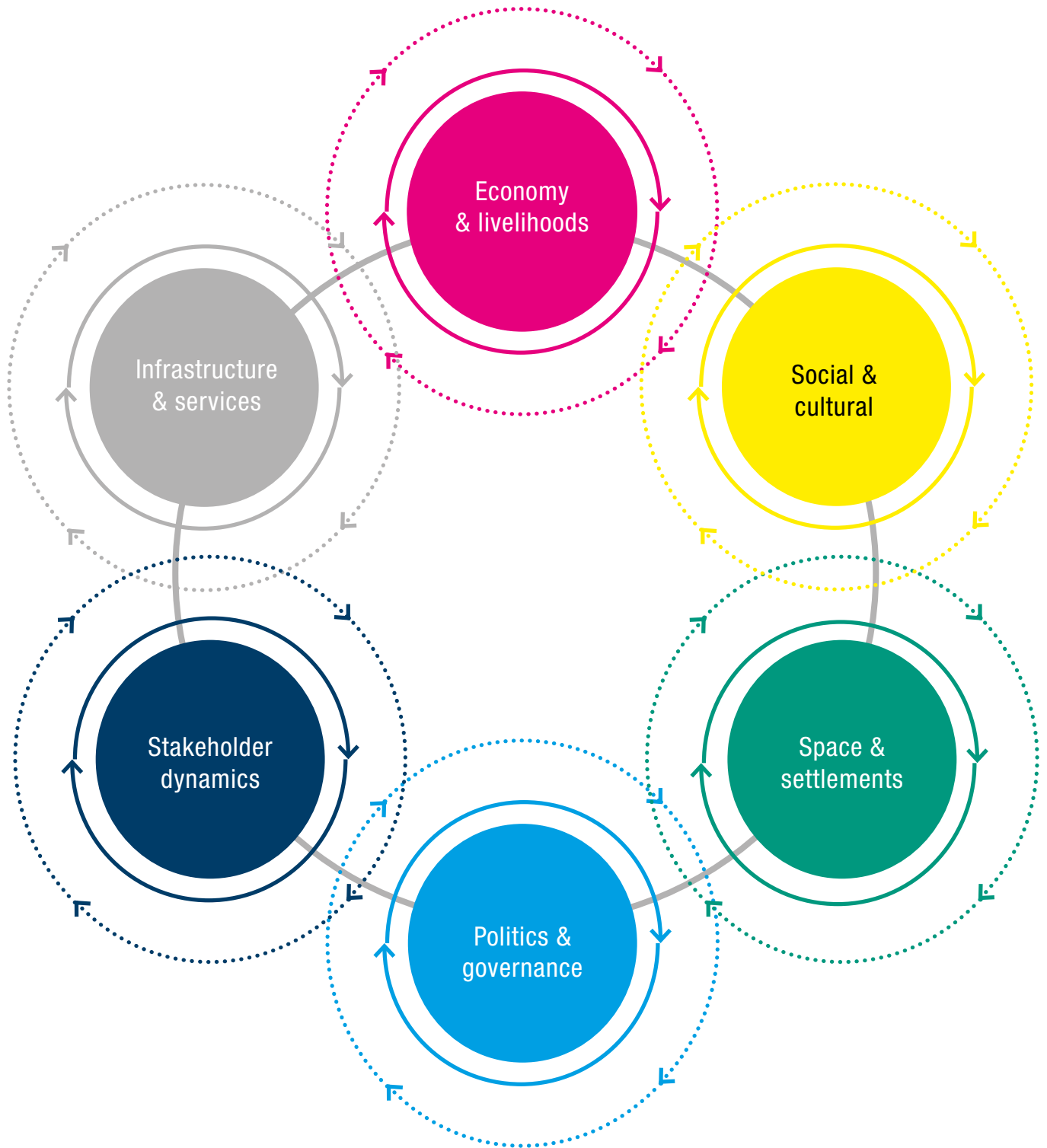
Figure 2: The urban context

Table 1. What is distinctive about context?

	Context	Situation	Needs & Vulnerability	Conflict	Population Data & Trends
Definition	The environment and circumstances within which something happens and which can help to explain it	The set of things that are happening and the conditions that exist at a particular time	How crises-affected people have been affected, how they are coping and whether they need support	Tension/ hostility between two or more parties, often resulting in violence	Data and trends about a population group. For example, the number, location and situation of displaced people in a city
What sorts of questions should we ask?	» What needs to be understood about the context? » Why are things the way they are? » How will the context affect the lives of individuals? » How will the context affect any humanitarian response? » Who are relevant stakeholders in this context? » How do the situation, needs, and vulnerabilities and any conflict affect the context?	» What has happened? » Where did it happen? » Who/what was affected, and to what extent? » What resources/ capacities exist? » What are the access conditions, security and operational constraints? » How can the situation be understood relation to the context?	» What is the extent of vulnerability (before and after crisis)? » Do disaster-affected communities need assistance? (Currion, 2014b) » If so, what type, quality and timing of assistance is needed? (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014) » What are the priorities for humanitarian assistance? » Are any groups more vulnerable than others? » How do institutions/ households/ individuals respond to shocks? » What are the strengths and weaknesses of households, communities, institutions? (IFRC, 2016c) » How can needs be explained by the context?	» Tension/ hostility between two or more parties, often resulting in violence » Who is involved? Who is impacted? » What issues are at stake? How do different parties see them? » How long has it been going on? » What led to/caused the conflict? » What are the dividers and connectors between parties to the conflict? » What is the context this conflict is located within? How does the context affect the conflict?	» What is the size of this population group? I.e. How many people are displaced? » Where is this population located? » What are the drivers of displacement? » What % of people are affected by this (situation/ topic)? » Is the experience of one population group different from others? How? » Has the experience of this/different population group(s) changed? How?

2.2.1 Context and situation

The context is different from the situation. 'Situation' is best understood as 'the set of things that are happening and the conditions that exist at a particular time' (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). The situation may be the earthquake that just hit, the election taking place next week, or the displacement crisis that's been affecting the city for the past year. There may be several situations happening simultaneously within a given context.

It is important to distinguish between context and situation because humanitarians already gather information to understand the situation. Tools such as damage assessment, risk analysis and various forms of situation analysis are widely used. While some of these tools do touch on context issues, generally they focus on some sort of crisis, shock or stress and its impact. Understanding context can improve our understanding of the situation by providing a baseline against which any impact can be compared and explained. For example, how might the arrival of more displaced people affect social cohesion?

Context, situation and change

Each situation affects and may change the context in various ways. For example, a displacement crisis may create social tensions, change the religious makeup of the context, and increase the strain on waste management and water services. However, other parts of the context, such as power relationships between national and local authorities, or the road layout, may not change. In a situation such as an earthquake, however, roads may be completely destroyed and key members of local government may be injured or killed. But, the culture may not change. The economy may experience short-term stresses but quickly recover. The context may also change on its own, regardless of the situation, for example, through seasonal weather patterns, or economic development increasing the gross domestic product (GDP).

2.2.2 Context and needs

The needs of affected populations differ from context in that they are specific to the situation. While needs and context are different things, an understanding of one can help to improve understanding of the other. For example, it can help to understand the reality individuals are facing if one understands 'the wider context and the contribution of aid relative to other factors in people's survival and well-being' (Darcy, 2009:4). Similarly,

many of the context tools examined in this research included, for example, vulnerable groups, the nature of any existing humanitarian response, and the capacities of relevant stakeholders.

In reality, it may not always be possible to undertake a specific context analysis in every urban humanitarian response. As needs, vulnerability and capacity analyses are already widely used, some have proposed finding ways to incorporate more aspects of contextual understanding into these tools. In the words of one learning exchange participant, 'we don't live in an ideal world, so sometimes, we have to cope with the fact that there is no context analysis, and we have to add some context analysis into the needs assessment questions'. Indeed, this is the approach NRC took in developing the Urban Multi-Sectorial Vulnerability Analysis Tool (UMVAT) which is designed to follow an urban context analysis, but includes questions about context should that not be possible. While see the value in this approach, as one interviewee explained, doing this may result in a feeling that 'we checked the box on context…we're done', whereas the argument for better understanding of context is really one of a cultural shift to achieve this throughout a response. Needs are also often assessed sectorally, whereas contextual issues don't fit into sectoral siloes. The interviewee reflected, 'I've seen that happen in our own organisation. If you don't carve out space to do context analysis as a discipline in and of itself, what can often happen is you do a needs assessment that bolts on context…that just gives you the data you want to hear'.

2.2.3 Context and conflict

It is also important to distinguish between context and conflict, particularly as the terms are sometimes used interchangeably. This is because, as illustrated in Figure 3 from GPPAC guidance, it is recognised that to understand conflict, it is important to understand the broader range of issues which contribute to it and within which it occurs (Saferworld, 2004). USAID (2012:16) explains, 'For the purposes of a conflict assessment, it is not necessary to produce a comprehensive understanding of contextual elements, but it is important to identify those salient components of the context that directly relate to the conflict dynamics and trajectories. In other words, how do elements of the context interact with conflict dynamics?'

Figure 3: Conflict versus context

The conflict exists within the context and is influenced
by it, but the conflict has its own important dynamics.

CONFLICT
DYNAMICS

BROADER
CONTEXT

Source: GPPAC (2015)
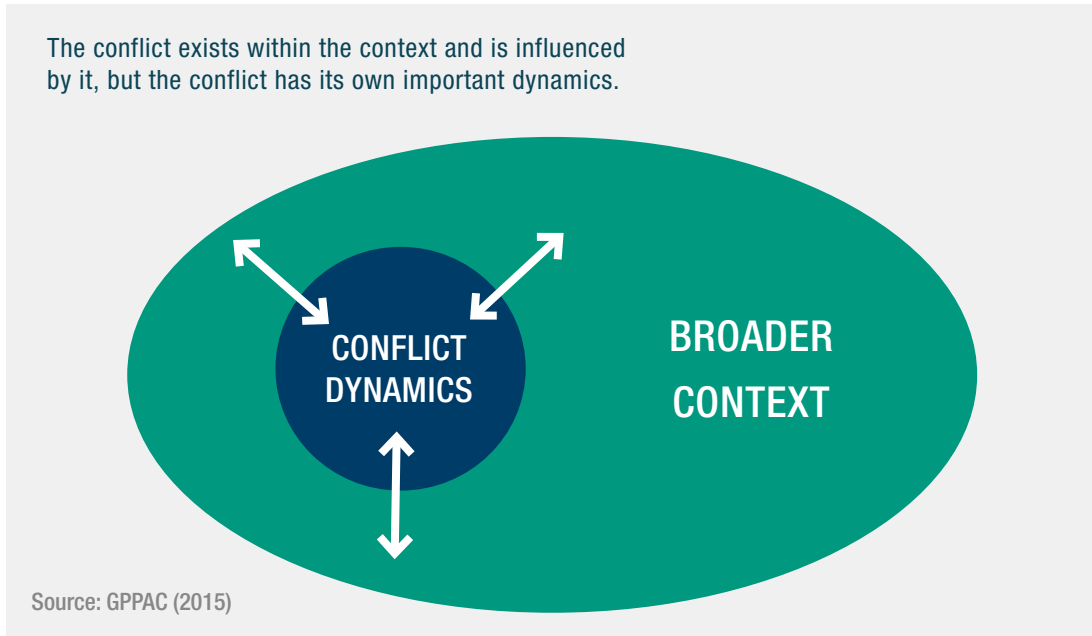
Some have found that describing conflict analysis as an analysis of context
may make the exercise more palatable. The Conflict Sensitivity Consortium
(2012:4) note that, 'in some situations it may be too contentious or sensitive
to talk of conflict analysis. Using the broader term "context analysis" can
help to overcome this challenge. However, it is important to differentiate
between a context analysis that examines a broad array of social, economic,
political and cultural issues and a conflict analysis that specifically seeks to
understand conflict'.

These different uses of 'context' can be confusing, but because conflict
analysis has been used for some time, there is a large body of evidence from
which to learn, much of which has been incorporated into this paper.

2.2.4 Context and population data/trends

Context is broader than the experience of any individual group of people.
However, it can be important to know about the experiences of a particular
group – for example, displaced people or a minority group, as this can
illustrate aspects of the context such as social cohesion, or disparities in
access to land, livelihoods and/or legal protection. Focusing on a specific
population can be a useful lens through which to understand the context,
and vice versa – looking at the context can help understand the significance
of the experiences of that population group.

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A number of the tools reviewed for this paper, particularly the Displacement Profiling facilitated by the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) and also UN Habitat's City Profiles, do focus on data and trends about displaced populations, combining this understanding effectively with other contextual aspects.

2.3 Why is it important to understand context in urban humanitarian response?

There are many reasons why understanding context matters for an effective urban response. These include: informing and improving programming, building on what already exists in the urban environment, and having a holistic, and ideally shared, view of what's happening and how things are interconnected. These aspects are discussed in the sub-sections below.

2.3.1 Informed and effective humanitarian response in urban areas

Understanding the context allows humanitarians:

To design effective humanitarian response programmes that are relevant to context

Simply put, 'Understanding the political, socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the urban community you are working with is essential to effective programming' (Grünewald & Carpenter, 2014: ix). Thinking back to the example of an earthquake response, if responding organisations understood the context they would be able to recognise the significance of its impact and make more effective programming decisions. For example, knowing which actors and information channels the affected population regarded as trustworthy would help humanitarians to better disseminate critical information.

Previous urban humanitarian responses, such as the 2010 Port-au-Prince earthquake, have been criticised for 'not asking the right questions at the beginning' and having 'an inadequate understanding of local issues and needs' (Clermont et al., 2011:19). Subsequent reviews have recognised that 'sharpening context analysis and assessments can make a significant contribution to improving the appropriateness and quality of our urban programmes' (Kyazze, Baizan & Carpenter 2012:30) and have questioned whether humanitarians were relying too much on a 'best practice culture' without asking why and taking the time to respond in a contextually

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appropriate fashion (Brown & Johnson, 2015:3; Pantuliano et al., 2012). Indeed, earlier ALNAP research found that 'previous urban humanitarian responses have been criticised for being disconnected from the context, as if context was "over there" and separated from programming decisions' (Campbell, 2016:18) and research has found that 'many of the flaws associated with ineffectiveness in intervention strategies in fragile contexts can be traced to inaccurate and/or partial understanding of the context' (Kamatsiko, 2016:7).

In order to respond to crises in urban environments more effectively, humanitarians must contextualise their responses, which requires understanding that context. Doing so will allow humanitarians to 'understand the broader picture in order to analyse the reasons behind the challenges facing the affected population and the contributing factors to be able to effectuate change' (Kelling & Heykoop, 2013b). This contextual understanding should be a pre-requisite for any well-designed project (SIMLab, 2017d; Kamatsiko, 2016) and is 'as important as the detailed analysis of different sectoral needs' in a response (Darcy, 2009:18).

To ensure that programming is not just reactive but proactive

Understanding context also helps organisations to be more proactive in their approach, rather than solely reactive. For example, if organisations understand more about land tenure issues from the outset, they are in a better position to address them before they impede the response. In addition, humanitarians who understand the context also recognise how it might change, enabling them to anticipate and manage necessary shifts, and to respond more quickly when needed (Klassen et al., 2016; Melim-McLeod, 2012a). For example, if organisations understand how likely governance structures or social tensions are to change, and what the change might be, they can better anticipate such changes and plan accordingly.

To ensure responses are sensitive to conflict and Do No Harm

If humanitarians do not understand context, this 'can also lead to mistakes and affect [the] outcome of humanitarian aid interventions doing more harm than good' (Heyse, 2015a). Do No Harm is a widely accepted principle of humanitarian response, based on recognising that how a response is delivered has the potential to create harm, despite best intentions,

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particularly in conflict situations. Doing no harm requires humanitarians to be conflict-sensitive, meaning 'the ability of an organisation to understand its context, the interaction between its intervention and the context and act upon this understanding in order to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts' (Klassen et al., 2016).

In complex urban environments, understanding context is an important first step in doing no harm (Wallace, 2015; Bolling, 2015; Heykoop & Kelling, 2014). One learning exchange participant explained, 'there's a kind of fear, if you like, of making a decision without understanding the full implications, particularly in the urban environment, where when you step on one thing it may affect something else'. Another reflected, 'there was quite a strong feeling that there was real risk of doing harm if we didn't do better context analysis, and understand better where the power lays and what the risks were to programme design, and understanding fully the political, the economic, the ethnicity, whatever…sometimes we can make the situation worse if we don't understand the context in which we're working. So, for example targeting, you do your needs assessment with certain parameters and you go into a community but actually it depends on who you're talking to and you may be targeting the one group and another group might feel that this organisation is favouring this other group. It can easily lead to social tensions'. This is another potential example in the earthquake scenario, which emphasises that understanding context can help to avoid unintended, negative outcomes (Mountfield, 2016) and ensure the positive impact intended (Wallace, 2015).

To base response decisions on evidence rather than assumptions

Understanding context helps to ensure that decisions are based on sound analysis and evidence, rather than assumptions. While assumptions may or may not be correct, we are unlikely to convince others to go along with them if we can't back them up. In addition, assumptions may be based on 'partial or outdated information. Doing this runs the risk of overlooking certain operational challenges such as intermittent access to power or challenges unique to particular groups, such as women, for whom it may not be culturally appropriate to use mobile technology, for example. Powerful and positive messages such as "smartphones are ubiquitous," can prevail in lieu of asking tough, culture— and context-specific questions' (Church & Walker McDonald, 2016).

2.3.2 Recognition of and support to existing networks, structures, institutions and systems in a city

The first of the OECD's principles for good international engagement in fragile states is to 'take context as the starting point' (OECD, 2011). From the experience of past urban humanitarian responses, we know that 'when we don't understand context, we deliver inappropriate "classic" humanitarian response which is self-contained, working outside government systems and reliant on imported material and personnel' (Patrick, 2011:4). Interviewees for this research felt that ignoring context resulted in 'off-the-shelf, sectoral, non-integrated solutions that fail to maximise opportunity or, worse, actively conspire to make things worse'.

Understanding the context allows humanitarians:

To build on existing systems and services

Ensuring responses are relevant to context is important in every humanitarian crisis, particularly so in urban areas because of the existing capacity, networks, and systems within them. 'Cities are more than the sum of their buildings and physical infrastructure. They are highly complex systems and a spatial manifestation of inequalities and diversities that exist in the society. There are countless systems, structures, institutions, and networks all coexisting, interacting, and overlapping at many different levels in a city' (Kadihasanoglu, 2015a). It may then be possible to harness 'existing social and human capital in towns and cities, and the opportunities provided by local governance institutions, markets and the private sector to support relief and recovery' (Earle, 2017:219). With 'a better understanding of urban processes and systems and of local actors' experiences and perceptions', this 'can inform context-appropriate and inclusive approaches to urban humanitarian response' (Brown & Johnson, 2015:1).

Research from the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) found that 'urban response requires a new humanitarian model. Rather than building a new infrastructure of services to serve the refugee population, as is the traditional approach in camps, urban response must try to leverage the wide range of services, resources, and social capital that already exists in cities' (WRC, 2016a). This means a shift in approach for the humanitarian sector, which has traditionally used more of a 'comprehensive' model of humanitarian assistance where there is limited national capacity and international

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humanitarian actors take the lead, introducing the systems and structures familiar to them (Ramalingam & Mitchell, 2014). A more 'collaborative' model where international actors work alongside national and local actors and build on existing systems and structures rather than importing and setting up new (often parallel) ones does require humanitarians to get outside their comfort zone, and is not without its challenges (ibid). In several countries, a 'collaborative' model is not possible due to limited national capacity, or where governments are party to a conflict, for example. Working in urban areas within these broader state contexts may require a more nuanced approach. Often it is possible for humanitarians to work with local government structures, even if they can't at a national level, and they should strive to do so, informed by their understanding of context and what is appropriate and possible.

To be able to work effectively and appropriately with a range of urban stakeholders

Understanding the context helps in identifying and making sense of the wide range of actors in an urban setting, engaging with and possibly working with them in implementing a response.

Understanding context requires an understanding of a range of relevant stakeholders, not just potential partners. Often, we identify only those with whom we want to work or who may seem relevant to a specific intervention. However, as one interviewee explained, 'we've got to take it out of the mind-set of sub-contracting to these local actors and start looking at how do we actually create space for these actors to influence what we're doing'. Even if we do not work with these stakeholders in implementation, it may still be relevant to inform them, learn from their knowledge, and understand challenges they may face.

Research by NRC found that, 'developing a thorough understanding of the history of the city and the various authorities, institutions and governance structures has been an important part of the process of being able to go on to uncover the various stakeholders and internal dynamics that operate within a city and between its stakeholders that influence programme activities and what they were able to achieve' (Kelling & Heykoop, 2013a). Understanding urban stakeholders, including their relationships, interests, motivations, capacities, power, and goals will help humanitarians to build on local response capacities and to navigate the context effectively and without doing harm.

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To understand issues that are relevant to the specific city or neighbourhood

Many of the relevant contextual issues are fairly common – the politics of decentralised government, religious and social traditions, weather patterns and complex land tenure, for example – but how these play out in a given city or neighbourhood is unique to each place. Understanding the urban context makes it possible to understand how municipal, national, regional and even global phenomena are manifested, and how issues at the micro level are shaped by, and have significance for, the macro and meso levels, and vice versa.

To support city development and planning

By understanding urban environments, humanitarians will be better able to contribute to long-term city development and planning, even if their own response is focused on short-term relief. The relief-to-development continuum has long been a part of humanitarian discourse, and since the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) has emerged as a key theme for improvement, with calls for a 'New Way of Working'[1]. In urban areas, understanding context can help to align humanitarian action and development goals by informing humanitarians about long-term development and planning goals and challenges, and the root causes of vulnerability.

Without this understanding, humanitarian response risks both missing out on potential long-term impacts of their work beyond the immediate response and also perhaps creating or exacerbating long-term problems. For example, transitional shelters can morph into slums and have lasting negative impacts on the city's fabric, undermining the likelihood of a well-planned urban environment. Direct provision of food, water and services to affected populations could undermine small business, distort local markets and generate dependency. In Haiti, for example, 'free provision of healthcare negatively affected local private clinics' (Earle, 2017:220).

Some have described this approach as moving beyond 'emergency response in an urban context…to carry[ing] out urban planning and redevelopment in an emergency context' (Clermont, 2011:6). While some humanitarian actors believe that long-term development is beyond the scope of humanitarian response, this is a different argument. 'The exclusion of development perspectives in humanitarian action can impede long-term recovery and leave affected populations dependent on humanitarian assistance for longer than necessary. While humanitarian actors cannot solve

urban problems, they can operate in ways that better support city systems, and limit disruption to sustainable urban development trajectories' (Earle, 2016:9, see also Knox Clarke & Obrecht, 2015b).

2.3.3 Holistic understanding of what's happening and how things are interconnected

Responding effectively to urban crises requires a holistic[2] understanding of context. Often, humanitarians have a much narrower analysis, focusing 'on how their particular approach or area of interest might fit or be useful in the context, which can lead them to miss important aspects…or to develop misguided or irrelevant programmes' (Harvey et al., 2012:104). Some find the complexity of an urban area overwhelming, and it can feel easier to focus on just one aspect (USAID, 2011). This can, however, result in a 'piecemeal' approach that 'takes humanitarian response down to its component parts, working in sectors, at the household or individual level, and on a short timeline post-crisis that disregards the urban past and much of its future…with different agencies providing goods and services that are clearly linked – for example food, shelter, water and sanitation. Agencies may concentrate …their programming in certain areas where they already have a presence, or where it is easiest for them to gain access. This can mean particular neighbourhoods become small islands of excellence, while other equally or more vulnerable areas and populations are neglected, and the infrastructure and markets that links these neighbourhoods, and the wider city, are ignored' (Earle, 2016:5). One interviewee reflected that, "so many approaches, they look at parts of the whole. They look at particular sectors, or they look at particular issues that are of interest to specific NGOs, but not a lot of them are really looking at the whole system as a holistic whole, where each part is…influencing the others".

Understanding context helps organisations to 'understand the broader picture in order to analyse the reasons behind the challenges facing the affected population, and the scale of the problem as well as the contributing factors and consequences in detail, and therefore to be able to effectuate change…. Humanitarian actors responding to urban crises and displacement have to understand the complex contextual factors and dynamics operating in a given situation. Who are the stakeholders? What are the existing power relations and which groups dominate the decision-making processes? How are resources distributed? What existing policy and legal frameworks are in place? What role do social networks play? Why do certain social groups

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> Some find the complexity of an urban area overwhelming, and it can feel easier to focus on just one aspect. This can, however, result in a 'piecemeal' approach.
> **"**

have access to some services while others do not? Why are services located in certain areas and not in others' (Meaux & Osofisan, 2016:7).

A holistic understanding of the context does not necessarily mean doing multi-sectoral programming such as area or settlement-based approaches. Programming decisions should be informed by an understanding of context, but context cannot be divided up into sectors. Understanding context holistically informs better programming, where that programming is sector specific or otherwise, because it is in line with the interconnected reality of the city.

Why is understanding context important for local actors?

Many of the above reasons for understanding context focus on its relevance for international humanitarian actors, but going through a process such as a context analysis or profiling is equally useful for local actors. For example, local authorities involved in some of the analysis exercises found it useful to have all the relevant information about their area gathered in one document, which they could use for their own advocacy purposes. One national academic institution, whose staff had grown up in the area being studied, valued the rigour of the findings and discovered new things. In another municipality, one tool was adapted to inform a resilience-planning process led by the municipality. While this paper is aimed at a humanitarian audience, much of it will also be relevant for other local actors using context tools to respond to or prevent crisis, work in development or resilience, or as part of strategic and planning purposes.

> " Context cannot be divided up into sectors. "

2.3.4 Is understanding context just an urban issue?

The simple answer is no, of course not. Understanding context is always important to an effective humanitarian response, but the complexity and scale of urban settings can amplify challenges which occur across the humanitarian sector including coordination, engagement, and the need to understand context.

The humanitarian system has had far more experience working in rural and camp settings, and has developed and adapted a number of tools to help understand these contexts. It is not always clear which are appropriate for urban environments or would first need to be adapted.

Some aspects of context which are particularly critical to understand in urban areas, such as land tenure, services and spatial analysis, may

sometimes be relevant to more rural or camp contexts, but in urban areas it is crucial not to miss them. As one interviewee reflected: 'For example, there is a question related to the strategic planning of the local authority. If we are talking about a small, rural municipality, maybe this question doesn't apply. I mean, you ask this question, and they will tell you that they don't have any kind of strategic planning. If you go to the municipality of Tripoli, for example, in Lebanon, maybe they will have tons of documents, strategic documents'. Another commented: 'These factors…are much more applicable and prominent and therefore have to be taken [into] account in urban space. I think they can be to some extent disregarded or agencies can be ignorant of them [when] working in a rural space, but if you're ignorant and ignore those in [an] urban space, then [there are likely to be] much higher levels of project failure, and arguably even worse consequences'. Table 2 below highlights some of these issues.
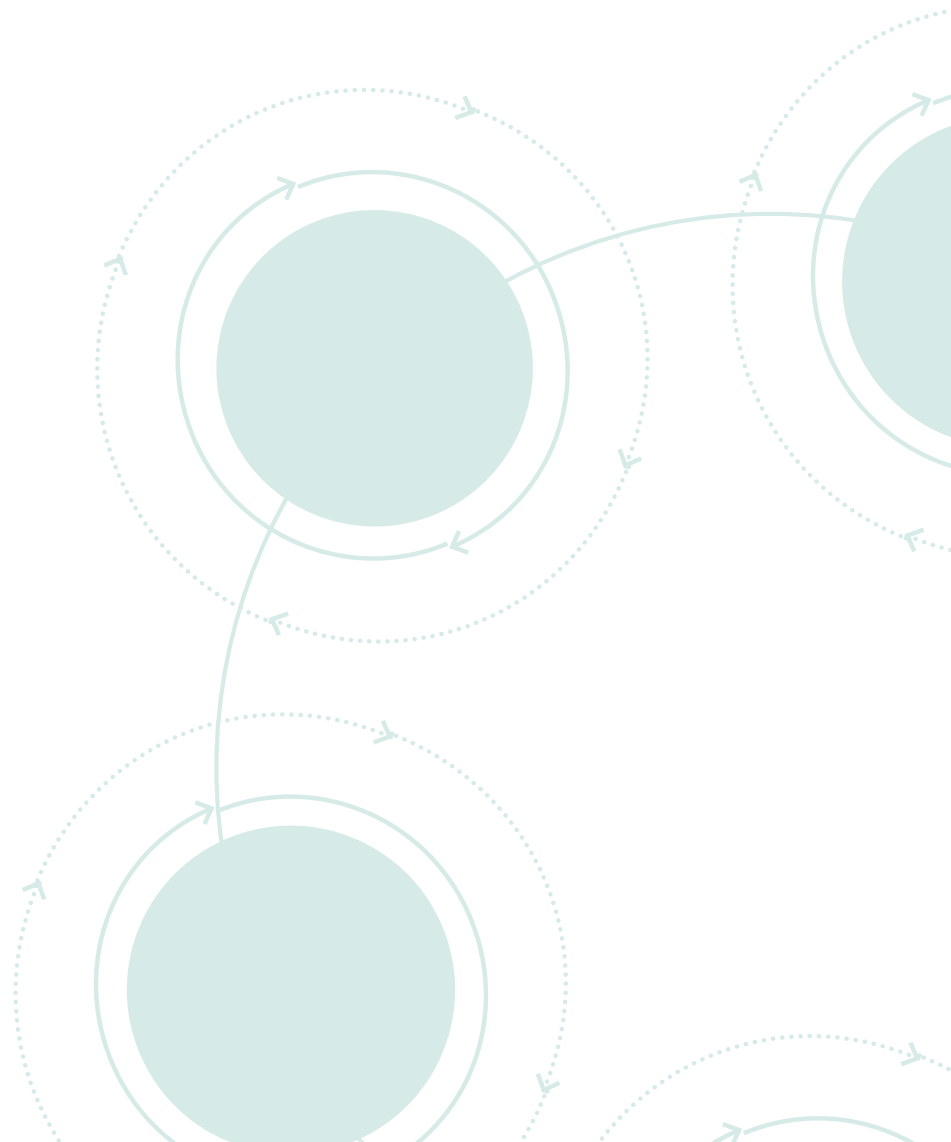
Table 2. Specifics to understanding the urban context

Aspect of context to understand	Urban Specifics
Overall	» Complex » Large volume of issues to understand » Likelihood that information will already exist » Interconnectedness between all the contextual aspects - cannot understand individual communities or issues without also understanding the broader area or context around them
Politics & governance	» Multiple layers of governance with varying power/ interests/ resources/ incentives/ relationships to each other » Insecurity
Economics & livelihoods	» Role of markets & private sector » Economic activity spanning across the city » Variety of livelihoods & economic models, formal & informal » Right to work dynamics for refugees » Pre-existing vulnerabilities & poverty » Influence of macro-economic dynamics on affected people
Social & cultural	» Social cohesion & social capital unique to urban » Possibility of high stratification » Mobility & turnover of population » Coping strategies & antisocial behaviour
Services & infrastructure	» Services & infrastructure spanning across a city » Complex infrastructure » Uneven access to services » Public health risks
Space & settlement	» Planning documents likely to exist and be in use » Complex land tenure dynamics » Connections between urban & periphery » Intersection between environmental risk & informal settlements » Boundaries between areas unclear, defined in official and socially constructed ways » Importance of mapping to understand spatial relationships
Stakeholders	» Multiple local & national stakeholders to understand and potentially work with » Many humanitarians working in the same place = more coordination needed

2.4 How well do we understand context in urban humanitarian response today?

Although many issues apply to understanding any context for a humanitarian response, current understanding of urban environments is not good enough – there is a need for action.

Over the past decade or two of urban humanitarian crises, including Haiti, Goma, Afghanistan, West Africa and Central African Republic, reports and evaluations have consistently found that humanitarians had little understanding of contextual issues, 'rarely undertaking' context analyses (Pantuliano et al., 2012:511), resulting in urban humanitarian action, in many responses, being disconnected from context (Meaux & Osofisan, 2016; Rudolf, 2014; Kyazze et al., 2012; Haver, 2011; Patrick, 2011; Zicherman et al., 2011; Boyer, 2011; Duncan, Williams & de Catheu, 2010).

At one time or another, all aspects of the urban context have been identified as particular gaps including:

- Information about economics/markets (Heyse 2015a) and political dynamics (Patrick, 2011; Darcy et al, 2007)

- Issues regarding space and settlements, such as maps and boundaries (Boyer, 2011) and housing, land and property (HLP) issues including land rights, tenure types, occupancy rights and land availability (IASC, 2010)

- Social issues (Darcy et al, 2007; Currion, 2015:6) and cultural issues (Campbell, 2017a)

- An understanding of stakeholder relationships, roles and power dynamics (exchange; Pilia, 2016; Patrick, 2011)

Consequently, many have emphasised the need for humanitarians to do more to understand urban areas (WRC, 2016b; Campbell, 2017a; Currion, 2015; Knox Clarke & Ramalingam, 2012; Haver, 2011) and to take action against the current tendency of 'ignoring' urban characteristics (Muggah, 2012) and seeing context as 'an afterthought' (Earle, 2016:4). Participants in the ALNAP learning exchange noted that much of this information 'is usually out there' but 'humanitarians don't go looking for it'.

> "
> Current understanding of urban environments is not good enough – there is a need for action.
> "

The struggle to understand urban environments is part of a broader trend in the humanitarian sector, which has often been criticised for lack of understanding and relevance to context (Heyse, 2015a). Similar criticisms have also been levelled at development (Ginsberg, 2015; Harris & Booth, 2013; Duncan, Williams & de Catheu, 2010), peacebuilding (ARK, 2016; Garred et al., 2015; Hiscock, 2012) and urban planning (van Assche, 2007; Bryson, 2004).

> " Much of this information 'is usually out there' but 'humanitarians don't go looking for it'. "

2.4.1 What's stopping us?

Given the importance of understanding context, what's stopping humanitarians?

Lack of experience

One reason may be that humanitarians don't (or at least think they don't) have the skills or experience to understand context. In some cases, it is the complexity of the urban environment with which humanitarians have 'struggled' (Earle, 2016:5). This has led humanitarians either to avoid responding in urban environments (Rudolf, 2014; Boyer, 2011) or to do so in ways more familiar to them, keeping away from issues like water infrastructure, for example (DFID, 2014). Some have expressed feeling that the 'layers and dimensions of analysis' required to understand urban areas requires specialist skills that humanitarians don't currently have (Mohiddin & Smith, 2016:10).

Lack of needed perspective

Humanitarians often focus on the needs and capacities of specific individuals or households, and so fail to understand contextual issues in an urban environment (Earle, 2017; Campbell, 2017b). Similarly, separating responses into sectoral 'component parts' (Earle, 2016:5) makes it harder to take in contextual issues, which span across this understanding. This is critical because, as Currion notes, 'it is not possible to understand a city simply by looking at individual geographic areas, or service sectors, or demographics' (Currion, 2015:11).

Lack of time and resources (real or perceived)

The humanitarian timeframe can also be a constraint. Some have described the lack of 'time to think' (Goddard & Annaraj, 2017:17) in an urban crisis response, which means that things like context analysis are often deferred,

as are opportunities to engage with local stakeholders – which can end up 'burning bridges' (ibid: 17) even before we realise it. Even quick forms of analysis take some resource capacity, and most of the tools identified took at least several weeks, sometimes months, to complete from design to dissemination. Meaux & Osofisan expand on this in their desk review of context analysis tools, explaining that often, 'humanitarian actors working in rapid onset emergencies do not have the luxury of time to conduct such analysis' (Meaux & Osofisan, 2016:8).

It may be the case, however, that some of this is a perceived constraint. Organisations don't have to be paralysed until they have completed an analysis exercise – efforts to understand context can be made alongside a response, and should in any case be an ongoing process (see Section 4.3.6). Staff time and resource cost constraints could be overcome with greater policy/headquarters (HQ) support (see Section 5.2.2) so that context analysis has its own budget line.

Lack of tools

Finally, in some ways it depends on what tools we have at our disposal. In 2010, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas (IASC MHCUA) group conducted an assessment of tools and guidelines to address urban humanitarian challenges. It found that 'virtually all…were developed predominantly for rural areas' and required adaptation (IASC, 2010). Since then, several reports have cited the lack of urban-relevant tools (including Earle, 2016; Currion, 2015; DFID, 2014; Lucchi, 2013; Boyer, Hettrich & Letourneur, 2011: 4).

However, the 2010 IASC review looked mainly at tools for needs/vulnerability assessment, targeting, sector-based assessment and response analysis. While this is an important gap which has only recently started to be addressed[3], adapting rural-designed needs assessment tools will not improve our understand of context. This is an entirely different issue which was not acknowledged in the IASC review of tools, where the only context gap mentioned related to land issues (IASC, 2010). Since then, as more humanitarians have gained experience working in urban environments, there began to be calls for better tools to understand urban contexts.

In 2013, an ALNAP lessons paper on urban violence found there were no tools which could provide humanitarians with 'a detailed analysis of the context' to explore issues such as politics, economics, social and cultural aspects and basic services (Lucchi, 2013). In 2014, a series of consultations
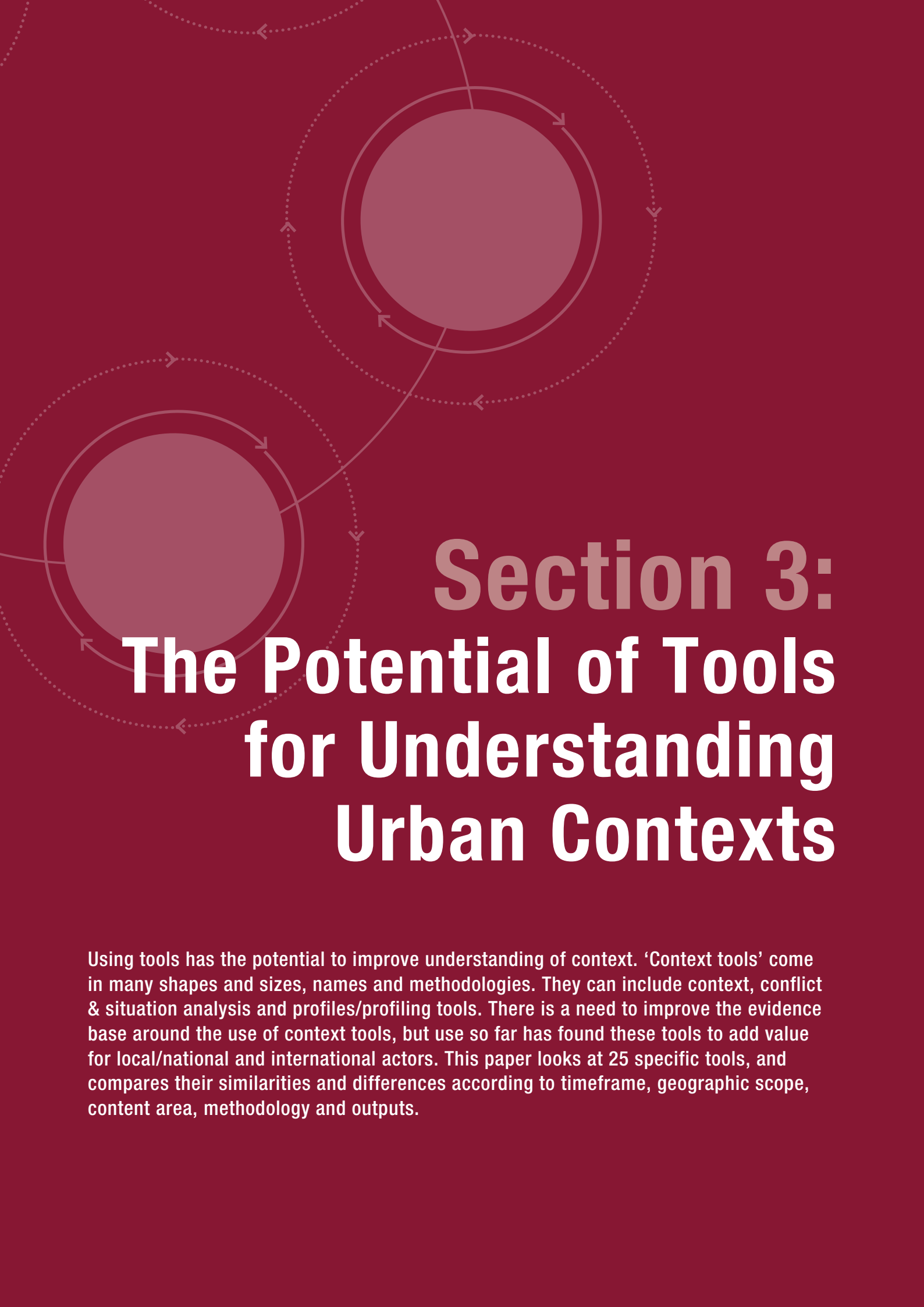
> "
> Adapting rural-designed needs assessment tools will not improve our understand of context. This is an entirely different issue which was not acknowledged.
> "

on urban response convened by DFID acknowledged the need for tools
to explore urban markets, power analysis, and deal with HLP and urban
services (DFID, 2014). More recently, IRC conducted a desk review to find
tools to address the urban context (Meaux & Osofisan, 2016).

While new for humanitarians, there have for some time been tools for
understanding the urban context in the fields of development, peacebuilding
and urban planning. There are valuable lessons to learn from these
experiences, as humanitarians begin to apply and adapt these tools for use
in urban crises. This paper has brought together learning from a variety of
different such tools, including those designed for urban areas, and those
focusing on country level analysis. Before we get to those tools, however, it is
important to first ask, is this a problem that tools can solve?
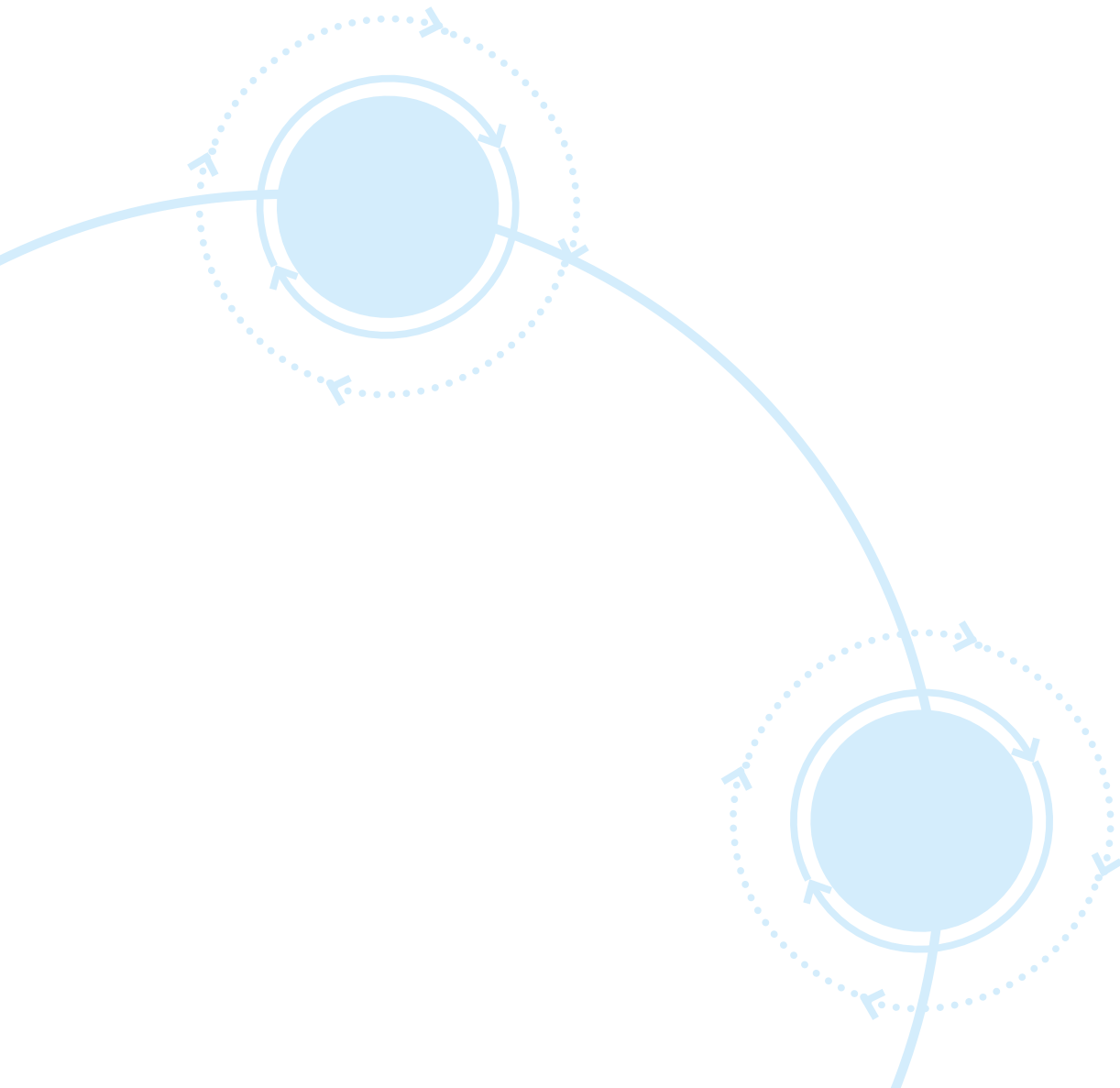
Section 3:
The Potential of Tools for Understanding Urban Contexts

Using tools has the potential to improve understanding of context. 'Context tools' come in many shapes and sizes, names and methodologies. They can include context, conflict & situation analysis and profiles/profiling tools. There is a need to improve the evidence base around the use of context tools, but use so far has found these tools to add value for local/national and international actors. This paper looks at 25 specific tools, and compares their similarities and differences according to timeframe, geographic scope, content area, methodology and outputs.

Section 3: The potential of tools for understanding urban contexts

3.1 A note on 'tools'

Before discussing their potential value in understanding urban environments, it is important to reflect on the concept of tools.

Some find 'tool' a problematic or loaded word. To some it suggests a 300-page manual to add to the stack already gathering dust. However a tool can also be understood as anything which helps achieve a goal – a spreadsheet, a ladder or a bicycle depending on the job. This paper uses a broad understanding of the term 'tool', including any specific process or method that could be used to understand context. It distinguishes 'tools' from 'Frameworks'[4]. For example, the ACF Assessment of Sustainable Livelihoods and Urban Vulnerabilities tool uses a Sustainable Livelihoods framework.

> "
> A tool can be understood as anything which helps achieve a goal.
> "

3.2 Do tools help us understand context? What evidence do we have?

The effectiveness and relevance of urban humanitarian response depends on understanding the context, which includes politics, economics, services, spaces, and social and cultural aspects, as well as the range of stakeholders, and how these interconnect (see Figure 2).

Using profiling, context analysis and other tools is one way for humanitarians to understand context. This section explores the value of tools and the supporting evidence, as well as other ways to improve understanding of context.

3.2.1 How useful are tools in helping to understand context?

Tools can help to guide the identification of relevant information about context and provide an analytical framework (Saferworld, 2004), particularly if there is a 'complex labyrinth of information' (Kelling & Heykoop, 2013b). Tools 'do not necessarily offer new information' but help to centralise it from a range of sources and identify knowledge gaps (Mohammed & Howard, 2013) and can add value through 'critical questions and offering new perspectives' (Saferworld, 2004:8).

Using tools allows individuals to explore different ideas and perspectives across an organisation, and from a wide range of organisations including 'consultation with a range of communities and other stakeholders' (Saferworld, 2004:8). Using a structured tool can help organisations go beyond their usual sources and find information, including research, which 'can provide a better understanding of the complexity of the context and analyse historical, institutional and political aspects' (Kelling & Heykoop, 2013b). Some of the tools examined for this paper were developed by organisations wanting to systematically harness the value of a local knowledge. One interviewee explained, 'When we started the programme we had a range of experts. We hired a huge team of urbanists – urban planners, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) specialists, housing specialists, all [nationals] who knew the cities…and I think that local knowledge paved the way for building urban contextual analysis'.

Tools help users to look at the context comprehensively and recognise the interconnectedness between its different parts (USAID, 2011). They also provide a systematic way to capture, retain and share existing information (Kelling & Heykoop, 2013b).

Limitations of context tools

Using tools for understanding context does not guarantee the quality of the analysis. Looking across several uses of their governance analysis, CARE staff have reflected, 'there was a very wide variety in the quality of different reports, much hinged on the quality of the consultants, but some of that obviously was down to how we were able to facilitate the process, and whether or not for example we budgeted for including semi-structured interviews, or engaging additional stakeholders that were able to tell us information that we didn't have first-hand ourselves' (Aston, 2016). Guidance for several tools underlines that they are only as good as the quality of facilitators, informants, data, access and those doing the analysis (OECD, 2014; Forcier Consulting, 2016; Humphrey, 2012; O'Leary, 2015).

Tools for understanding context won't tell us how to programme, but can be combined or followed up with response analysis, which can help. Some may expect a tool to do more than it can, or not know what to do after a context analysis is completed. Response analysis is explained in Box 1 and Section 4.7 furthers these thoughts in discussions about uptake.

Box 1: Response Analysis

Response analysis is a process of using information (about the needs, situation and context) to plan a response, including the selection of 'response options, modalities and target groups, based on their appropriateness and feasibility and taking into account potential risks' (Mohiddin & Smith, 2016:7; Kamara, 2013).

Considered a 'crucial but commonly neglected step' (Harvey & Bailey, 2011:20) response analysis is increasingly used in humanitarian action. It encourages the design of more flexible and innovative responses (McHattie, 2012; Mohiddin, Phelps & Smith, 2017a) and may foster greater accountability and transparency in decision-making processes (Darcy et al., 2013). It offers the opportunity 'to build on existing processes, tools and frameworks and not re-invent them' (FAO, 2011:13).

There are several response analysis tools for humanitarian action. In 2017, a consortium of humanitarian actors created the Urban Response Analysis Framework (URAF) which supports the 'identification of appropriate multi-sector urban programmes for urban displaced and vulnerable populations in a participatory workshop type environment' (Mohiddin, Smith & Phelps, 2017a:16). Similar frameworks for response analysis identified in this review were mostly in relation to cash and food security responses, such as UNHCR's Situation and Response Analysis (SRA) framework, which is used to establish whether multi-sector needs can be met with one cash grant or in combination with other sector-specific interventions (UNHCR, 2015a) and Save the Children's Situation and Response Analysis framework (SRAF), which was developed to improve early responses to slow-onset food security crises and support longer-term development programmes (Save the Children, 2016). Several of the tools reviewed in this paper include a form of response analysis as an output (see Figure 8).

Finally, tools for understanding context, and the analysis they produce, cannot be all things to all people. Several of the analysis reports produced by tools reviewed for this paper listed everything the analysis could not do. Analysis of context does not replace a needs assessment, will not answer all the questions a sector specialist may have, and generally relies on secondary

and aggregated data and information rather than producing comprehensive statistics or large new datasets. Organisations will probably need to use other sorts of tools – needs assessments, sectoral analysis, etc. – which can in turn be informed by the understanding of context that tools can provide.

3.2.2 How do we know the tools are useful?

Individuals who have used the tools highlighted in this paper clearly find them useful. As one national staff person who piloted a tool explained, 'In [this country] there's so much information in terms of markets and things like how the market is behaving in [this city], prices, all those things but they are specific and limited information. When you need to know what exactly is happening in [this city] and how the urban context of [this city] a is really like, you will not find so much information. So, for us we've learned a lot from this context analysis. We're able to write our proposals confident on the information that we have…we actually know a bit more on what's going on in [this city]'. Interviewees made similar comments on other tools. The arguments for usefulness are four-fold:

> "
> There is growing recognition of an information need, which other tools and methods are not adequately meeting.
> "

1. **There is a recognised need to understand context, for all of the reasons described above.**

There is growing recognition of an information need, which other tools and methods are not adequately meeting, partly because they do not focus on context, and also because they are not systematic and do not result in a shared understanding of context.

2. **Those who have used these tools report that the analysis provides useful information.**

Interviewees emphasised that analysis 'gave us a very clear idea of who was doing what within the city', and that it was particularly 'useful in uncovering the rules of the game – both the formal and informal'. A workshop following the use of CARE's Governance Context Analysis tool found it 'was useful in identifying the different stakeholders, their level of influence, vested interests and allegiances. This knowledge is important for the selection and prioritisation of the most critical players and thereafter where and how to engage them…. The participants noted that they had found the tool extremely useful as it probed them to think outside the box and increased their appreciation of the need to continuously interrogate

institutions, spaces and actors' (CARE International, 2013). Similarly, a report following UNDP's ICA tool found that it 'helped to identify institutions that were previously not considered as potential partners…and emphasized the magnitude and potential impact of unequal power relations among the stakeholders. The lack of incentives for certain actors to take a genuine interest in a project was also brought to light as a result of the exercise. These findings were extremely useful in identifying the possible and explicit governance entry points … based on sound analysis that were [sic] context specific' (Various, 2013c).

A report about the RSA tool found that, 'Sixteen of the twenty-one staff interviewed indicated that they were not used to focus[ing] on contextual risks and appreciated this new way of thinking as it helped to "raise complexity and linkages" in a "very structured way"'. Many of the interviewees found that risk analysis remained challenging, 'in part because the breadth and depth of contextual knowledge was limited within the programme teams' (MacLeman et al., 2017).

3. **Interest in using the tools by organisations and a broader stakeholder group.**

Many interviewees noted the increasing interest both within their own organisations, as well as from local government, other humanitarian actors, etc., in using these tools and the analysis they produce. One said, 'we don't make anybody do the [analysis]. Countries ask to do them because they see them as being useful. So, it's all driven by requests from our country offices saying, we're developing a programme and would like to do an [analysis] to support that. We presume they find it useful because they're asking for it'. Another reflected, 'The fact that people come back to us from municipal councils or municipalities or from the communities themselves and say "this is useful for us", that's the first indication… it took us time to develop the tools but…the interest in partnering to scale up and go to new areas has increased drastically. For us also that's an indication that this is useful information'. A third felt that 'the continued engagement between the partners…that in itself shows the approach has been useful… and there is an added value for each of the partners to continue'. Following one Good Enough Context Analysis for Rapid Response (GECARR) exercise, a report found that using the tool also strengthened World Vision's reputation as 'an organisation that is thinking in advance' (World Vision, 2017b).

4.   People use the analysis.

Finally, the practical application of the analysis was seen as an indication of usefulness. While uptake is a challenge for any sort of analysis tool (see Section 4.7), many interviewees could cite general and specific examples where they had made use of analysis produced by using context tools. One commented, 'you can see the references to the [analysis] in [our] project documents and proposals'. Another expanded, 'we have used it to inform our 2017 response plan. As a point of reference for new proposals, we are already dong two more proposals for urban programme-based projects, and we have used that context report to write our proposals. Our advocacy now is mainstreaming peacebuilding and conflict resolutions, based on the recommendations that came out from the context analysis'. Several studies following the GECARR tool found the analysis findings being used by a range of actors such as implementers and donors, and for various purposes including implementation, policy, advocacy and to secure funding (World Vision, 2017a; World Vision, 2017b; Klassen et al., 2016).

Limitations of the evidence base

As most of these tools are fairly new to the humanitarian sector, and to date there has been little research, evaluation or impact assessment, it is difficult to prove their value. A key obstacle to their wider usage is being unsure whether they justify investing the time and effort to do so – and the evidence is even more limited. Most of the tools reviewed for this paper were developed because of a recognised information need, and the existing evidence focuses on how well that need has been met rather than on the cost–benefit aspect. Several of the tools had only been used only once or twice and need to be used more widely to understand their potential and 'added value'.

Even then, much of the existing evidence is anecdotal. Although some of the tools examined for the paper have been in use for several years, there has been little attempt to evaluate their impact and usefulness. One interviewee explained, 'a systematic and independent review hasn't happened so far. It's something that we've been discussing but it's…very difficult to say in the end, what was the impact of a specific exercise because it fits into the picture of a lot of things'. Since few organisations have attempted to do this, it's hard to say how difficult it might be.

> "
> Many interviewees could cite general and specific examples where they had made use of analysis produced by using context tools.
> "

Another reason for the lack of assessment of the added value these tools offer is competing priorities. Almost all of the tools examined were created by organisations whose main role is operational humanitarian response, and may not have had the time to study their impact or effectiveness because, as one interviewee explained, 'for us the priority has been to provide assistance to the population'. Another interviewee, while recognising that knowing more would be useful, explained that understanding how analysis gets used 'goes a little bit beyond our mandate'.

As little has been written about how to improve the evidence base of context tools, it is useful to look at similar work about the value of Political Economy Analysis (PEA[5]). This faces similar challenges, with one report noting, 'There are good reasons to expect that these changes brought by the use of PEA will increase aid effectiveness. However, the evidence to support such a claim has not yet been gathered. We are not aware of any wider review of the impact of PEA on development effectiveness and aid effectiveness - the ultimate justification for undertaking the work'. (Duncan & Williams, 2010:15). Another piece reflects, 'one reason why it has been hard to find evidence that such approaches work is that those looking for evidence have not been looking in the right places. The best examples of the potential of thinking and working politically may not be ones where formal political analysis is used to contribute to better programme design, or where donor staff themselves act in a radically different way; and they may not be interventions that have political change as an objective. They may be about working with non-obvious partners, discovering ways of working that are politically astute, as well as better informed, and contributing to development in indirect ways' (Booth & Unsworth, 2014:1).

How can we improve the evidence base on such tools?

As the evidence base is very small and largely anecdotal, the first step would be for those using tools to conduct some sort of follow-up to understand their impact on the response. Any such analysis for any of the tools explored in this paper would be useful. In a recent review of urban needs assessments, researchers urged evaluators to refer to analysis undertaken when undertaking evaluations (Mohiddin & Smith, 2016). This paper extends that request in cases where organisations have used analysis of context. It is hoped that, as more organisations start using these tools, the humanitarian community can improve its understanding of how best to understand context in urban humanitarian response.

> " Although some of the tools examined for the paper have been in use for several years, there has been little attempt to evaluate their impact and usefulness. "

3.2.3 How else can humanitarians understand context?

Using tools is just one way to understand urban contexts. Humanitarians are likely to pick up relevant contextual information piece by piece over time, particularly if they get to know the people and institutions with which they interact. However, this can take a significant amount of time, will not be gathered and evidenced in one place for practical use in response planning, and is also likely to be patchy.

Some might argue that the best approach is to employ local staff and work with local partners, who already know the context. The research corroborated this. When working in Baghdad, NRC found it valuable to draw on the expertise of national staff who were able to 'gain insights on capacities, decision making power and political will' (Kelling & Heykoop, 2013b) that were often highly practical. For example, one 'national staff member during a meeting gave advice on how to approach a discussion with a particular Director General' and that 'knowledge was also gained on individual approaches such as why it might be better to phone an official than email them if it is more likely to get a more accurate and timely response' (Kelling & Heykoop, 2013b).

Most international organisations already employ national staff and/or work with local partners, but their knowledge of the context is not informing decision-making. Organisations could enhance their understanding of context by drawing on the perspectives of local staff and partners more systematically. Using context tools could support this in three ways:

1. Rather than presenting their assumptions and perceptions, local staff and partners would have a firmer evidence base. The analysis itself would capitalise on their existing knowledge and be richer for it, and a structured methodology could help to reduce individual bias (see Section 5.3.2).

2. Using a tool helps to create buy-in from senior management and relevant stakeholders, enabling findings to have broader application and inform significant decisions.

3. Local staff and stakeholders interviewed for this research, who had lived in the cities being examined by context analysis and similar tools, said they found them useful. The tools helped to confirm and provide evidence for their existing knowledge, revealed and confirmed assumptions and ideas, and also provided new insights.

> " The tools helped to confirm and provide evidence for their existing knowledge, revealed and confirmed assumptions and ideas, and also provided new insights. "

As the guidance for UNDP's ICA tool explains, 'ICA is not meant
to replace the deep local knowledge that those who are working in
the country concerned already have – it is only a method to help
extract that knowledge so it can support policy implementation and
programming in a structured manner' (Melim-McLeod, 2017:9).

Humanitarians also reach an understanding of context in an incremental,
adaptive approach. In their guidance note on conducting a context analysis
in development settings, SIMLab explain that one alternative to context
analysis, 'is to take an experimental approach, co-creating design by trying
things out, involving the community and the implementing team and going
in with as few assumptions as possible. This very agile, adaptive approach…
can arguably lead to more sustainable, locally-owned solutions, and may
be an option where we are working with established service providers such
as governments or local authorities, in a long-term development setting,
or where such approaches are the target of the learning. Most of the time,
a discrete context analysis exercise is a good way to take stock near the
beginning of a process, and it is well-suited to the relatively short-term
project cycle in which most social change work is funded and carried out.
For SIMLab, who are often brought in for a specific role, and not always at
the beginning of the project, it is crucial to establish this type of knowledge
in order to inform our advice. It may be that our partner already knows
or possesses the relevant information, in which desk review of existing
documents and a brief report may suffice. In other cases, fieldwork and
original research may be required. Regardless, some sort of context analysis
is advisable in every project that SIMLab takes on, but the scale of the
assessment will vary widely depending on budgets and timelines' (SIMLab,
2017d).

3.3 What tools help us to understand context?

It was not initially clear whether there were any tools that could help humanitarians to understand the urban context, in part due to the inconsistent use of 'context' (see Section 2.1) and the lack of standard terms for 'context tools'. Tools identified during the research were known by different names, including context analysis, profiles or profiling, governance analysis, stakeholder analysis and situation analysis. At a learning exchange event organised for this research, colleagues who had developed or used some of these tools wondered, given the differences in their scope, scale, methodologies, ownership and focus, whether they had anything in common at all. Could they all come under the same umbrella?

After a detailed analysis, 25 tools were identified which, to varying degrees, could come under the 'context tools' umbrella. Despite their many differences, they all help improve an understanding of context. They have been grouped as follows:

- Sixteen 'Core' tools – developed for, or used in, urban or sub-national contexts in an emergency or crisis context, and deal in whole or in part with context.

- Six 'Supplemental' tools – these deal in whole or in part with context. Some focus on a country or an urban level in a crisis context but in a development or planning context.

- Three 'Related' tools – these tools have been considered because they do address context in some way, but have a larger focus on, for example, needs or conflict.

This section gives a brief description of each of the tools explored. (See Annex A, available at **https://www.alnap.org/help-library/urban-tools-paper-annex**, for a longer description, with links to further relevant reading for each).

3.3.1 Core Tools for understanding urban contexts

ACF's Assessment of Sustainable Livelihoods and Urban Vulnerabilities

Using the sustainable livelihoods analytical framework, this tool focuses on understanding urban contexts and how they affect marginalised and excluded communities. It can be used at the city or neighbourhood level and takes approximately 2.5 to 4 months to complete.

Concern Worldwide – Contextual Analysis

This tool aims to capture a holistic understanding of the context and gives guidance on identifying effective and sustainable programme options to reduce extreme poverty. Applicable to both urban and rural settings, it focuses on extreme poverty including assets, inequality, risk and vulnerability. It can be used at the city or neighbourhood level and takes at least a month to complete.

Context Analysis using the Web of Institutionalisation

This approach was developed following an evaluation of NRC's shelter programme in Baghdad. Though it has not yet been used in a crisis, it has the potential to explore complex stakeholder relationships, and how these might stimulate change. The tool uses the conceptual 'Web of Institutionalisation' framework, and explores four spheres: policy, citizen, organisational and delivery. It could be used at the country, city or neighbourhood level, and takes about 2–3 weeks to complete.

Impact Initiatives – Area Based Toolkit

Aiming to support a more effective and relevant area-based response to refugee and displacement situations, the toolkit uses social network analysis[6] and is of particular use in understanding services and space. It can be used at the city and neighbourhood level and takes about 2–3 weeks to complete.

Integrating Peacebuilding and Conflict Sensitivity (IPACS)

This micro-level tool was designed to help community development and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) practitioners analyse the context and impact of their work in conflict settings. It focuses on the neighbourhood level and takes approximately 1-2 weeks to complete. It is part of the same suite of tools as the GECARR.

IRC's Urban Context Analysis Toolkit

This toolkit enables humanitarians to better understand the complex dynamics of an urban context, and also helps to strengthen existing or future programme strategy. It analyses the interconnected systems within a city – political, economic, social, infrastructural and spatial – as well as looking at gender equality and Do No Harm. It was developed specifically for urban displacement contexts and can be applied at the city and neighbourhood level and takes 4–6 weeks to complete.

JIPS Displacement Profiling

This tool focuses on understanding a displaced population, including the context, and where displaced people find themselves. It also aims to understand the size of the displaced population. The tool is collaborative, aiming to bring humanitarian, development, government and local actors together in one data-collection process to share ownership of profiling results. It has been used in various contexts and can take from four months to over a year to complete.

Market Analysis with Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and Political Economy Analysis

This approach, put together by a consultant working for ICRC in Gaza, combines market analysis, sustainable livelihoods and political economy analysis. It aims to understand the interactions between different aspects of a context and how they affect urban and rural markets and livelihoods. The approach has only been used once, but has the potential for wider use. It focuses on the city level and takes about a month to complete.

Mercy Corps – Strategic Resilience Assessment (STRESS)

This tool tries to understand the dynamic systems surrounding communities in order to build resilience. It explores the underlying causes of shocks and stresses, their impact, and the capacity of communities to adapt to them. STRESS connects qualitative and quantitative data at different scales and from various sectors. It also helps to develop a context-specific and resilience-focused Theory of Change to facilitate the design of more robust long-term programmes and strategies. STRESS can be applied at the country, city and local level, and takes about 3–9 months to complete.

Oxfam Italia - Local Authority Profiling Tool

This tool focuses on understanding local authorities as stakeholders, and the context in which they are working in order to find ways to engage with local authorities. It focuses on the city level and takes around 2–3 weeks to complete.

RCRC City-Wide Risk Assessment: Do it Together Toolkit for Building Urban Community Resilience

This toolkit provides guidance for communities working together to build resilience in cities. Using a systems approach, it explores vulnerabilities and resilience opportunities, with a focus on stakeholders, space and climate issues, and infrastructure. It can be used at city or neighbourhood levels, and its flexible methodology can take 1–6 months to complete.

Save the Children – Urban Situation Analysis Guide and Toolkit (USAGT)

This toolkit explores the urban context, focusing on the situation of children. It is designed to complement Save the Children's Child Rights Situation Analysis tool and is accompanied by guidance material for country offices new to urban contexts. Its flexible approach can be used at a city or neighbourhood scale and takes 1.5–3 months to complete.

UN-HABITAT City and Neighbourhood Profiles

UN-Habitat's City and Neighbourhood Profiles have been used in different countries and with varying methodologies. They aim to explore a range of contextual aspects, focusing especially on space. Profiles can be used to highlight urban issues, or to inform other profiles and humanitarian responses. The methodology used depends on the situation and aspects under review, with each profile taking approximately 2–6 months to complete.

Women's Refugee Commission – Service Provision Mapping

This tool helps to gather a comprehensive understanding of urban services and the stakeholders involved in providing them. It specifically focuses on service provision for different urban refugee populations, such as women, people with disabilities and LGBTI individuals. It can be applied at the city level and is particularly useful for identifying linkages that could be fostered or strengthened in order to bridge existing service gaps in urban contexts of displacement. It takes a few weeks to compile and can be updated continuously.

World Vision's Citywide Assessment

This tool aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the operational environment for urban development programmes. Using citywide landscape analysis, it can help to understand government policies and programmes, locate affected populations, and strengthen stakeholder networks in a neighbourhood. It can be implemented at the city or neighbourhood level and takes around 6 weeks to complete.

World Vision Context Analysis of Juba

This was a one-off context analysis by the South Sudan country team, which took a holistic approach to understanding the Juba context, particularly aiming to understand how this affected communities' vulnerability and resilience. This approach could be modified to suit other contexts and takes 3 months to complete.

3.3.2 Supplemental Tools for understanding context

CARE – Governance Context Analysis

This tool explores the governance context using PEA to help organisations identify and capitalise on opportunities and improve programme design. It includes institutional, stakeholder and structural analyses, and a workshop for participants to challenge findings and prioritise identified issues. So far, it has been used at the country level but could be adapted to urban contexts and takes 1-6 months to complete.

London Context and Character Analysis

This urban planning tool has been used to understand how neighbourhoods' character and context contribute to London's overall diversity. It explores the physical, cultural and social context. It takes about 3 months to complete and can be useful in designing strategies to sustaining and enhancing neighbourhoods' positive attributes.

OECD Resilient Systems Analysis (RSA)

This tool uses a collaborative approach to build a shared understanding of context as well as the main risks and coping strategies in a specific area. It emphasises a holistic understanding of risk and helps actors to work together to build resilience. It has primarily been used at country level and takes at least 4 months to complete.

SDC Context Analysis and Monitoring System for Development-Related Changes (MERV)

This tool is used to monitor contextual changes that may require an existing programme to be adapted. The context analysis acts as a starting point for cooperation strategies and as a baseline for context-monitoring processes within a MERV cycle. It can be used at the country, city or neighbourhood level. The time for completing it can vary.

SIMLab – Framework for Context Analysis for Inclusive Technology Projects

This tool focuses specifically on how information and communication technologies fit within a context and also explores stakeholders, politics, economics and culture. The tool was piloted in rural and urban development contexts. It could be used at the country, city or neighbourhood level and takes 1-2 weeks to conduct analysis and 2–3 months to incorporate the analysis into programming, depending on scope.

UNDP Institutional and Context Analysis (ICA)

This tool explores the roles actors play in achieving programme success to provide a better understanding of the enabling/disabling environment and better predict and manage risk. It explores issues including stakeholder interests, power relations, and the presence of (in)formal institutions. It was developed for use by a group of stakeholders in development contexts and

has so far been used at the country level and takes between 1–3 months depending on scope.

3.3.3 Related Tools for understanding context

Good Enough Context Analysis for Rapid Response (GECARR)

This tool, created by World Vision, provides a macro-level analysis of a country or a specific region in the midst of, or susceptible to, a crisis. It aims to provide a snapshot of the current situation, bringing together a wide range of stakeholder perspectives. GECARR's inter-agency and flexible nature enables swift implementation in rapidly changing contexts and takes 3–5 weeks to complete. It is part of the same suite of tools as IPACS. The GECARR provides useful insights and is referred to throughout this paper. However, as primarily a conflict-analysis tool at the macro scale, it has been grouped as a 'related' tool.

Urban Multi-Sectorial Vulnerability Analysis Tool (UMVAT)

Developed by NRC, UMVAT is a multi-sectoral needs and vulnerability assessment tool, although some context questions can be incorporated. It takes an area-based approach to explore key vulnerabilities in several sectors, the relationship between sectors and their impact on displaced and host communities. It can be implemented at the city and neighbourhood levels and takes approximately 1.5–4 months to complete.

WFP Integrated Context Analysis (ICA)

This tool combines multi-year food security trends with natural shock risk data to show where different programme strategies, including safety nets, DRR, preparedness and early warning, are appropriate in order to reduce food insecurity and climate-related shock risk. It uses quantitative data for mapping, which can be interpreted through consultation with government and other partners to develop programme strategies. It does not specifically focus on cities but uses maps to identify the trends and themes it explores. It takes approximately 2–3 months to use. WFP's ICA uses a different definition of context than the one used in this paper and so it is included as a 'related' tool.

3.4.2 How are these tools similar to or different from each other?

The tools explored by this research can be differentiated in various ways, as briefly outlined below.

Timeframe

The tools vary considerably in terms of their timeframe, from a couple of weeks to a year or more, but most take several months from start to finish. Generally, tools with a longer timeframe, such as JIPS' displacement profiling, use a more collaborative approach, involving multiple stakeholders, aim for a higher level of detail and include additional content areas such as enumerating the size of the displaced population. At the other end of the spectrum, the GECARR tool has a very short timeframe, which suits its objective of providing information very quickly in turbulent contexts. The GECARR does not aim to provide a great level of detail and relies heavily on the knowledge of a sample of key informants to generate a rapid analysis of a conflict and the context in which it occurs.

Content areas

While all of the tools explore context, they vary considerably in their depth and focus. Using the framework proposed in earlier research (Campbell, 2016), the tools are compared in the above graphic according to the five different aspects of the urban context – politics and governance, economics, social and cultural, services and infrastructure, and space and settlements, plus an additional category of relevant stakeholders (see Figure 2). Some focus on one or two areas, for instance CARE's Governance Analysis focuses mostly on politics & governance. Others, such as the UN-Habitat City & Neighbourhood Profiles and IRC's Urban Context Analysis, explore all of them. Clearly even when two tools cover an issue in depth, they are likely to pose different questions and emphasise different aspects, and many have room to vary the depth of analysis (see Section 4.1 for deciding on scope). Although several of the tools are not designed to cover all aspects of the urban context, ALNAP's research emphasises the complex interconnections between different areas. This research recommends that tools used to understand urban areas explore all aspects of the context.

Figure 4: Timeframe of the tools

Key

Tool implementation timeframe:

| Minimum | Tool name | Maximum |

- Core tools
- Supplemental tools
- Related tools

Note: This chart is intended for illustrative purposes only. The timeframe for the SDC Context Analysis/MERV is variable. As such, it is not in this chart.

Tools shown:
- Governance CA
- Ldn Character/CA
- OECD RSA
- CA Web of Inst.
- City/N'hood profiles
- STRESS
- Displacement profiling
- SIMLab CA
- UNDP ICA
- WV City Wide Assess.
- WRC Service Map
- Urban CA toolkit
- Municip. profiling
- IPACS
- Concern CA
- RCRC Citywide risk
- USAGT
- Juba CA
- ACF SL & Urb.
- UMVAT
- WFP ICA
- Area-based toolbox
- SLF & PEA
- GECARR

Timeline: 1 week — 1 month — 3 months — 6 months — 1 year

Figure 5: Content areas

Economy and Livelihoods

Politics and governance

Stakeholders

WFP ICA
UMVAT
GECARR
UNDP ICA
Simlab CA
CA & MERV
OECD RSA
London Character/CA
Governance CA
WRC Service
Juba CA
IPACS
WV Citywide Assess
City/N'hood profiles
USAGT
RCRC Citywide risk
Municip. profiling
CA Web of Inst
STRESS
Displacement profiling
Urban CA Toolkit
Area-based toolbox
SLF & PEA
CONCERN CA
ACF SL & URB

Key

Core tools
Supplemental tools
Related tools

Tool focuses strongly on this area

Tool has some focus in this area

Infrastructure and service

Space and settlements

Social and cultural

ACF SL & UR8
CONCERN CA
SLF & PEA
Area-based toolbox
Urban CA Toolkit
Displacement profiling
STRESS
CA Web of Inst
Municip. profiling
RCRC Citywide risk
USAGT
City/N'hood profiles
Citywide Assess
IPACS
Juba CA
WRC Service
Governance CA
London Character/CA
OECD RSA
CA & MERV
Simlab CA
UNDP ICA
GECARR
UMVAT
WFP ICA

Scale

While many important issues span an urban landscape, it would require major time and resources to gain an in-depth understanding of the myriad relevant factors. This is why most of the tools combine different lenses of analysis. Some issues are explored at a city-wide level, while others focus on a specific area or neighbourhood. In some cases, the same issues are examined at multiple levels, but with different levels of depth. Several have been designed to look at the national scale but could be adapted to urban environments, or be useful in understanding several cities and how they relate to each other.

Figure 6: Scale
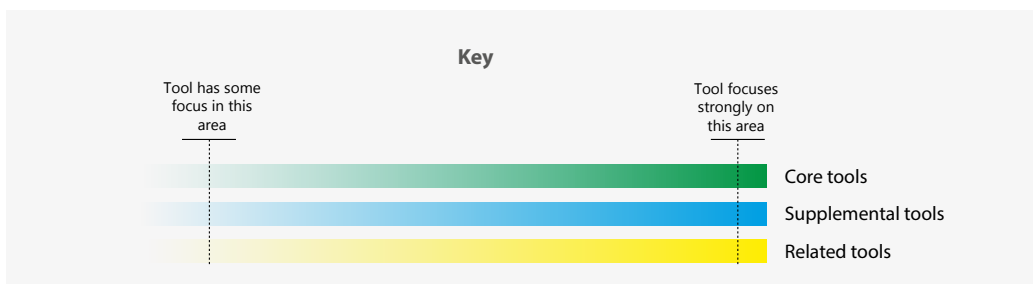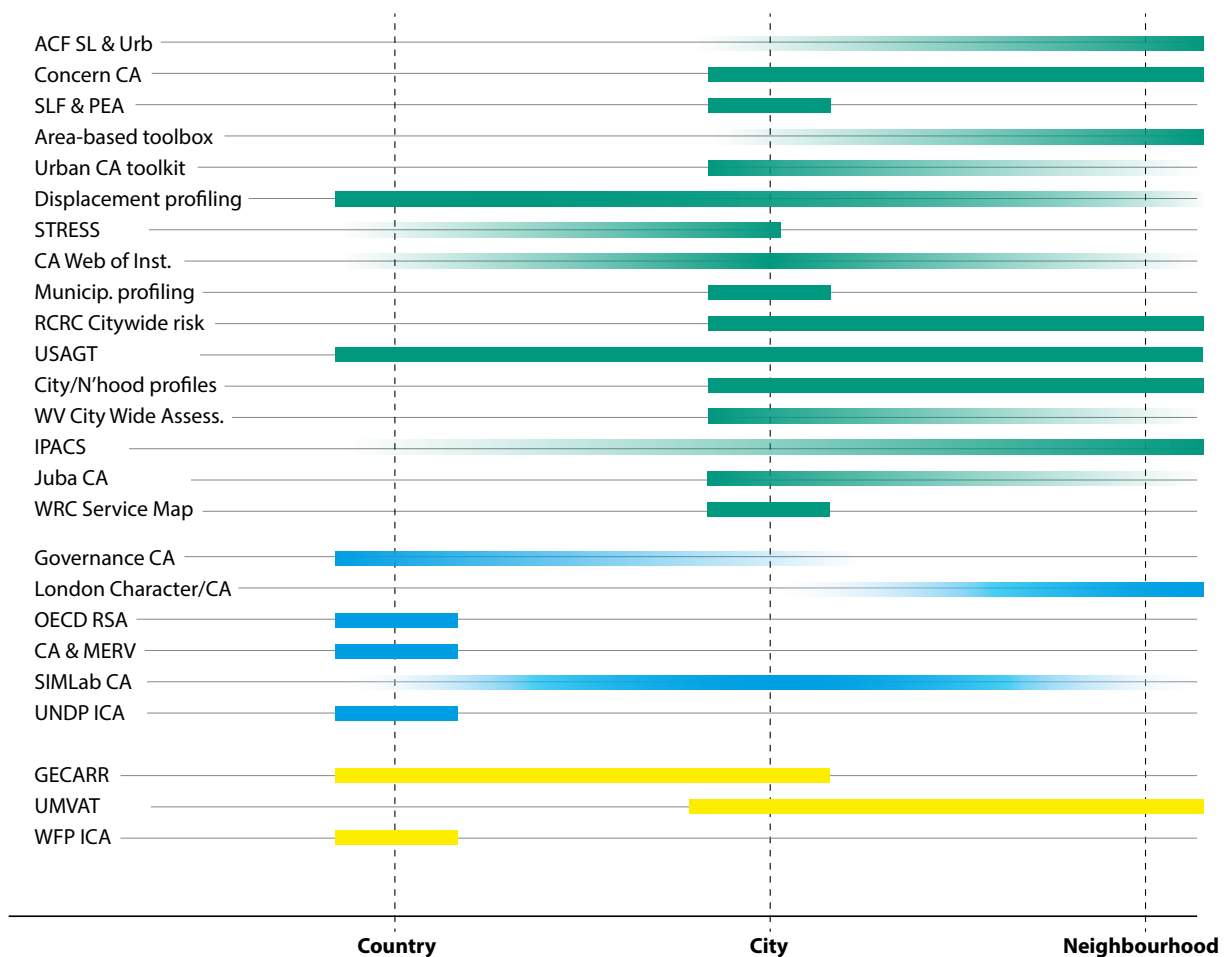
Methodology

Each tool uses a different methodology, with common elements including desk review, KIIs, focus group discussions (FGDs) and workshops. Most methods for understanding context are qualitative, but some of the tools use quantitative approaches particularly where baseline data are not available or reliable, such as to understand the size of a displaced population. Most tools are designed to be used by one organisation, but some are intentionally collaborative, finding this to be a valuable part of the process itself (see Section 4.4).

Outputs

The tools also vary considerably in terms of what they produce. Some have a built-in response analysis (see Box 1), others do not. Most produce a final written report, though few are routinely disseminated. Some suggest dissemination through a workshop or other interactive means. Most tools, however, could easily be adapted to produce any potential output. The options are discussed in Section 4.2.

Resource cost

The overall cost of using each tool will vary considerably,. These variations, and lack of recorded information, prevent a meaningful comparison. Generally, the largest cost is staff time and, depending on the methodology, there may also be costs for travel, workshop organisation and publication.

3.4.3 The usefulness/importance of having different tools

Each of the 25 tools examined in this research is unique, but given the lack of tools that are relevant for an urban context until quite recently, this is a good sign. Each tool will be more appropriate depending on the circumstances, and they may also learn and borrow from one another, or be combined in different ways, in order to be most suitable for specific needs. There will never be a one-size-fits-all tool, or one that is universally 'better' or 'worse' than another. Within reason, each is 'most useful' in a given circumstance. Before developing any new tools, the existing ones – those reviewed in this paper as well as others – should be considered for use or adaptation.
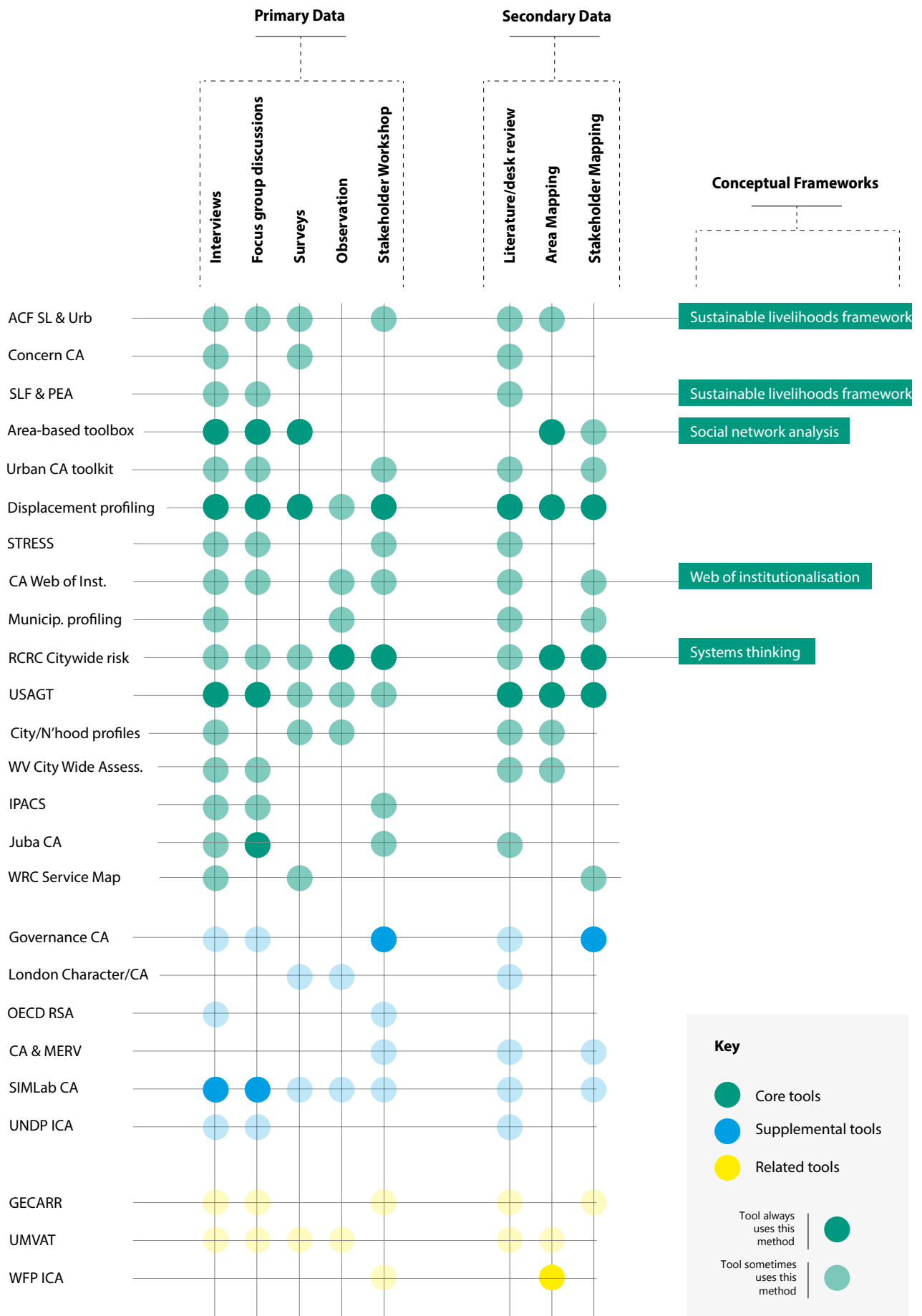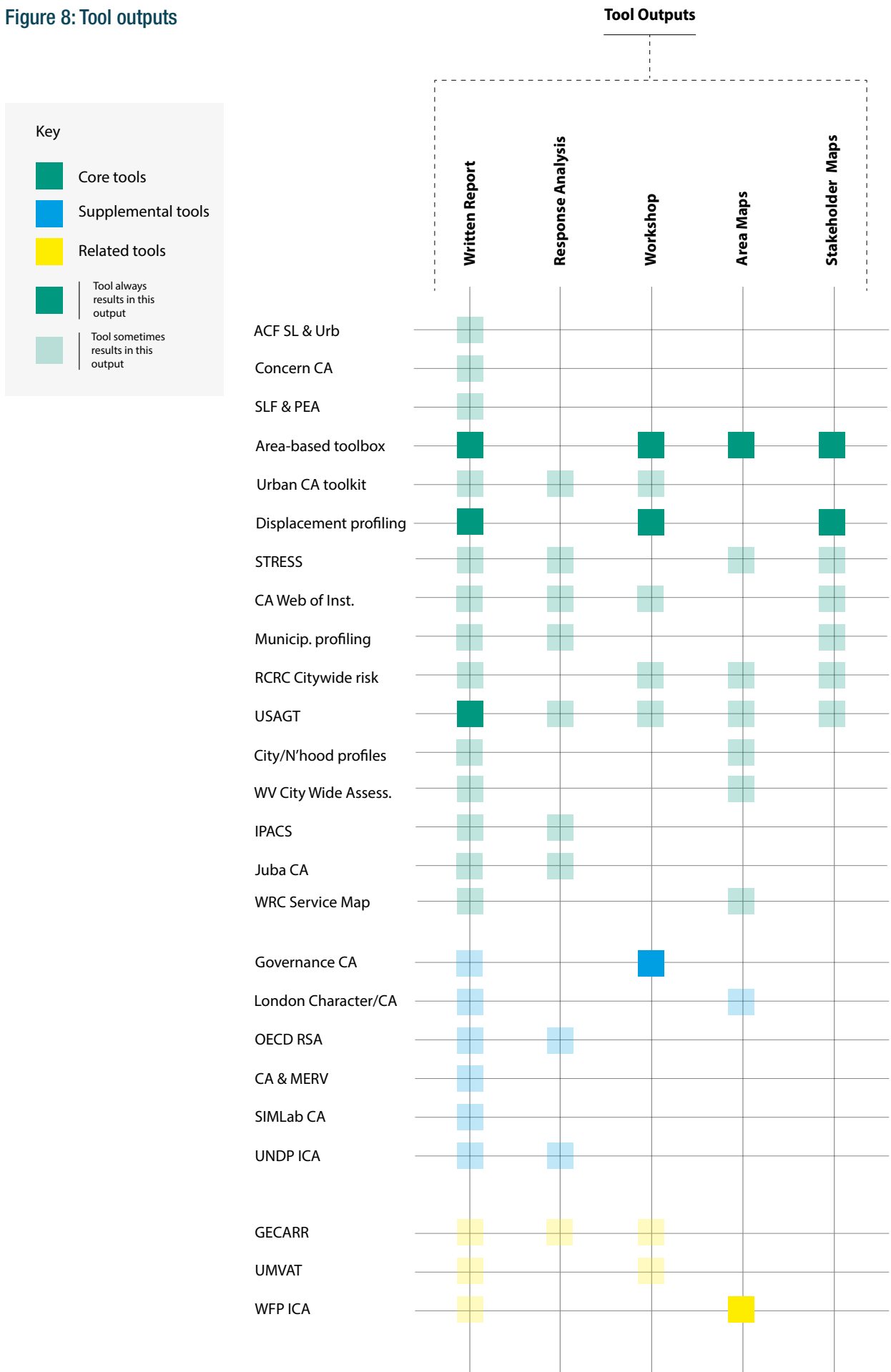
Figure 7: Tool methodologies

Figure 8: Tool outputs

3.4.4 Which tool should I use?

No method or tool will work best in all circumstances. During the learning exchange, participants proposed creating a decision tree or menu of options to help organisations make a choice. The range of aspects to consider, and the variations each context will bring, make it unrealistic to attempt to do so in this report, although the graphics above, and full descriptions of the tools may help (see Annex A, available at **https://www.alnap.org/help-library/ urban-tools-paper-annex**).

For organisations interested in using a tool to better understand context, the first step is to determine the objective of a potential analysis exercise. Identifying the objective leads to the questions which need answering, the appropriate scope and level of detail, the time and resources available, and so on. The various tools can be compared in terms of how well they might meet the objective on the basis of their methodologies, their specific focus, and the guidance material available. For example, if the objective is a collaborative, comprehensive understanding of a displacement context and there are no critical time constraints, displacement profiling may be appropriate. If, however, there is a need to understand a conflict context very rapidly, the GECARR might be a good choice. There may well be other tools that were not identified in the research, or have since been developed. These could be compared using the same metrics.

To assess whether a tool meets the objectives, it may be useful to answer the following questions (based on Saferworld, 2004:12):

- Does it provide the information you need for your work?

- Is the proposed process for the analysis consistent with your aims?

- Do you understand and agree with its conceptual frameworks?

- Does the proposed methodology match the purpose of the analysis?

- How long does it take to obtain results?

- What are its resource implications (staff time, travel, seminar costs, facilities, data management)?

- Is your organisation able to allocate the required resources?

- Can you access the guidance/materials necessary to use this tool?

> "
> Each tool will be more appropriate depending on the circumstances, and they may also learn and borrow from one another, or be combined in different ways.
> "

Section 4:
Using tools to understand context

In order to use context tools effectively, organisations need to make a number of decisions: What is the objective of the analysis, and how will this shape the scope? In what ways does the tool need to be adapted for use in a particular place? When should the tool be used? Who should lead, and who else should be involved? How will the analysis finding and outputs be shared, and what needs to happen to ensure their uptake?

Section 4: Using tools to understand context

4.1 Determining objectives and scope for the analysis

How detailed does an analysis of context need to be? Are 'good enough' approaches fit for purpose? How can one decide between depth of analysis and timeliness? Will access limit the scope of the analysis? What is the right balance of depth, rigour and cost?

The answer to these questions will depend on what is most appropriate for the context, for the organisation(s) involved, logistics, resources, and so on. This section considers the questions organisations must address in order to determine the scope of their analysis, which will usually involve difficult decisions, for instance weighing up between time constraints and the depth required.

4.1.1 What is the aim or objective of this analysis?

A consideration of scope starts by determining the objective or purpose of the analysis. 'Each purpose or combination of purposes will demand different kinds of information and analyses. Thus, the content of assessments, as well as the process by which they are undertaken, will often be shaped by the purpose…This can be a double-edged sword: there is a risk of missing important information if the assessment is too heavily focused on responding to a specific purpose. However, assessments that do not respond to the immediate decision-making needs of an organization also risk being disregarded. Challenges often arise when the purpose of an assessment is not clearly established from the outset, leading to differing, and even competing, expectations of how the assessment should be used' (Slotin, Wyeth & Romita, 2010:11). This will avoid expectations that exceed the scope of the analysis (Darcy et al, 2007).

Several tools include guidance on defining the objectives of the analysis. JIPS, for example, found that any analysis should begin by asking 'What is the purpose? And what is the scope?' (NRC-IDMC & UN OCHA, 2008). The Mercy Corps STRESS tool begins with a scoping phase and defining the purpose in a given context. For example, 'Are we using this to build an urban resilience strategy, jointly with government stakeholders? Are we using

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> Assessments that do not respond to the immediate decision-making needs of an organization also risk being disregarded.
>
> **"**

the STRESS to put out a call for proposals? Are we using this process as an inception phase, to start up a large, multi-sector programme? The purpose of the assessment is very important, because it also determines its scope and scale' (Petryniak, 2017).

4.1.2 What is the necessary level of detail and depth?

Once an objective is defined, its level of depth or detail need to be determined. Organisations may ask what information would be most relevant to the decisions they need to make, the level of detail that will be appropriate for this situation and context, and the depth of information needed to produce sound findings.

It is not easy to strike the balance between getting enough information in order to avoid overlooking critical details, but not collecting more detail than would be useful. Being too restrictive and narrowly focused risks missing vital information. Organisations that are new to undertaking an analysis to understand context in an urban environment may find this balance difficult to establish. They may feel that some aspects of the context, such as social and cultural issues or politics and governance, are not relevant to their programmatic objectives. However, in the urban environment, all aspects of context are interconnected, and may well be relevant to any humanitarian response.

> **"**
> It is not easy to strike the balance between getting enough information in order to avoid overlooking critical details, but not collecting more detail than would be useful.
> **"**

At the same time, it is both impractical and unreasonable to expect to capture everything that is relevant – some information will have to be overlooked. One interviewee emphasised that, 'really narrowing down the questions is quite important. Everyone always wants to know everything. It's not necessary, don't do it, you'll end up with far too much data, you won't be able to write it up'. A USAID report on conflict analysis similarly argued that 'assessments that seek to provide a deep analysis of all of the component parts of a conflict context produce more information than a policy maker or donor agency can absorb. The result is that some assessment tools generate long lists of factors that leave decision makers overwhelmed by information and no clear priorities and no clear sense of how the factors work together' (USAID, 2011:6).

An iterative approach uses triangulation to understand when there is sufficient data to support a certain finding. Organisations can also be iterative with the level of detail, taking it step by step, finding out more if seems likely to be useful, or making corrections when it is not. As

organisations become more experienced with using tools to understand context, they can rely on experience to better predict what sorts of information are likely to be most relevant. They can start by considering what information did we not have the last time, that we should have had at the outset? However, it is important to not assume that something won't be relevant because it hasn't been elsewhere. Each context is different and dynamic. Tools such as the IRC's urban context analysis tool, specifically designed for urban areas and humanitarian response, are useful starting points to understand the sorts of questions to ask to avoid overlooking critical information.

Heyse (2015b) differentiates between 'quick and dirty' and 'slow and thorough' approaches to analysis, suggesting that the ideal is halfway between the two. This balance can be thought of as a 'good enough' approach, and is easier said than done. Recognising the practical realities of humanitarian contexts and timeframes, organisations do their best to understand, recognising that analysis will always be imperfect and somewhat incomplete but is nevertheless 'good enough' (UNHCR, 2017; GPPAC, 2015; Patrick, 2011; Darcy et al., 2013). In the 2010 Haiti earthquake, information about needs and context was shared too late to be useful (Currion, 2015), leading to arguments that it is 'better to have moderately reliable information and "good enough" analysis on time than "perfect" information and analysis that comes too late. Late analysis, no matter how good, is of little use' (Patrick, 2011:3). As Currion (2014b:3) points out, 'being "good enough" means choosing a simple solution rather than a complicated one. "Good enough" does not mean second best'.

Others are critical of a 'good enough' approach, or at least how it can be (mis)used in practice. In principle, it means having enough information to make a decision, accepting that aiming for 'perfect' is impossible. Even 'good enough' may be difficult to achieve, and some interviewees felt that not all 'good enough' analysis is sufficiently rigorous to inform sound decisions, and that the term can be used incorrectly. One learning exchange participant emphasised that, 'I hear a lot of people talk about, on one side, the complexity of urban environment and context, but at the same time that the tools should be simple. So, in my mind, we should be very careful about how we phrase this, because for me, the simplicity should come the way we communicate the results…the analysis part shouldn't be, or cannot be…too simple'.

Realistically, the level of detail – and what 'good enough' will require – will depend on several factors. The ideal level of detail may need to be compromised to accommodate other factors such as resource and access constraints. The tools examined for this research varied greatly in their level of detail – both overall and in different areas. Some focused on certain aspects (such as space, or governance) more than others (such as social and cultural issues). So, in determining scope and choosing an analytical tool, organisations should be nuanced in how much detail they seek to achieve.

4.1.3 What scale will the analysis focus on? How will area be chosen?

Given the interconnectedness of urban environments, the context cannot be understood without looking at multiple scales. This does not mean needing to understand each issue in the same amount of depth. Some things (aspects of the political or cultural context, for example) may be broadly the same across a city or even a country, whereas others (use of space, access to transport, etc.) may be best understood at a neighbourhood level. It is also useful to consider the relationship between different scales and, for example, the linkages between urban and rural spaces.

In some cases, the same issue may be examined at several levels. This is also true for particular stakeholders – for example, the Ministry of Health may influence health policy, while at a city level health issues could be divided into several units or groups, each with 'different interests and concerns about the outcome' (Varvasovsky & Brugha 2000:340).

Several of the tools were developed, at least in part, to add to the detail of information available about an urban context. The City Profiles produced across Syria, working alongside the Humanitarian Needs Overview and Humanitarian Planning Cycle, have added immense value to the response in Syria, for the first time offering humanitarians data at a neighbourhood level.

Similarly, CARE's Governance Context Analysis tool originally offered users guidance about how to apply it to specific sectors, or to national or local contexts, but found that 'what many staff were most keen for was not country or sector level analytical frameworks, but something that allowed them to analyse political economy dynamics at local level' (Aston, n.d. c).

In order to provide this level of detail in a manageable way, several tools opt for national and city-wide analysis, combined with a deeper look at a small number of neighbourhoods, and/or groups of neighbourhoods.

The first question is to decide which particular area in a city on which to focus. In 2017, ALNAP held a webinar to explore this question and the resulting **research note** reflects on a variety of approaches organisations can use to determine an area.

4.1.4 What resources are available?

The scope of analysis will depend on the time and financial resources available. The tools examined for this research vary greatly – some taking a couple of weeks start to finish, others close to a year. Balancing time and cost with the depth of analysis is one of the main initial decisions, both to determine the scope and the most appropriate tool to achieve it.

The time and cost of an analysis should be considered with those who will have an active role in the exercise. It may be difficult to convince decision-makers to invest in an analysis if they do not understand what needs it will address. One learning exchange participant explained, 'some national offices say ooh, $10,000? Yeah, you're running a multi-million-dollar response and you're complaining about $10,000 to guide you as to what's happening? Really? So, it is still a case that has to be made in general for context analysis in large multi-mandate organisations'. If these challenges come up, it may be useful to refer to Section 2 exploring why this analysis is important and Section 5.2.2 about leadership support.

In order to address the time and resource question, guidance documents for Save the Children's Urban Situation Analysis Guidance & Toolkit propose four options for using the tool, each with different time/resource implications. Table 3 identifies some of these differences. While time and resource constraints are a reality, organisations should aim to make decisions on the basis of their objectives. So, rather than thinking, 'We've got two weeks, what can we do?', it is better to define an objective, understand its implications, and make compromises – which may mean changing the objective, or finding additional resource.

> "
> A 'good enough' approach' means having enough information to make a decision, accepting that aiming for 'perfect' is impossible.
> "

Table 3: Different options for the USAGT

	Suggested team makeup	Suggested length of analysis period	Predominant data collection type
Multi-theme/ citywide	2 team members from each relevant thematic groups, 1 - 2 team members from other thematic groups with experience in the targeted city	2 months, with part-time commitment from team members	Surveys, desk research, interviews with donors and other implementers
Multi-theme/ neighborhood-scale	1 team member from each relevant thematic group, 1 - 2 representatives of local partners with experience in the targeted neighborhood(s)	4 - 6 weeks, with part-time commitment from team members	Surveys, focus group discussions, interviews with local partners and local officials/politicians
Single-theme/ citywide	2 - 3 team members from the relevant thematic group, 1 - 2 team members from a different thematic group with experience in the targeted city	2 - 4 weeks, with part-time commitment from team members	Desk research, focus group discussions, interviews with local partners and local officials/politicians
Single-theme/ neighborhood-scale	1 - 2 team members from the relevant thematic group, at least 1 team member from a different thematic group with experience working in the targeted neighborhood	2 - 3 weeks, with part-time commitment from team members	Focus group discussions, interviews with local partners and local officials/politicians

(Source: Save the Children, 2016)

Timing constraints may also come from the context. Slotin, Wyeth & Romita (2010:12) note that 'while a more resource-intensive and time-consuming analysis may produce a stronger final product, sometimes such a luxury is not available because the pace of events requires rapid decision making'.

4.1.5 Are there any logistical constraints?

Most humanitarian contexts are challenging situations in which to get things done. There are constraints on physical access for programming and analysis, including security concerns and official restrictions (NRC-IDMC & UN OCHA, 2008). It can be hard to navigate densely populated areas, particularly if there is traffic congestion, 'which imposes slowdowns, and adds stress and time requirements to all planning' (Jacobsen & Cardona, 2014).

Access to information may also be restricted or require going back and forth to different government agencies, for example. One interviewee lamented, 'there were too many red tapes we had to go through and that frustrated our consultant to the extent that it affected a small portion of data collection'. JIPS also found that interview fatigue may mean some potential key informants may be unwilling to participate (NRC-IDMC & UN OCHA, 2008).

Logistical challenges are likely to come up during the analysis. These can range in severity from certain key informants being unavailable, to larger concerns such as a security incident. Any analysis exercise should anticipate potential volatility and uncertainty and remain flexible and adapt as needed (World Vision, 2017a; Kamatsiko, 2016; Sardesai & Wam, 2006). Anticipating challenges and identifying mitigating measures where possible can help to ensure analysis can still go ahead. For some, security and access constraints may seem insurmountable. One report by World Vision found that, 'people interviewed noted that context analysis exercises often don't happen because gathering information in fragile and conflict-prone areas can be too difficult' (Klassen et al., 2016:9). However, much analysis can be done remotely, by reviewing secondary data or by remote interview and, if carefully planned, these constraints can be worked through. This does have time implications, however, so compromises may be needed to decide what is feasible.

4.1.6 What else might limit the scope?

Whether secondary or baseline data are available will influence the scope of the analysis. If information is easily accessible, organisations may be able to do a deeper analysis for less investment and less need to compromise. As one interviewee noted, however, 'In urban areas, there's a lot of information and a lot of data but in reality, the data isn't in one place. It's everywhere so it's difficult to go to just one place and collect the information and sometimes you don't know where the information is'. Political sensitivities may also be a limiting factor – see Section 4.6.2.

Organisations should also consider how far they intend to work with others to carry out the analysis. While a coordinated approach has significant advantages for the analysis it has implications for timing and scope. The more organisations involved, the more complicated the process - see Section 4.4.

4.2 Adapting Tools to Context

There are many ways to understand the urban environment. The tools reviewed for this paper are just some, and have looked slightly different in each iteration. As IRC comments, 'just as no context is the same, no context analysis will be the same'. The range of options will depend on decisions regarding scope and depth, as discussed in the previous section. It may be necessary to adapt the tool to account, for example, for differences in baseline information, logistics and security considerations in a given context, or for the capacity of those involved. The scope, timeframe, methodology, team composition, questions asked and issues prioritised can, and should, be adapted to the context. This can also help to make the tools easier for analysis teams to use and understand, avoid unintentional harm or exacerbating social tensions, support understanding of analysis findings and their significance, and allow the team to understand nuances of the context and the potential role they could play (UNHCR, 2017).

During the learning exchange, participants discussed the need for significant adaptations depending on the types of crisis (for example, in rapid-onset crisis in Port-au-Prince or Manila compared to longer-term displacement crises in Beirut, or protracted conflict in Bangui or Goma). In some respects, adaptation will relate to these crises types. The degree to which local authorities can or should be involved in the analysis exercise

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> Anticipating challenges and identifying mitigating measures where possible can help to ensure analysis can still go ahead.
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in part depends on this, for example, and there may be certain priorities depending on the crisis type and situation. But in many ways, the content of an analysis of urban context will be the same, regardless of the specific crisis, because, as discussed in Section 2.1, context is more than any specific crisis event. It encompasses everything that makes up the environment and circumstances in which the crisis and the response occur. Although not every aspect of the urban context will be relevant to a humanitarian response, the politics and governance of a city, the social and cultural factors, the economic environment, the space and settlement issues and the services and infrastructure will always be critical. This means that many of the questions (perhaps with some variation in wording) will be the same, even though the answers will be different.

The good news is that existing tools can be adapted to context. UN-Habitat's City Profiles, for example, were adapted to the contexts of Gaza, Aleppo and Tripoli – and each result looks quite different. Most of the tools examined explicitly encourage users to adapt them to context. It has been suggested that tools could include guidance for how to do so, but given that so many adaptations are possible, many of which may not be due to crisis type but to contextual factors, this is unlikely to be worth pursuing. It may also discourage an analysis team from taking time to reflect on what other adaptations may be needed if they just follow standard guidance.

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> The scope, timeframe, methodology, team composition, questions asked and issues prioritised can, and should, be adapted to the context.
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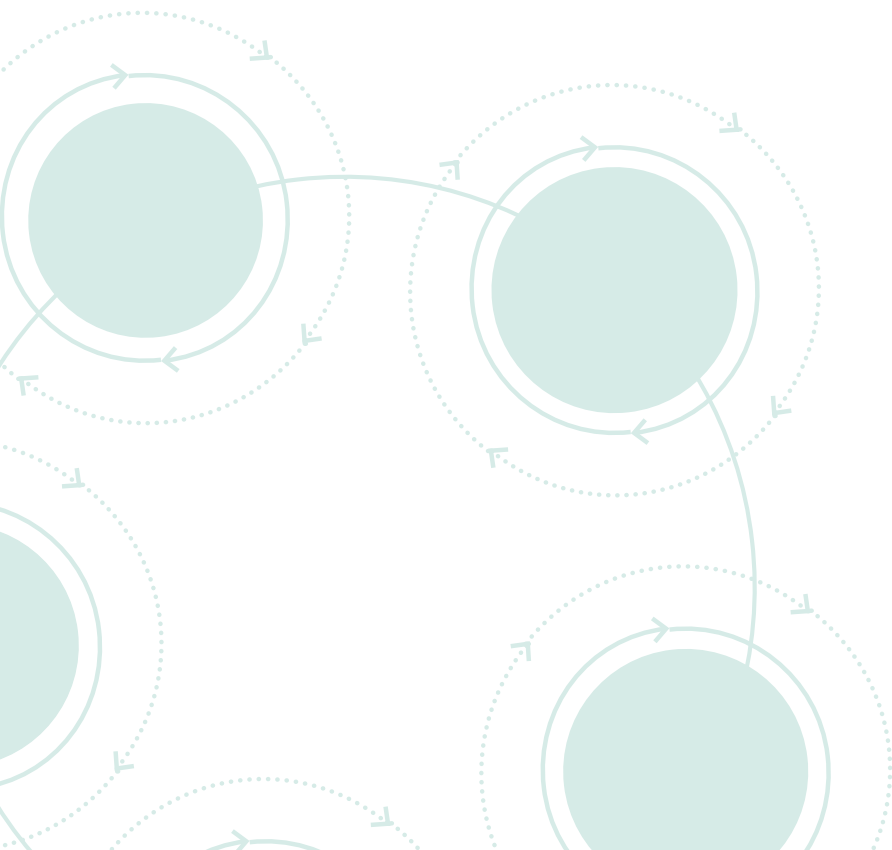
So, how to go about adapting context analysis tools? The following aspects came up in the review of the literature and the tools.

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> Many of the questions (perhaps with some variation in wording) will be the same, even though the answers will be different.
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1. **Include adaptation of tools/approaches early in the analysis exercise**. Involving the analysis team helps to familiarise them with the tools and to understand the purpose behind the approach and so produce a better analysis (UNHCR, 2017). This is particularly important if tools have been developed at a global level and are being used by country teams.

2. **Adapt as an iterative process** – even in a rapid analysis, it is important to build in time and space to reflect and make changes as new information comes to light.

3. **Contextualise language**. In some cases, for example, the term 'refugee' or 'host' may be sensitive, and other terms less so. Similarly, 'household', 'community', 'family', and 'vulnerability' can all be understood in many different ways (Mohiddin et al., 2017a) – so check what they mean in the context rather than assuming.

4. **Build on existing contextual knowledge**. Critical to adapting the tool and process to the context is the knowledge of local staff, who are ideally significant members of the analysis team (see Section 4.5 on team composition).

5. **Adapt based on context, not on assumptions**. Resist the urge to exclude issues because your organisation does not typically work on them. Remove questions once you already have sufficient information, rather than because you're not sure who to ask.

6. **Be creative and find workarounds to adapt rather than skip**. Some of the pilots of tools studied opted to remove parts of the process either because they felt uncomfortable with trying something new, or because they had concerns about protection. For example, during one pilot the team had concerns that holding FGDs to ask a host population about refugees could inflame social tensions, so opted to not to do so. While the protection concerns are important to consider, the team could perhaps have structured the questions in a different way rather than missing out on understanding the perspectives of host communities.

4.3 When should we use tools to understand the context?

There is no one right moment to use tools to understand the urban environment. Several of the tools' guidance suggests analysis should be reviewed 'when necessary', which is understandably quite vague. When would be best will depend on the context itself – how complex it is, how much it's changing, and what depth of understanding may now be required, what resources are available, etc. There are, however, some common themes in the literature and tools reviewed, which suggest that context tools can/should be used at the following times:

- Pre-crisis, as a preparedness/anticipation activity

- At key moments in the programme cycle (at start of response, part of M&E process, etc.)

- Whenever there is a major event/change (or one is anticipated)

- To align with strategic and planning processes and with other analyses processes etc.

- To align with the context

- In a modified way on a continuous basis

4.3.1 The potential of pre-crisis analysis

One of the critical obstacles to understanding the context in a humanitarian response is the pressure of time. There are many things to do, not enough resources and although those responding want to understand the context, there will always be practical limitations. One way to mitigate the pressures of time is to have at least a partial analysis of context before an emergency occurs.

Having some pre-crisis analysis would also add another layer to the understanding. Ultimately any crisis situation will change the context, so any analysis that begins after the fact could fail to understand what things were like beforehand. One interviewee explained, 'We will never understand its impact without understanding how the context functions prior to crisis, where the vulnerabilities are that were already there'.

Understanding the context is therefore an important preparedness activity (Kondo Rossier, 2016) and humanitarian organisations 'should be aware of the need and make suitable space for strategic analysis and lesson learning before and during intervention' (Patrick, 2011:4). This approach is already used for pre-crisis market analysis[7].

While it will not be possible to predict what situation might arise, the context exists regardless of any situation. So, while many aspects of the urban context will either not much change as a result of the situation, others will, and having a before and after analysis can help in understanding the significance of any changes that do occur.

Not every organisation that responds to a humanitarian crisis has a pre-crisis presence, so those which do – local authorities, local, national or international NGOs, development and resilience actors – should explore undertaking an analysis and making it widely available in the event of a crisis.

4.3.2 Understanding context at key moments in the programme cycle

Tools can be used to better understand the context at any point, but most importantly at the outset of planning a project or programme (Concern, 2012; Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, 2012; Kamatsiko, 2016; World Vision, 2017f; Golder & Gawler, 2005; WHO, 2009). This ensures that analysis can inform project design and identify potential risks and opportunities. One interviewee who was involved in an analysis of context mid-way through a project said that, with hindsight, it would have been helpful to do the analysis at the start because 'understanding these dynamics from a planning perspective, as an example, would have helped us design our programmes in a more comprehensive way'. Another interviewee noted that, 'doing the exercise really laid bare the fact that there are so many organisations that they [the project team] don't know about', and this information is useful to have sooner rather than later. Interviewees also suggested that decision-makers may be more open-minded and have 'more space to think outside the box' at the start of a project. Understandably, this is a common time for analysis to take place, and several tools incorporate some element of response analysis or programme design as a direct follow-on from the findings.

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One way to mitigate the pressures of time is to have at least a partial analysis of context before an emergency occurs.
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While ideal, it will not always be possible to complete analysis before project design begins. Depending on the nature of the crisis, there may be constraints on time, resources, security and access (Ward, 2013). For example, in rapid-onset situations donors may make funding decisions within 10 days (Garfield et al., 2011), so it would then be more practical to undertake analysis alongside planning, or even shortly into the response (Ward, 2013).

In order to assess relevance, and to amend plans as needed or to inform changes or new plans (Concern, 2012), analysis can and should be 'something you will use throughout the life of your project' (Montayne, 2006:2). Analysis mid-way through could 'provide an immediate picture of the impact the activity is having on the context, and may require immediate decision making to rectify any prevailing issues (negative impact)' (World Vision, 2017f). While it is important to understand the context throughout the programme cycle, the analysis should not be too directed by the programme. This is because some aspects of context may be omitted if they are initially deemed unimportant, and potentially relevant information will be missed later. This is one of the fundamental challenges in an analysis of context. It must not be done for its own sake, and those undertaking it should be clear from the outset what decisions will be informed and how it will be used – but too many assumptions will limit the potential of analysis.

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> Decision-makers may be more open-minded and have 'more space to think outside the box' at the start of a project.
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This ties into adopting a flexible or adaptive approach to programming. Since it is impossible to know everything which might be relevant about the context at the project design stage, even if an analysis is conducted before planning begins, organisations must anticipate that new information about the context may arise, either because something has changed, or because some information has since come to light. As explained by SIMLab, 'At a minimum, we should be prepared to make major adjustments as a result of the assessment, which can be unpalatable for project teams and donors alike. The "adaptive programming" movement seeks to change this mindset, encouraging us to assume complexity and change as part of development work, but it has a long way to go before grant instruments and institutional modalities really reflect this approach' (Church & Walker McDonald, 2016). An organisation's ability to adapt its approach during an urban crisis will be explored further in future ALNAP publications.

Analysis can also be critical in monitoring and evaluating a project's effectiveness (Golder & Gawler, 2005) including mid-term reviews and

through monitoring and reflection throughout the programme. For example, ALNAP commissioned a context analysis as part of evaluation work on Haiti (see Clermont et al., 2011; Haver, 2011; Rencoret et al., 2010). Similarly, the Inter Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) steering group commissioned context analyses to support evaluations of regional responses in Syria (see Slim & Trombetta, 2014; Slim, Trombetta & Sida, 2015). These analyses provided background material on the wider context and a set of questions that served as the basis for a common evaluation framework (Haver, 2011).

4.3.3 Updating analysis when major changes occur or are anticipated

It is important that analysis is reviewed and updated as necessary in the event of, or anticipation of, major changes. This includes changes in the context – such as an election, for example (World Vision, 2013; IRC, 2017j; Interviews) which mean incorporating new information into the analysis; or a major change in the situation which has implications for the context (for example, a sudden influx of IDPs or a second flood). It also includes changes in programming (ARC, 1999) – for example, a shift in approach, a change in funding – as these are likely to affect decisions regarding the scope of the analysis, including new areas or depth of information.

4.3.4 Aligning contextual understanding to strategic planning

Uptake is one of the biggest challenges for analysis. One way to increase the chances that analysis will be used is to time it to feed into planning and strategic processes (Kamatsiko, 2016). This could mean the annual Humanitarian Programme Cycle planning, organisational or country team planning, or any other relevant process. This is important because 'operational relevance can be lost if the timing of the exercise is such that all the significant decisions have already been taken' (DFID, 2009:20-21). Where analysis misses a 'window of influence, it is likely to have little impact' (Slotin, Wyeth & Romita 2010:12)

In order to inform other activities such as needs assessments, the timing of analysis of context should bear in mind these other activities. For example, a context analysis or profiling exercise could be completed before a needs or market assessment is scheduled, so that the contextual information can inform these activities.

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> Organisations must anticipate that new information about the context may arise, either because something has changed, or because some information has since come to light.
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This may be an opportune time to 'ask some questions to assess the continued applicability of the context analysis and re-confirm its findings' (IRC, 2017j).

Unfortunately, despite best planning, delays may prevent linking analysis to such processes as hoped. 'In some cases, particularly in volatile contexts, these delays are inevitable, because they are influenced by changes in the situation. In other cases, though, they are primarily caused by organizational flaws, and can be avoided with better planning' (Melim-McLeod, 2012b). This may have a number of negative consequences, including:

- Findings are not incorporated into programme design

- Analysis loses relevance to decision-makers as they cannot practically apply it

- Analysis may be out of date when eventually used, if at all

- Analysis is overlooked in future planning cycles

(Slotin, Wyeth & Romita,2010:12; Kamatsiko, 2016; Melim-McLeod, 2012b; Oxfam, 2013)

4.3.5 Aligning contextual understanding to contextual realities

As well as aiming to be aligned with strategic planning cycles, the analysis of context must be aligned to the realities of the context itself. This means several things including timing the analysis to take account of:

- Key events or planning cycles in the context (such as election cycles, major reforms, or economic shocks (Harris & Booth, 2013; CARE, 2014).

- The time and schedules of those who will contribute to it. If the methodology includes questionnaires or FGDs with crisis-affected people, or there are particularly busy points for government officials, such as budgeting/reporting periods, these should be considered.

4.3.6 The importance of continuous analysis

Although understanding the context is not a one-off activity, the tools we employ are often used only once (Harvey et al., 2012), if at all. This can result in making decisions on the basis of outdated information.

In Haiti, for instance, international agencies were criticised for having a 'static' understanding of context that failed to take account of changes (Duncan, Williams & de Catheu, 2010).

Despite this, the literature and guidance overwhelmingly support a mechanism of continuous analysis (Meaux & Osofisan, 2016; UNDG,2016; Sida et al., 2012; Currion, 2015; GPPAC, 2015; Acosta & Pettit, 2013; Oxfam, 2013; Sanderson et al., 2012; Hiscock, 2012; Slotin, Wyeth & Romita 2010; WHO, 2009), or context monitoring. Continuous analysis of context is important because humanitarian and urban environments change rapidly – so there is a lot to keep up with. Just as needs will change throughout a crisis, and the crisis itself will change (displacement into new areas, for example), the context will also change (change in government or economy, varying degrees of social cohesion, etc.). It may also be necessary to broaden the scope of the original analysis as certain aspects of the context become more relevant. It is therefore important to have mechanisms to update at least some aspects of the analysis (SIMLab, 2017d).

Continuously monitoring the context also makes it easier for humanitarian programming to be flexible and iterative (Warner, 2017; Mercy Corps, n.d. b; Garred et al., 2015). If organisations make programmatic decisions based on an understanding of context, monitor changes and the impact of their decisions, and continually explore and test adding depth and breadth to their understanding, they can continue to make context-relevant decisions that will have the most impact. Some form of continuous analysis also allows them to keep in mind the other timing considerations, such as when major changes occur, and to align with planning processes and contextual realities.

Achieving this impact, as for a full analysis exercise, depends on understanding how the context information being monitored will be used, and having a plan in place. It is unlikely that all aspects of the context need to be continuously monitored at the same rate. It also needs to be clear who will be responsible for updating information. A recent ALNAP paper on monitoring found that continuous analysis is seldom part of anyone's job description (Warner, 2017). In order to address what information to monitor and whose responsibility it should be, organisations should include a final step in their analysis exercise that identifies a plan for continuous analysis, specifies what information is likely to change, how regularly it should be updated (weekly? quarterly? yearly?) and by whom. It may be possible to embed this in existing monitoring or assessment processes,

for example, in the M&E team, or in an early-warning or security-

> " Although understanding the context is not a one-off activity, the tools we employ are often used only once. "

monitoring system (Kamatsiko, 2016; Wu, 2011; Collinson et al, 2002).

This approach of identifying a set of context topics, questions or indicators to monitor on an ongoing basis has been used in conflict and governance analysis. It broadly involves identifying indicators to monitor major shifts or changes which may be relevant. One such approach is used by Oxfam GB to update its PEA using a 'Qualitative Assessment Scorecard' (QAS). The QAS uses an initial analysis to identify statements which can be assigned a score through a collective exercise. Any change to the statements can then be identified by a change in score.

By maintaining some form of continuous analysis, organisations can extend its life and also support its connection with action (Kamatsiko, 2016). Writing about the uptake of PEA, a DFID report acknowledged that, 'The measure of success is not the conduct of the study itself, but the extent to which findings are integrated into the strategies and programmes of a country office, and ultimately contribute to improved results on the ground' (DFID,2009:20). Where such analysis can become 'integral to the work of the office, with knowledge being continuously updated over time and fed back into programming' (DFID,2009:20), it is likely to have a greater impact

4.4 Single organisation or joint analysis

There are pros and cons for working independently or jointly in using tools to understand context. By and large, however, the literature supports joint analysis because it generates a shared picture of the context and sets the ground for a more coordinated response. It improves the credibility of analysis and can be a more efficient use of resources. Despite these advantages, as with needs assessments, most organisations conduct their own analysis. Indeed, of the 16 core tools examined for this paper, only three could justifiably be described as being for joint analysis. Working independently does have advantages – it can be quicker and nimbler, and allows each organisation to retain its own information.

This section will examine the pros and cons of using context tools jointly and independently, the reasons organisations often prefer independent analysis, and explore how joint analysis can be achieved. Jointly conducting an analysis is not the only way to work together – different ways to get multiple actors involved will be outlined, and Section 4.6 also explores sharing the outputs of analysis.

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Organisations should include a final step in their analysis exercise that identifies a plan for continuous analysis, specifies what information is likely to change, how regularly it should be updated and by whom.

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4.4.1   The pros and cons of working independently or jointly

Having a big picture of the context is very useful in a humanitarian response, particularly when it is shared. Humanitarian coordination mechanisms, such as clusters, are particularly valuable when they help organisations to have a shared picture of the response (Knox Clarke & Campbell, 2015). Having a shared understanding of the context is also useful for operational and strategic purposes, and is one of the key reasons for developing Displacement Profiling, one of the tools examined for this paper. As JIPS explains, 'Profiling became a process whereby actors with different cultures, approaches and points of view come together and agree on the "big picture" of a given displacement' (Chemaly et al, 2016, Krynsky Baal & Jacobsen, 2016). JIPS notes that developing and sharing this big picture, in this case of a displacement context, is important because the need for displacement profiling is often in contexts where:

- Organisations and government departments only have an incomplete picture of the displacement situation

- Organisations and government departments have different versions of this picture and different priorities on the ground

- Organisations and government departments have good information but their findings are not trusted or perceived as credible by others' (Chemaly et al, 2016, Krynsky Baal & Jacobsen, 2016:79).

JIPS argues that not having a shared big picture in these environments means that often:

- Only part of the picture is being responded to

- There is limited space for joint planning and coordination of activities

- Time and resources are taken up in simply disagreeing over data' (Chemaly et al, 2016, Krynsky Baal & Jacobsen, 2016:79).

Having a common understanding is a starting point for further working together (Chemaly et al, 2016, Krynsky Baal & Jacobsen, 2016; Dixon, 2012), and the process of reaching that understanding builds trust and

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consensus (Chemaly et al, 2016, Krynsky Baal & Jacobsen, 2016). A shared understanding also helps organisations to understand the opportunities and constraints in the context (Oxfam, 2013; DFID, 2009) and increases ownership and buy-in (OECD, n.d.).

Table 4: The pros and cons of working independently or jointly

	Single organisation		Multiple organisations	
Shared picture	Lack of common picture, can have contradictory information	×	More perspectives improve quality, shared agreement on big picture	√
Speed & flexibility of the analysis	Quicker Nimbler	√	Time/admin costs Compromise/agreement required, unclear which tool to use	×
Bias/credibility	Organisation can retain independent/ confidential information	√	Reduce org bias by broadening perspective; credibility due to multiple perspectives;	√
	but risk of org bias	×	Risk of losing independence/principles	×
Efficient use of resources	Less efficient	×	More efficient	√
			but can be more expensive	×
Coordinated response	Less coordination prior to response	×	Sets ground for working together	√

A shared picture of the context

A shared understanding of the context will be difficult to achieve when organisations are each analysing context separately. This is also the case for needs assessments, where if organisations conduct assessments individually, it becomes difficult to have a holistic picture of the situation. This has implications both for comprehensiveness – 'results of single-sector assessments may be hard to interpret on their own' (Darcy & Hofmann, 2003:7) and for uptake – 'Most individual agencies conducted their own needs assessments, but each followed different standards, methodologies and focus thus limiting the usefulness of the results for an overall analyses or strategic planning' (Patrick, 2011:3).

Speed and flexibility of the analysis

While joint analysis may produce a common understanding of context, it can take time and requires compromise, and thus may not always be feasible. One of the tools examined for this paper shared the experience that, while aiming to pilot their tool with another organisation, due to a short timeframe based on the funding for the analysis, this was ultimately not possible. Others have noted that working jointly can be time consuming (Chemaly et al, 2016, Krynsky Baal & Jacobsen, 2016) in some cases

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Having a common understanding is a starting point for further working together.
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because of the time taken to coordinate different organisational approaches (Sardesai & Wam, 2006). Joint needs assessments have sometimes been criticised for taking too long – in the 2010 Haiti response, the initial joint rapid needs assessment was found to be 'out of date' by the time it was published (Patrick, 2011).

Organisations that opt for solo analysis say they value the flexibility of working alone, particularly when they have specific questions they want to answer quickly (Sardesai & Wam, 2006).

In some cases, organisations may assume working jointly will take more time, or require more compromises than they are willing to make – plus, if the outcome of the analysis will be for internal use, there is no reason to compromise (ibid). Organisations that have developed their own tool for understanding context may wish to use it – or not know what other options may be available and whether they might be more relevant (Darcy et al., 2013).

While in most cases, solo analysis may be the quicker option, where resources are pooled, working jointly may mean more can get done simultaneously, which could reduce timeframes (Darcy et al., 2013).

Bias and credibility

Whether analysis of context is undertaken by individual organisations or jointly will also have an impact on the credibility of the analysis itself, largely due to assumptions and concerns about bias (See Section 5.2.4) and validity.

Various studies of needs assessments and PEA have found that analysis conducted by one organisation tends to reflect organisational preoccupations (Duncan, Williams & de Catheu, 2010) and that generally, 'a collaborative approach is less likely to be biased towards the perspective any one person or institution' (Darcy et al, 2007:45). Organisations have found that 'joint assessments are not subject to the same degree of scepticism that… independent…assessment[s] might attract' (Darcy et al, 2007:44) and that 'basing a response on a shared analysis will improve the credibility of the Organization' (UNDG 2016:2) and reduce risks for individual organisations (Mathur, 2007; Sardesai & Wam, 2006). As one participant at ALNAP's learning exchange commented, it is not 'blinkered and limited by your own paradigms, and your own network of relationships that you have'. Another added, 'if you have a broader group of people involved in that process, then hopefully you can reduce that subjectivity and then you have a better-quality context analysis at the end of it'.

Joint analysis may also raise the profile of analysis outputs (IFRC, 2017d), giving them a greater impact (American Red Cross, 2017).

Some have pointed out, however, that when each organisation conducts its own assessment, the end result (of multiple reports) can enhance the credibility of the overall information set as the findings can be compared (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014). This is possible only if the analyses were sufficiently coordinated to allow comparison, and if someone compiles them. One problem is that 'what information and data is available to agencies will vary a great deal in scope, reliability and detail' (Collinson et al, 2002:20) as will the tools and methodologies each organisation employs. As a result there may not be a richer pool of information, but contradictory information which is more confusing than helpful.

Of course, there is no guarantee that joint analysis conducted by a handful of coordinated actors will not be viewed with scepticism or contain bias, particularly if actors of key relevance to the context, such as local government and civil society, are not jointly involved (Mathur, 2007). This issue is discussed further in Section 5.8.

Efficient use of resources and access

Another area worth considering is whether joint or solo analysis will make the best use of resources and provide more comprehensive understanding in situations of constrained access. An analysis reflecting on the GECARR tool found that joint analysis 'enable[d] access to a wider range of geographic areas, ensure[d] a more even/manageable division of labour and open[ed] a wider contact book for interviews' (World Vision, 2017a).

Again, looking at this issue in needs assessments, research has found that where organisations conduct them individually, this not only produced conflicting results but also was an inefficient use of resources (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014). Joint analysis reduces duplication of efforts and also adds diverse skills to the exercise (IFRC, 2017d); Darcy et al., 2013). For example, one joint conflict analysis 'allowed the partners to contribute their different areas of expertise, making it a more convenient and beneficial way to share the costs of the analysis. Core partners had different roles and responsibilities: some agencies covered logistics, some managed relationships, some provided staff/consultants, and some were responsible for quality control of the analysis' (Sardesai & Wam, 2006:10). Joint analysis may also make the best use of informants' time as they do not need to be interviewed on several occasions (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014; Currion, 2014b).

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> If you have a broader group of people involved in that process, then hopefully you can reduce that subjectivity and then have a better quality context analysis at the end of it.
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Of course, not all joint analysis will be more efficient – time and resources can be lost to process costs as explored above, which is exacerbated where there are unclear roles and responsibilities leading to duplication and mixed messages (Sardesai & Wam, 2006). Indeed, some argue that joint analysis is inevitably more expensive (Darcy et al., 2013).

A coordinated response

The final area which can be used to weigh up individual and joint analysis is the potential for better working together after the analysis is finalised. Where organisations collaborate to undertake analysis, each is more likely to use it, which will result in better coordinated responses (IRC, 2017j). As different organisations will share a common picture of the context, they can base their responses on this shared understanding, which can 'help to align the work of different…entities towards common goals' (UNDG, 2016:2). Shared analysis 'can also provide the basis for joint action by identifying entry points for programming, as well as the risks of engaging in these areas'(DFID, 2009:22). Conversely, it is unlikely that analysis conducted by single organisations will be able to serve 'strategic and holistic programming purposes effectively' (Chemaly et al, 2016, Krynsky Baal & Jacobsen, 2016).

Working together also builds trust, positive working relationships and dialogue (OECD, 2014; Dixon, 2012; Mathur, 2007; Sardesai & Wam, 2006). Conflict analysis research found that 'one of the major challenges of interagency planning is that political, security, and development actors have different institutional goals, cultures, and languages and each brings its own perspective and understanding of the context to the table. Rather than waiting until the planning stage (when perspectives are fully formed) to bring these actors together, conducting joint assessments aims to get everyone on the same page by breaking down actors' preconceived assumptions, thereby providing a basis for integrated decision making' (Sardesai & Wam, 2006:10).

4.4.2 What happens in reality?

While acknowledging the practicalities of time pressures which are a major factor in humanitarian response, the overwhelming evidence leans towards the benefits of understanding context jointly. Currion (2015) argues that the complexity of urban environments means that no one organisation could understand the needs, so the best urban needs assessments are likely to be undertaken jointly.

Similar points were also made in interviews for this research, justifiably extending the argument to understanding context.

Despite this, the research found that most tools are designed, or in practice used, as single agency exercises. At the ALNAP learning exchange, one participant commented, 'we can say that "We should all work together!" but I don't know if that's one of the more realistic aims'. Given the benefits of joint analysis, why is that? The research identified a number of obstacles, explored below, but few solutions, so this is an area worth further consideration.

Engrained ways of working

One of the reasons organisations work individually is due to their engrained ways of working. Due to organisational goals and mandates, sometimes organisations move ahead with a solo approach without even realising that they have a choice. Organisations with existing planning processes or ways of working can find it a challenge to work differently. One learning exchange participant noted, 'we talk about understanding the urban context, but sometimes, we also fail to understand the context in which we are also operating as organisations'. In its work on displacement profiling, JIPS found that the different organisational approaches and priorities, combined with different language and programmatic approaches, as well as differences in each context itself, complicate working together on analysis (Chemaly et al, 2016, Krynsky Baal & Jacobsen, 2016). This has later implications, as some have argued that if organisations start off thinking separately at the assessment and analysis stage, they tend to work separately in their response (USAID, 2011).

Assumptions about the difficulty/compromise required to work jointly

Another reason organisations often choose individual analysis is because they assume that joint approaches take more time and require too much compromise. As explored above, speed and independence are the main arguments for solo analysis, which is why organisations often prioritise it. Organisations may assume they will have to compromise on methodology (Darcy et al, 2007) or that they do not have time for a coordinated process which may be more of a burden than of practical use (Finn & Oreglia, 2016).

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> Most tools are designed, or in practice used, as single agency exercise.
> "

Desire for independence

Organisations often want to retain the independence to do their own thing, particularly in making decisions. Working jointly does require handing over some control. As Darcy (Darcy et al, 2007:44) points out, for a humanitarian organisation, 'maintaining its independence of analysis and obtaining the information it requires for organisational decision-making, while at the same time engaging effectively in collaborative assessment processes, is a challenge'.

Competition and lack of trust

> **Organisations with existing planning processes or ways of working can find it a challenge to work differently.**

Tied to a desire for independence is the fact that different humanitarian organisations may compete for funding or control, and so perceive other organisations with distrust. This factor has been described as a 'considerable obstacle' not only for working together but even for sharing information with another organisation (Finn & Oreglia, 2016). Reflecting on this at the learning exchange, one participant explained, 'you can understand why an individual agency would [do solo analysis] because that's valuable information that you can put into a proposal, you're more likely to get funding. It's basically like your R&D, in a way. Your unique selling point is the way that you've designed and delivered on a piece of analysis'. 'Some organisations think that others are interested in getting into their area and pursuing their agenda, and thus presenting a competition for already scarce resources' (Mathur 2007:20).

Organisations may fear the quality of analysis will slip if they work with others they do not trust, or that potentially sensitive information may be at stake. In other cases, organisations may feel possessive, especially if they have developed the tool to be used or have more experience of using tools to understand context.

4.4.3 Different ways to work together

If organisations decide not to do joint analysis, there are ways to include other voices either through advisory groups or validation workshops, briefly mentioned below. Dissemination of findings is explored later in Sections 4.6 and 4.7.

Advisory groups

One option if organisations prefer not to do an entirely joint analysis is to have an advisory board where representatives from different organisations can feed in at key moments, but one organisation leads the process. This approach is used in several of the tools examined for this paper, including the Impact Initiatives area-based toolkit. Reflecting on the first pilot of this tool in Mafraq, Impact Initiatives found that an in-country steering committee with representatives from local government and other NGOs and UN agencies working in Mafraq provided strategic and programmatic guidance, as well as an opportunity to reflect on the lessons learned in the pilot process (Impact Initiatives, 2017a). During the learning exchange one participant felt that this sort of advisory role could 'create a buy-in on the findings, but it could also be an opportunity, especially in more sensitive environments, to have a conversation about sensitive issues that you might not want to write down, ensuring a safe space for sharing'.

Validation of analysis

Another option is to convene a stakeholder group to discuss and validate the findings of an analysis. This would mean much less input than a joint analysis, or advisory capacity, but may help to disseminate analysis beyond a single organisation and provide a final level of validation, if it is done before the analysis is finalised. At the learning exchange, one participant explained, 'you collect the data and try to involve as many of your key stakeholders as possible and opportune and helpful, and you have a moment where you validate those findings. Often though they are time-consuming, having the opportunity to get everyone in the same room and triangulating what you've found at different levels, first of all helps with buy in…you can also identify areas where there are diverging opinions and present those more clearly in your findings…validating data in a discussion forum is so much more helpful than having someone just look at the qualitative or quantitative database and try to make sense of it'.

4.4.4 How to work together effectively

The literature review identified several ways to support organisations working together on assessments and analysis. These are briefly outlined below.

> " Humanitarian organisations may compete for funding or control, and so perceive other organisations with distrust. "

Clear incentives for working together

It will be easier to work together if the incentives for doing so, which may vary depending on the actor, are clear for all involved. Some potential incentives and disincentives are illustrated in Table 5 below. Incentives should be realistic, and everyone should be 'clear and honest from the start about the purpose…what it might lead to and what is likely or unlikely to change as a result' (Hiscock, 2012:22). For example, JIPS found that 'actors join a profiling process if they see clearly that the results will affects their programming or advocacy capacity. It is equally important for them to feel that their role is not symbolic, but they have the capacity to influence the process' (Chemaly et al, 2016, Krynsky Baal & Jacobsen, 2016).

Table 5: Incentives and disincentives to participate

Incentives	Disincentives
» Commitment that analysis will lead to some action	» Time and energy cost, especially where there are other pressing tasks
» Being able to participate in analysis without having to commit to future joint action	» Feeling the exercise is being imposed
	» Analysis seen as confirming what is already known
» Commitment that humanitarian principles will be protected	» Fearing that analysis may pose questions or make recommendations that contradict existing plans
» Recognising how analysis will benefit their own interests (for example, having a say in priority issues to be taken forward)	

Build trusting relationships

Working together on analysis also requires an investment in building relationships. As one participant in the learning exchange explained, the value in taking the time to build relationships is immeasurable. 'Taking the time to do that from the outset means that later on… you wouldn't have the obstacles that will just put a break to the whole process. So, for us, it's really worth it, to create a process from the outset, and to have the partners be on board and participating in the methodology development for data collection, so that they trust the data, and they trust how it's being collected'.

It is also important to recognise, given the potential for sensitive issues to emerge during analysis of context (discussed later in Section 4.6.2), that there may be pre-existing relationships to take into account. In other cases, for example where an actor is party to a conflict, they should not participate in the analysis (Hiscock, 2012). Guidance from the American Red Cross notes, 'It is also important to consider how different stakeholders are likely to interact. This is particularly important if you plan to invite both community representatives and city or national government representatives…You want to make sure that everyone who attends will be able to actively participate – to speak, to listen, and to learn from one another. Ample opportunity for dialogue and multiple types of interaction (using creative tools, game playing, mapping etc.) and feedback (oral response, written response, survey, one-on-one conversation, and small group conversation) can create the space for everyone to participate… In an urban environment, networking will need to be more extensive and systematic than in a rural environment' (Tyler et al., 2014).

Ensure analysis is useful, and the process accessible, to all involved

The process also needs to be useful for all involved, and as far as possible, honour the incentives. For UN-Habitat's City and Neighbourhood Profiles in Lebanon, a joint effort between UN-Habitat leading the process and local authorities providing key data, and building their capacity so they will be able to update the profiles of their own cities, it was important to pair the profiles with short and long-term actions resulting from the analysis. No or low-cost options help authorities to see how they can make immediate use of the analysis, even if some actions will take more time.

The process needs to be clear and accessible to all stakeholders (Darcy et al, 2013). One participant at the learning exchange noted that often 'when you mention context analysis people think big, scary, HQ driven project that's going to take up lots of time. So, fear of even touching it'.

Agree on ground rules, roles and responsibilities

Finally, being clear from the beginning about roles and responsibilities, and rules to respect during the exercise allows everyone involved to have a shared understanding of expectations (World Vision, 2017a; Sardesai & Wam, 2006), including duties and timeframe. It also means having discussions jointly to determine objective and scope (see earlier discussion) and using these as reference points to resolve confusion or conflict. These rules, roles and responsibilities can be informal or formal written agreements (American Red Cross, 2017).

4.5 Roles, ownership and team composition

Before beginning an analysis exercise, it is helpful to consider who will be actively involved in the process. Do these people need specific skills? Should they be familiar with the context, or the methodology? Should they be internal or external consultants? Should they be local or international?

4.5.1 Should analysis exercises be done by internal staff or external consultants?

While several organisations that have used tools to understand context have employed external consultants to carry out analysis, this research has found that analysis is more effective when members of the organisation(s) that will use the analysis are active participants in its creation. In part, this is because the tools are just a vehicle to help in understanding context that everyone responding to an urban crisis should have. An analysis of context is more than a set of data. Relying on consultants also raises questions about ownership and uptake, the quality of analysis and how well it is able to meet objectives. These issues are discussed below.

Ownership and uptake

Ensuring that analysis is used – uptake – is one of the biggest challenges and is discussed more generally below and in Section 4.7. Whether individuals have a role in carrying out analysis directly affects their ownership of the findings, and whether they will take them forward. The literature suggests that when organisations outsource analysis exercises, the ownership remains with the consultant (Midgley & Garred, 2013; Dixon, 2012; MacLeman et al., 2017) and the findings are more likely to end up on a shelf gathering dust, no matter the quality or cost (Sida et al., 2012; Oliva & Charbonnier, n.d.). Guidance from Oxfam recommends that colleagues 'resist the apparently easier route of simply contracting consultants. Our staff need to embed the learning into their thought processes, and programming needs to emerge from the analysis' (Oxfam, 2013:4). CARE offers similar guidance, 'while an expensive external consultant could provide a manicured report, this would do little to build capacity within the organization and of our local partners to carry out more politically smart analysis in the future. If one doesn't build the capacity of foot soldiers you get the same capacity-deficit trap of implementation in which the person who designs the intervention doesn't actually implement it' (Aston, n.d. a).

The early versions of the American Red Cross' City-Wide Risk Assessment toolkit relied on external consultants. While these created more detailed profiles of an urban area, the American Red Cross found the work was not scalable. Most places lacked the resources to hire a consultant, and the consultant kept ownership out of the hands of the community. The organisation changed its approach and transformed the tool into the existing toolkit which is designed as a 'Do It Together' approach that is 'user friendly, community oriented, fully contained and designed for organizations to implement without the need for external expert help' (American Red Cross, 2017).

Meeting the objectives of analysis

Some have also found that external consultants can 'often fail to understand either the needs or the capabilities of the requesting organisation' (Oliva & Charbonnier, n.d.:29). CARE has reflected that, 'our experience from [using] consultants was that they need a lot of guidance and accompaniment... There was considerable variation in the quality of reports between different countries…Some local consultants offered excellent insights, wrote good reports and were vital to facilitating the analysis workshops; others spent little time writing their reports and largely copied and pasted information from other reports with little analysis, and were not on hand for the workshop' (Aston, n.d. a).

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An analysis of context is more than a set of data.

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Consultants may also bring not just their technical expertise but also their own worldview (Midgley & Garred, 2013) which may be 'disconnected from the real issues that matter to people' (Kamatsiko, 2016:21). When a team conducts the analysis exercise, rather than just relying on one individual, there is less chance of individual bias influencing the findings (see Section 5.3.2).

The right mix of capacities

Organisations may feel that staff do not have time or necessary skills to carry out the analysis. This approach can, however, have a long-term opportunity cost. 'Often the default can be to hire a consultant to save time. This should be avoided unless there are very good reasons such as urgency/lack of capacity within office/starting new programme area, etc. The process can be a cost-effective way of increasing staff capacity as well as being more likely to result in an analysis that actually influences planning and implementation. Consultants learn a great deal from the process but then walk out the door, taking that learning with them' (Dixon, 2012:15).

If an organisation does not have the time and capacity to conduct its own analysis, using an external facilitator may be a good compromise. Staff will still be involved, with a consultant serving as a facilitator, encouraging active staff participation (Dixon, 2012). This facilitator need not be an external consultant, but could be from another team, country office or head office and could be another way to increase leadership buy-in (see Section 5.1).

4.5.2 The use of context tools by locals and internationals

There should be no dispute that local actors – local civil society, authorities, communities and local staff of international NGOs – can add immense value to any understanding of context. They bring a wealth of information and can use this to 'decode the environment and relationships between different stakeholders' and 'provide insights on organisational mandates and capacities as well as the decision-making power and political will of individual officials. For example, a national staff member gave advice on how to approach a discussion with a senior civil servant in order to engage sensitively and begin to build rapport. This allowed interactions to be tailored to the needs or preferences of individual stakeholders and increase the likelihood of achieving the desired outcome' (Heykoop & Kelling, 2014). If local actors lead the analysis the credibility and reliability of the findings may be enhanced (GPPAC, 2015).

Previous ALNAP research has noted that, 'local actors have an understanding of the context and dynamics that is quite often missed by international actors. When we fail to engage effectively with urban stakeholders, we also put at risk the amount and quality of information available to us, which can lead to gaps and duplication in our responses' (Campbell, 2016:19). Without the active participation of local actors, 'international actors run the risk of making dangerous assumptions about the needs and views of different groups in society' (Midgley & Garred, 2013:21). It is worth nothing that having an active role during the analysis exercise does not necessarily mean local actors will have ownership over the findings and be in a position to act on any recommendations (Garred at al., 2015).

This local knowledge can be an untapped potential. One learning exchange participant explained, 'a lot of this information, the national staff, they have it, they know it. They know the context' but often don't have the tools or platform to bring this understanding to the surface, so context tools can 'help them structure it to make sense of it'. One interviewee explained, "I

> "
> There should be no dispute that local actors – local civil society, authorities, communities and local staff of international NGOs – can add immense value to any understanding of context.
> "

am from that neighbourhood and I have observed how the neighbourhood changed [but using the tool means] it's not just a perception…now you have the objective instruments to show you what…is really happening".

There are also arguments for an international role in understanding context. Those without a prior history in a context may have a real or perceived objectivity and have a more neutral viewpoint. They may find it easier to look at the local political climate, for example (Melim-McLeod, 2017). Guidance from Oxfam notes that, 'It is not easy to undertake [analysis] of a context in which you are embedded. Having someone outside the context working to support you through the process is recommended' (Oxfam, 2013:3). Similarly, research on conflict analysis, which often deals with sensitive topics, 'has found in some circumstances, local people cannot or should not take a visible role in conflict analysis for political/safety reasons. At times, the understandable biases of local people will make it difficult for them to take the lead in conflict analysis; sensitive outsiders can conduct the process, with input from multiple local people' (GPPAC, 2015).

Whether or not there are sensitive issues, it can sometimes be difficult to step back and see the familiar through an analytical lens. One interviewee explained, 'with context analysis it's sometimes useful to have that external perspective to push people beyond what they accept as being just almost a fixed thing rather than something that's actually unique based on a number of factors that came to that'.

Local staff may lack the skills or the time to carry out the analysis. International colleagues may be able to bring their prior experience of using the context tools and may be more familiar with their methodologies. Learning exchange participants also proposed peer support. For example, after the Bangladesh office conducts a context analysis, their team could provide support to the Nigeria office to do the same.

Having individuals from international head offices or from donor agencies involved in the analysis process can help with their buy-in and make it easier for analysis findings to be acted on (see Section 5.1 & 5.2.2 for more). At present, the reality of the humanitarian system is that many decisions are taken outside a country context, and so it can help to have these stakeholders involved in the analysis.

Finally, some have found that having an outsider can be useful because they may be 'able to raise useful questions, some of which might be too sensitive to be raised by locals. In some circumstances, respondents within a conflict arena might find it more comfortable to open up to an outsider than a

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> Without the active participation of local actors, 'international actors run the risk of making dangerous assumptions about the needs and views of different groups in society'.
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fellow local (bearing in mind that an outsider could be someone from a different location within the same country, a different country within the same region, or even from another continent)' (GPPAC, 2015:22). One interviewee explained how international staff were more successful in getting meetings with senior government officials.

In most cases, a mixed team of local and international colleagues is ideal (GPPAC, 2015; Harris & Booth, 2013), ensuring that a range of actors, each with a role in taking forward the findings, are engaged appropriately in the exercise. One learning participant summed up the benefits of this approach saying, 'if you balance out the expertise that is on one hand really important and should happen, with the local influence and make sure those two meet in the analysis, you get an analysis that's both influenced by experts at HQ level and with years of experience with people who are actually living in the area that we're talking about. And when all that happens at the same time, it tends to make sense'. In a summary of the discussion on this topic, another participant reflected, 'We also talked about locally or externally driven context analysis, and kind of agreed that there should be both, but it should be a balanced approach. Sometimes external experts, or external sets of eyes can see different things, or can be more objective, can be a little bit insulated from the local political dynamics, but definitely, local perspectives should be in it. Actually, a big part of it'.

Unfortunately, in the words of one interviewee, 'often we're pretty good at creating systems and processes at headquarters level and then we email our country offices to say can you implement our massive project for us and tell us how it went? But actually, being part of the process of developing the tool and if we also expect them to be the ones who are the primary users of it, then once you have that you get a process that works and maybe that drives content that's actually useful for those who need it'. So, while both local and international perspectives add value to an analysis of context, there is a need to ensure that both are actively valued during the process itself.

4.6 Presenting and sharing analysis findings

Communication is the most basic form of working together. Information is shared, with no specific obligation to make use of it (Saavedra & Knox Clarke, 2015). Sharing information, however, is the first step towards coordination or working together more closely.

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Having an outsider can be useful because they may be 'able to raise useful questions, some of which might be too sensitive to be raised by locals.

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While this research recommends that organisations undertake joint analysis wherever possible, it is unrealistic that everyone who might find the analysis useful will be involved in producing it. Sharing analysis findings as widely as possible is recommended as a minimum step to ensure uptake (Meaux & Osofisan, 2016; Heykoop & Kelling, 2014; Currion, 2014b).

At present, undertaking an analysis to better understand the context is not done in all urban crises. So, where an organisation has done this, the findings can be valuable to international, national and local actors responding to the crisis (Meaux & Osofisan, 2016). Sharing information also helps to triangulate data and improve understanding. Lucchi (2013:10) explains, 'Sharing context and needs assessment information promotes better understanding of issues and needs. For example, In Sanaa and Aden, Yemen, MSF found that networking with a broad range of actors was key to having accurate information on how violence and insecurity were affecting the population'.

> " Sharing analysis findings as widely as possible is recommended as a minimum step to ensure uptake. "

4.6.1 What formats are best for sharing analysis findings?

Whether it is planned to share only with a select few individuals or to disseminate information broadly, you will have to decide how to present the findings. Darcy et al. (2013:33) note that, 'the way evidence is presented is often crucial to its uptake. Knowing how to present it, to whom, and in what form may be essential to informed decision making'. The chosen format is not the production of a report, but can help achieve the ultimate aim of analysis uptake (Chemaly, 2012). This section explores some common approaches.

Written Reports

A written report is the most common output of an analysis of context. These reports typically summarise the methodology and key findings of the analysis and may also include recommendations especially when response analysis is part of the method. They should refer to the original objectives of the analysis and suggest when the information should be updated.

The literature includes a number of tips about how to make written analysis of context most effective. These include:

- Keeping a report short and using accessible language

- Making it visually appealing, using maps, photos and diagrams where available/relevant

- Summarising key points and recommendations

- Using illustrative examples

- Keeping in mind the objectives of the analysis exercise

- Ensuring that any recommendations are actionable

- Writing with the target audience in mind – this may mean producing different reports for different audiences

Where analysis has been carried out as a joint exercise, or where different findings may be relevant to different audiences, organisations may consider creating different reports each relevant to a different target audience or organisation. In such cases, there might be one main report with several shorter pieces emphasising relevant issues for that audience (Sardesai & Wam, 2006).

Workshops

Another dissemination approach is to share the analysis findings in person. Such events allow the target audience to interact with the material and reflect on findings (Slotin, Wyeth & Romita, 2010). Events can range from small roundtables to large launch events, and different events may be organised for different audiences (Sardesai & Wam, 2006). Some of the guidance suggests that 'workshops may be more suitable than reports to ensure that stakeholder engagement strategies are communicated and task forces are formed to implement them' (Melim-McLeod, 2017). Indeed, workshops may be scheduled as part of the methodology, before a final written report is drafted. For example, 'The concluding activity of an Urban Situation Analysis exercise is a 3 to 4-day workshop planned as the final strategy development phase. Depending on the purpose of situation analysis this may take different forms – developing a country-level urban strategy, developing a specific program design or work plan. The Team Lead and facilitator will need to work together to decide how to organise and present the information in a way that is useful for the country, the team, and for any external stakeholders who may have been involved during data collection or the analysis itself' (Save the Children, 2017a). Where analysis contains sensitive information (see below), sharing it in person can help disseminate important points without risking negative consequences of publishing it.

Digital Formats

Organisations can also use digital platforms and technologies to share data. For example, UN-Habitat in Syria created a web-based information-management system to hold data identified in its city profiles. This platform allowed information to be updated regularly and shared in a secure way. Organisations can also use media such as podcasts to 'translate information about a context in an engaging way. By allowing staff to participate in the process, it removes the obstacles to analysis that may seem disconnected from the everyday workings of an organization' (Asibon et al., 2017:21).

4.6.2 Dealing with sensitive information

In humanitarian situations, it is likely that relevant contextual information could be sensitive for one reason or another. Relevant details about government stakeholders and their relationships and motivations, for example, may cause tensions with those stakeholders and jeopardise future working together. In some contexts, authorities will not want to discuss refugees. Understandably, stakeholders may not like how they have been identified or described, especially if this can be interpreted as negative (Levitan, 2014). Cultural and social issues, such as ethnic and religious tensions, or even sanitation, may be seen as topics that may be relevant, but should not be discussed. This can pose a challenge for data collection and acquiring an adequate understanding. Collinson (Collinson et al, 2002:18) notes that, 'inquiring into political and economic issues… is not only difficult, but also sensitive and potentially dangerous. How sensitive will vary greatly from place to place and over time, but in any situation of prolonged or recent conflict and political instability, the dangers and opportunity costs of research are considerable'. Sardesai & Wam (2006) add, 'the analyses may highlight issues that do not necessarily reflect positively on government or other actors involved. This has caused consternation and even rejection of the analysis in some cases'.

Fostering an environment of trust and mutual respect, and being open about the analysis objectives, can help stakeholders feel confident that it is worth contributing their information. Reflecting on their experience with conflict analysis, World Vision also recommends the following to ensure organisations do not exacerbate tensions during the process (World Vision, 2017f):

- 'Adjust your process to fit the current conditions. This may mean changing the composition of the assessment team, the composition of the participant groups, the dates, the meeting venues, transport details, etc.

- When selecting data gathering methods, keep in mind that the facilitator's control of interpersonal dynamics is usually highest in individual interviews. Homogenous focus groups may also offer relatively high control.

- Heterogeneous focus groups, which bring people together across lines of division or conflict, are the most challenging (but sometimes the most rewarding).

- Begin by discussing positive facts. It lightens the conversation and develops trust before moving to the more challenging discussion of Dividers and tensions.

- Be cautious about discussing volatile issues. Always have a plan for how to deal with disagreements that may arise within the group'.

Obtaining the information is just one obstacle. In some places, organisations that are known to be collecting sensitive information may be targeted either by those who do not want them to have it, or those who want the information for themselves.

Presenting sensitive information

When some or all of the analysis findings might be sensitive, there are also questions about how this information can be reflected in analysis outputs without creating tensions. In some contexts, the security situation may make it impossible to share any information at all. One learning exchange participant explained, 'For us in our context it's the issue of sharing the report. We had the final report done …a detailed one. Then one of our [policy team] read it and he was like, it cannot be shared in [this county] or else we'll all get deported. So, he had to go through the report and trim it. But the question is, how do you share such a sensitive document with partners who you know will be able to use some of the sensitive issues that are coming out of the report? What kind of platform do you use, where it won't fall into the hands of the government or other national security bodies that will then make trouble for INGOs in the country? Because for me we really had an argument…For me it was a good programming document but for him it's an issue of intelligence and conflict sensitivity, so how do you balance that?'

Some options for facing the dissemination of sensitive information are summarised below.

Choose your battles

Each context is different, so sharing sensitive information will pose different risks. In some cases, publishing sensitive findings will do more harm than good. For example, UNDP found that while there may be criticisms of government which are important to identify and understand, 'we also need them to be a big part of the solution, so we can't jeopardise that relationship' (Various, 2013a). In such cases, it may not be worth sharing any sensitive information.

In other cases, it may be worth taking a stand. One interviewee felt that relevant information, sensitive or otherwise, 'just needs to be included in the report. I fully take on board that people are sensitive about it but if you're going to be worrying about not upsetting people by stating facts within a contextual analysis, well then your whole programme is going to be built on misinformation'. Whether this is an appropriate course of action will depend on the context.

Where organisations have taken a stand, it has been helpful to be able to back up their statements with a sound methodology. One organisation explained that, 'despite the issues definitely being sensitive, we have bitten the bullet and actually put those into the document quite confidently, because our [findings] have been decisive on that point, so we felt fine with putting that out there'. Writing about situation analysis, UNICEF recommended 'concentrat[ing] on the facts and evidence, using verifiable and credible sources of information including, where possible, from official or internationally-recognized sources' (UNICEF, 2012:24).

However, taking a stand is always a risk. Describing the experience of one conflict analysis exercise, Sardesai & Wam (2006) explain, 'the government believed that a planned conflict analysis by an international agency violated state sovereignty. Hence, the agency decided to undertake the conflict analysis exercise without informing the government. Still, with an improvement in relations with government, the agency decided to share the completed conflict analysis with government for review and endorsement. However, government authorities did not recognize the work undertaken, and although it was an important piece of work, the analysis has been kept confidential for fear of antagonizing the government further'.

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> In some cases, publishing sensitive findings will do more harm than good.
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Winning people over

Some organisations have found that taking the time to engage with stakeholders who may not support sharing sensitive analysis findings, particularly if they become partners in the analysis process, can help to reduce the likelihood of findings being deemed too sensitive to share. One interviewee explained, 'you collect the data and try to involve as many of your key stakeholders as possible and opportune and helpful, and you have a moment where you validate those findings. Often though they are time-consuming, having the opportunity to get everyone in the same room and triangulating what you've found at different levels, first of all helps with buy in…you can also identify areas where there are diverging opinions and present those more clearly in your findings… I think in general validating data in a discussion forum is so much more helpful than having someone just look at the qualitative or quantitative database and try to make sense of it. But I think it's really about who your consumers are and then ensuring that there is an opportunity for validation and clarification and so forth'.

This sort of engagement gives organisations the opportunity to act on the offensive. For example, guidance for UNDP's ICA tool explains that the 'ICA includes questions related to the distribution of power and resources, the findings of the analysis can be very sensitive. For example, ICA studies can reveal challenges of corruption and patronage in the government… The UNCT should be able to explain the purpose of the analysis to national stakeholders when requested, in a way that highlights the value of the exercise from the perspective of allowing greater effectiveness and ensuring that the UN System's efforts are contributing to the policy prioritised of the country in question' (Melim-McLeod, 2017).

Engaging with stakeholders in this way will help an organisation to understand which findings may be most potentially sensitive. In some cases, there may be ways to phrase a finding in a way that is more palatable. One learning exchange participant explained that, 'if you uncover complicated, politically contentious issues in your context analysis, local actors become very concerned on who is going to read this? What are you reporting? Is my name going to be on this thing? So being very careful on the supply chain of that document and what hands it's going to end up into. Trying to anticipate that, strip out names and places and stuff as much as you can without taking the guts out of the report. That's the balance to strike. You want it to be incisive but you don't want it to get people in trouble and arrested'.

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Taking the time to engage with stakeholders who may not support sharing sensitive analysis findings, particularly if they become partners in the analysis process, can help to reduce the likelihood of findings being deemed too sensitive to share.

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Finally, engaging stakeholders will provide an opportunity to explain the objectives of the analysis and why certain information is being identified, and how it will contribute to more effective humanitarian response. One interviewee found that it can be useful to explain that, 'The purpose of it is to make sure we provide equitable and effective humanitarian aid. This is not to dig into people's politics or to dig into social differences. It's just to ensure that the most vulnerable people receive the support that they need'.

Choosing not to disseminate widely

In some circumstances, information will just be too risky to share. One interviewee explained, 'a lot of this is very sensitive, so we are not in the position to publicise this too broadly, so a lot of this analysis is shared with key actors, but not publicised'.` In such cases, information may be shared with a small group of relevant actors but not disseminated widely (World Vision, 2017f).

Thoughtful editing

In cases where sensitive information cannot be shared, organisations may choose to remove any sensitive findings. This may be appropriate where the information has the potential to cause harm. In one example, 'the report itself had to be adjusted in order to be more acceptable to senior actors within the country's reconciliation process and future government, who were criticized in the report. External actors meddling in the country were also explicitly discussed. To avoid affecting the peace process as well as hurting the organizations behind the analysis, parts of the report were reformulated to be more politically acceptable' (Sardesai & Wam, 2006).

In some cases, sensitive information may not be needed to make a point. One interviewee explained that, during the analysis exercise, information had been shared with the analysis team that could not be published. However, the team found that this information was more detailed than necessary for the report and opted to not include the sensitive matters.

Organisations may have to weigh up between publishing an unedited version which stakeholders may reject or block from public distribution, and editing out sensitive aspects (Kamatsiko, 2016). In these cases, modifying the report may help to 'strike a balance between being truthful and sensitive' (Sardesai & Wam, 2006:22). Sardesai & Wam also argue that where stakeholders request modifications, this can actually be a good thing, because it means they are engaged in the analysis. They elaborate, 'It is a

misperception that taking host government sensitivities into account will weaken the rigor of the analysis. Rather than viewing this as a trade-off, the analysis can be presented so as to highlight the findings and impart the messages in non-judgemental ways' (ibid:22).

Organisations can also choose to produce multiple versions of a report – one for a restricted audience, and one for broad dissemination which has been 'scrubbed' of sensitive information (Garred et al., 2015). One interviewee described an approach where sensitive information was included in the restricted draft but removed from the final shareable copy – 'put all the dirt in the draft report, send that round for comments, generate the awful reaction, pretty up the thing and make it palatable and that's what gets published but everyone has already seen the real stuff anyway'.

Ethics and Data Protection

As well as considering the risks for the analysis process, organisations should act ethically and consider the risks for stakeholders in the context, particularly crisis-affected people. CARE proposes some guiding questions:

- 'What may be potential risks to participants or community members linked to this study and how do we ensure we are conflict sensitive?

- How can we ensure that the analysis process is not just "extractive" but is accountable to communities, and promotes empowerment and learning?

- How can we ensure that we work sensitively and respectfully within communities?' (Wu, 2011)

Where methodologies include interviews, FGDs and/or surveys, organisations should take care to obtain prior informed consent and employ measures to protect data. This includes, 'informing people that at any point in the process they can step out. In [this exercise], they all gave a verbal consent. No names were taken down…procedures in place to assure anonymity' (Interviewee).

"
Modifying the report may help to 'strike a balance between being truthful and sensitive'.
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4.7 Uptake/getting analysis used

Uptake is the process of actively considering the findings of analysis and turning them into action (Kamatsiko, 2016). Uptake is one of the most difficult parts of any analysis (Hiscock, 2012), and for that reason has been called the 'Achilles' heel' of the process (Kamatsiko, 2016). Several interviewees spoke of the frustration that analysis could end up 'collecting dust on someone's shelf'. Hiscock elaborates, 'There is a risk that so much effort is invested in the design, research and initial analysis phases, that little time and energy and few resources are left to translate the analysis into response. However, as the primary purpose of…analysis is more commonly to inform programming and policy decisions, failing in this phase of the exercise undermines its whole value…It is extremely important to see this as a vital phase in the…analysis process and allocate proportionate space, time and priority to it' (Hiscock, 2012:30).

The challenge of uptake has little to do with quality, accuracy, rigour or inclusiveness of the analysis (Kamatsiko, 2016; Garred et al., 2015). The biggest obstacles to uptake, and some potential ways to overcome them, are presented in Table 6.

> "
> Uptake is the process of actively considering the findings of analysis and turning them into action. [It] is one of the most difficult parts of any analysis.
> "

Table 6. Overcoming uptake obstacles

Obstacle	Possible means to overcome
Findings are not actionable Often the main challenge is that findings don't offer operational meaning and still require interpretation (GPPAC, 2015). Particularly for those who have not carried out the analysis (Asibon et al., 2017), it can be difficult to translate high-level, academic-sounding findings into operational strategies and programmes (Slotin, Wyeth & Romita, 2010; Dahl-Ostergaard et al., 2005). This may mean findings are dismissed as nothing but an intellectual exercise (Slotin, Wyeth & Romita, 2010) and some have even questioned the degree to which contextual understanding 'can contribute directly to operational work' (Dahl-Ostergaard et al., 2005:13) and others have felt frustrated with the tendency to identify problems more than solutions (Denney, 2016).	**Ensure findings have operational focus** The best way to counter this obstacle is to make sure to not get lost in the data (Collinson et al, 2002) and to focus on implementable, prioritised (Kamatsiko, 2016) actionable recommendations which are tied to the needs of those who will use the findings (Sardesai & Wam, 2006). Analysis should be presented in accessible language that implementers will understand (Breckenridge et al., 2017). Some things will be best presented, for example, in a narrative or story rather than data set (Finn & Oreglia,2016; JIPS, 2017). **Use response analysis as part of process** Part of the analysis process should include some form of response analysis which translates findings into actionable approaches (Kondo Rossier, 2016). Doing to helps to provide 'a roadmap to help translate analysis into policy and programming' (Slotin, Wyeth & Romita, 2010). This can help get to the 'so what' questions that put findings into perspective (Oxfam, 2013). Oxfam (2013) suggests three steps which could be added to any of the tools mentioned in this paper: 1. Do the analysis – what are the key findings about context? 2. Reflect – what does this mean? What are implications for programming? 3. Make programme decisions and plan actions – what does the organisation need to do to address the implications of analysis? **Include those who will be responsible for implementing findings in the process** Presenting unsolicited data to decision-makers is unlikely to achieve uptake (JIPS, 2017; Sardesai & Wam, 2006). One interviewee explained, 'where the teams themselves have been involved in collecting the data, it has been much easier to get it utilised'. **Take the time to develop objectives for the analysis exercise** Ensuring findings can be used is easier if clear objectives were set for the analysis exercise in the first place (Duncan & Williams, 2010; Melim-McLeod, 2012b). In doing so, organisations can ask, what is this analysis meant to inform? Why are we doing this?

Obstacle	Possible means to overcome
Lack of follow up Often, lack of uptake is down to the simple fact that no one follows up to ensure it happens (Kamatsiko, 2016 ; Sardesai & Wam, 2006)	**Assign a champion who will follow up** Ultimately, 'translating analysis into action is in itself a process rather than a one-off activity' (Hiscock, 2012). Assigning a champion or focal point who will ensure findings are taken forward (DFID, 2009) could be helpful. Another idea is to schedule a check-in point 4–6 weeks after the analysis to review progress (Garred et al., 2015). This could help to keep up the momentum following analysis, so that it's 'not just a nice movie that ends' (Kamatsiko, 2016). **Get leadership buy-in** It is important to have leadership support for uptake. While a champion can help, uptake will not be achieved by one individual alone, particularly if leadership is not on board. **Plan for uptake, so it's not an afterthought** Uptake should not be an afterthought. It should be considered from the objectives stage, as noted above. This should include a plan for how follow-up will be done, and by whom.
Lack of capacity to deal with the complex issues raised by analysis Particularly where the issues raised in analysis seem complex or new, people may feel they do not have the skills to take things forward or need more guidance to take action. This can come up especially where consultants have led the analysis process and take their understanding with them (Kamatsiko, 2016).	**Build capacity to deal with urban complexity** Organisations can increase staff capacity to understand the complexity of urban environments. **Ensure findings are clear and practical** Analysis recommendations should be presented in a clear and practical way to reduce the chance that people will be intimidated by the complexity of the analysis. **Limit the use of consultants** Particularly where consultants lead the entire analysis process, hand over the results and leave others to achieve uptake, this can make it a lot harder. If individuals who will be involved in using the findings participate in the analysis process, they will be more familiar with the issues and better able to take them forward.
Findings do not fit decision-makers' priorities Information such as the analysis findings are always just going to be one of several considerations for decision-makers who also will consider budget, relationships, strategic priorities and be influenced by bias (JIPS, 2017; Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014, Heyse, 2015a). Where analysis findings contradict other priorities, it will be difficult to obtain uptake (Kamatsiko, 2016).	**Leadership buy-in** 'Investing time and effort" (Duncan & Williams, 2010) to explain the importance of analysis can help to mitigate against competing priorities. If this results in active leadership engagement throughout the process (Garred et al., 2015), it can be helpful to have this buy-in and 'visible support from senior staff' (Dahl-Ostergaard et al., 2005:19)

Obstacle	Possible means to overcome
Findings are cherry-picked to support pre-determined decisions Sometimes the most important findings from analysis are bypassed in favour of those which match pre-existing plans or ideas (Clermont et al., 2011). Organisations have a tendency to 'fall back on a relatively standard list of interventions' (Denney, 2016). Sometimes this is due to donor interests, such as focusing on the aspects more likely to receive funding (Asibon et al., 2017). Sometimes this is compounded by organisational mandate silos – people will ignore findings that don't fit with their perceived confines (Kamatsiko, 2016). 'People often jump ahead to conclusions and strategies looking at their own focus…we tend to fall back on what is familiar to us and therefore come up with the same old interventions… it is very easy to draw conclusions that fit with work that you have already been doing or that you are familiar with' (Concern, 2012).	**A culture shift which values understanding context** If analysis is going to be used for what it is, rather than to support pre-cooked conclusions, there needs to be a cultural shift in the sector which values an understanding of context and therefore respects the findings of context analysis. **Buy-in to the analysis process** If decision-makers buy into the value of the analysis, possibly because they participated in it, they may be less likely to disregard inconvenient findings.
Distrust of findings produced by others Competition among organisations can hinder uptake (Kamatsiko, 2016). Sometimes organisations will discount findings produced by other types of organisation (such as government or development actors) perceiving them not to be relevant (Hiscock, 2012).	**Transparent methodology** Ensuring the analysis process is transparent (SADC, 2015; Garred et al., 2015) helps to bring a joint vision (Eckersley, 2015) which is needed for a broad uptake among different actors. **Joint analysis** As explored in Section 4.4, whoever participates in producing an analysis will have ownership of and buy-in to it, and therefore more accepting of findings they had a role in creating.
Analysis process not linked to planning and decision-making processes Where analysis happens as a one-off exercise and is not linked to a process where its findings could be implemented, it is harder to get uptake (Slotin, Wyeth & Romita, 2010).	**Link analysis to planning** The simple solution to this obstacle is to ensure there is a linkage between analysis and organisation planning cycles (Garred et al., 2015; Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, 2012; Denney, 2016; Hiscock, 2012). **Use a theory of change to link findings to strategic goals** Creating a theory of change could help to navigate how recommendations from analysis will link to strategic outcomes you want to see (Aston, n.d. a).
Findings are discounted due to political sensitivities Findings may be ignored where there is perceived risk about getting into politically sensitive issues.	**Depoliticise language** Pay attention to whether certain words might antagonise or arouse interest, for instance because they align with current hot topics or discourse (Salvatore et al., 2014).

Section 5:
What else is needed to enable tools to be useful?

However much time or effort is put into using a tool or process of analysis, other factors will shape how effective they can be. The tools themselves are only one part of the equation. Buy-in and relationships from a range of stakeholders, institutional support, the experiences, mindset and bias of individuals and organisations, and the resources and funding landscape all contribute.

Section 5: What else is needed to enable tools to be useful?

However much time or effort is put into using a tool or process of analysis, other factors will shape how effective they can be. These factors include the relationships and buy-in from a range of stakeholders, organisational influences including institutional support, organisational or individual bias, the skillsets, individuals' experiences and mindsets, and the resources available.

This section explores each of these aspects, with examples and suggestions from the tools reviewed in this paper from the literature review.

5.1 Relationships and Buy-in

Whether analysis is undertaken by one organisation or several working together (the merits of which are discussed in Section 4.4), relationships and buy-in can 'make or break' any exercise. Some relationships may be as simple as informing an organisation the analysis is taking place, in other cases the organisation may contribute input or political support or be an audience for the findings. Whatever the scale, positive relationships with stakeholders including local authorities and community service organisations (CSOs), as well as others involved in humanitarian response, can:

> "
> Relationships and buy-in can 'make or break' any exercise.
> "

- Improve the quality of the analysis

- Add credibility and accountability to the analysis

- Avoid access and gatekeeper hurdles

- Broaden the impact of the analysis

- Contribute to a shared understanding of the context

- Pave the way for uptake and follow-through on the analysis

JIPS points out that humanitarian organisations, in a situation with a lot of information coming from different directions, tend to isolate themselves and therefore miss out. Organisations should resist this, and rather embrace the richness that a wide range of information brings (Chemaly et al, 2016, Krynsky Baal & Jacobsen, 2016). An analysis will be enhanced if more stakeholders, each with their own perspective and depth of understanding, can feed into the process in some way.

Accountability regarding the context analysis exercise also matters. During the learning exchange, participants discussed concerns about extracting information from people to use in analysis. One asked, 'what happens when you've got a community where you get the data, in order to understand the dynamics, but the decision was then not to do a project in that area?' Another interviewee noted that, 'If we can't explain to the people whose time we're taking this, why we're doing this and how it will impact their lives, in a way that they're on board, the relationships are going to break down'. The critical point is to be clear and transparent about how information is going to be used, particularly with anyone who contributes their time and information.

In some contexts, having some relationships will jeopardise others (see reflection in Section 4.6.2 on sensitivities). For example, if an organisation is seen to be working with government, some community or civil society groups may be wary of the process. In other contexts, if seen to be working with some community groups, a government may have concerns. The findings of the analysis can help the organisation to make appropriate decisions about how to approach relationships with different actors – but beforehand, it is important to take advantage of any existing knowledge of context, and make decisions carefully, particularly if the political environment is sensitive.

Any analysis of context depends on bringing together various pieces of information held by a range of stakeholders. All the approaches considered in this paper depend on KIIs, FGDs, review of secondary data, or a combination of these. Without support from KIIs and data holders, the analysis would be impossible. The receptiveness of individuals and organisations to take part depends on the relationships built with them.

Those brought into the process may also be able to leverage other networks, which can improve access and the quality of analysis. This is particularly useful when timeframes are short. One interviewee who had worked with an in-country INGO network about urban issues felt that, 'if we were just working on our own…and we were in a place that didn't have such a network…it would have been completely different. So that was definitely a helpful and enabling factor'.

Involving a broader group than just the organisations leading the analysis can expand the potential use of the findings. Some of the tools specifically identified local municipal government and CSOs as key audiences. Others had not reflected on the range of potential audiences and focused more on

how their organisation would use the information. There can be great value for local organisations in having access to the findings, which could be one of the main incentives for these stakeholders to get involved in the process.

Building relationships with a range of stakeholders can also foster a shared understanding of the context among a wider range of actors, which can be useful for working with them later. It can also be a useful outcome on its own. Reflecting on this regarding the RSA tool, the OECD found that, 'A common picture of the risk landscape could also lead to greater synergies between different development, climate change and humanitarian actors, perhaps leading to joint programmes. Finally, a shared and more complete analysis of the risk landscape will decrease the potential for unintended consequences' (OECD, 2014).

> "
> Any analysis of context depends on bringing together various pieces of information held by a range of stakeholders.
> "

Obtaining a deeper understanding may also help some who may be resistant or sceptical of a more holistic analysis to see its value. For example, sector specialists may doubt the value of anything other than sector-specific assessment, but one interviewee found that once these stakeholders became involved in the analysis, they found 'it was more than they thought it would provide them…the teams where we'd had sector people involved from the beginning…they bought into it because they were part of it'.

Relationships and the support from other stakeholders are also important for any follow-up to the analysis. As UNDP found, 'in some cases, follow-up depends on key actors. If they have not been involved in the analysis, or even in the design or the planning process, they may not feel the ownership needed to ensure that its recommendations are carried forward' (Melim-McLeod, 2012b). According to interviews, it is also easier for people to dismiss information which comes from processes with which they have not engaged. Others have also found that uptake of any analysis recommendations can rely on 'good relationships with government…even in places where issues were complex and sensitive' (Kamatsiko, 2016). Such relationships can open up access to stakeholders, build trust and create opportunities not just for the analysis but for the programming that follows, including potential advocacy (Kamatsiko, 2016). One interviewee noted that the various meetings conducted as part of a context analysis exercise, 'generally created a quite positive perception of [our organisation] and in certain cases helped establish a relationship with those stakeholders that the country programme didn't have before'.

There were several suggestions about how to strengthen relationships and increase buy-in, including:

- Putting in the time and effort to build relationships and encourage everyone to believe in and support the analysis exercise

- Making sure everyone understands the incentives for them to be involved and can answer for themselves, 'What am I going to get out of this?' (see Table 5)

- Identifying and encouraging champions of the process – for example, finding key local authorities or CSOs who can encourage others to get involved in the process

- Going beyond lip service, and offering opportunities for stakeholders to play an active role in the process

- Recognising that relationships and buy-in are a continuous, mutually reinforcing process. The more relationships are strengthened and people are involved, the more support and ownership there will be.

5.2 Organisational Factors

Most of the organisations which developed or used the tools for understanding urban contexts reviewed for this paper identified factors relating to the nature of their organisation which had an impact on the analysis. These fall broadly into four categories – institutional commitment, leadership buy-in, supportive environment and organisational bias – and are discussed below.

5.2.1 Institutional Commitment

Some organisations felt that they had been able to develop or use a tool to better understand urban contexts because of some sort of commitment at a broad, institutional level.

Several organisations have developed strategies or principles which either focus on or include elements which support the use of contextual analysis. For example, IRC's 2020 Strategy[8] emphasises the use of research and analysis, and the organisation has also developed principles for urban response which include recognising that 'effective urban humanitarian response requires a full understanding of the scale and complexities of the local context, its interconnected systems and stakeholders, and the

way in which diverse urban communities live within it and alongside one another'(IRC, 2017). Similarly, SIMLab has a core principle on being context-sensitive (SIMLab, 2017b). Save the Children has created a set of Urban Guiding Principles, one of which is to use holistic analysis and design in urban areas (Save the Children, 2017b). Mercy Corps' resilience approach includes four principles, one of which is that 'complex dynamics require a systems approach (thinking holistically, conducting ongoing analysis, and combining global experience, local knowledge and scientific expertise to understand the context of our work' (Mercy Corps, 2013). Concern's 'How Concern Understands Extreme Poverty'[9] document has shaped its approach to using contextual analysis and how its humanitarian and development functions work together.

Others felt that although their organisation did not have a formal commitment, there was a sense that 'the political will and the impetus that understanding context and having more context-appropriate programming was really important'. Organisations also pointed to their institutional participation in global initiatives such as the Global Alliance for Urban Crises, which encourages relationships with local authorities and involvement of urban practitioners.

Interviewees felt that institutional commitment was important in helping to ensure analysis of context could be prioritised in constrained situations, as they provided an incentive and space within the organisation for analysis. This reflects broader research into the use of evidence and analysis in humanitarian response, where it has been found that 'unless a signal comes from the top that evidence matters, progress will not be achieved' (Darcy, 2009:18). This institutional commitment is also important to ensure that findings from analysis are taken forward.

5.2.2 Leadership and Team Buy-in

Another critical aspect, particularly for ensuring that findings are taken forward, is to have the support of the organisation's senior leadership. This aspect was strongly emphasised in the literature (World Vision, 2017b; World Vision, 2017f; Garred et al., 2015; DFID, 2009; CARE, 2014) and in interviews. One World Vision report noted that support from senior leadership 'enabled swift take up of recommendations and further follow up' (World Vision, 2017b:5). Ensuring the support and ownership of decision-makers throughout the process also helps to avoid them being disengaged from the process and therefore ignore information from exercises in which

they have not participated (JIPS, 2017). Involving senior leadership can also help to encourage organisational buy-in, and promote quality standards (Sida et al., 2012).

Buy-in is important both from senior leadership and in-country staff. As one interviewee reflected, 'Whoever is in charge of the intervention, if they don't see value in it, then there's no point. There needs to be support at management level…[Also], I think there needs to be strong local support for it and the people who will ultimately be using the analysis have to want it. So, it's not something that can be pushed from the top otherwise it just becomes another bureaucratic requirement that they're going to roll their eyes at'.

When considering buy-in, the following questions can be helpful (adapted from Oxfam, 2013):

- Who is the main driver of the analysis? Is it being driven from above? If so, is there sufficient buy-in from staff? (If solely top-down, findings may not be internalised in daily work)

- Is it being driven by a particular individual or team? If so, is there sufficient buy-in from the top? (If not, findings may not be taken into account in planning and decision-making)

- Will these issues affect the analysis process? How? Are there any potential negative implications about leadership buy-in and ownership that need addressing?

- Where is there ownership of the analysis? Is there a need to widen ownership of the analysis process? If so, how can this be done in a meaningful, rather than tokenistic, way?

- How well does the exercise align with other processes such as strategy or operational planning?

There are several ways to increase buy-in at different organisational levels, including the following (adapted from Kamatsiko, 2016; World Vision, 2017f; Garred et al., 2015):

- Involve leaders from the beginning

- Meetings before and after analysis with leadership so they understand the process and how it adds value. Analysis not one event but 'part of a series of processes aimed at improving programming effectiveness'

> " Institutional commitment [is] important in helping to ensure analysis of context could be prioritised in constrained situations, as they provided an incentive and space within the organisation for analysis. "

> " Involving senior leadership can also help to encourage organisational buy-in, and promote quality standards. "

(Kamatsiko, 2016:28). Use meetings to get leadership committed to analysis, agree on purpose, decide timings and actions for follow-through.

- Think through the best way to communicate about the analysis and where possible allowing time for processing thoughts (World Vision, 2017f).

- Get leadership to put weight behind analysis, use their voice 'to continuously communicate to teams in the organisation about the importance of context/conflict analysis. They should demonstrate tangible support for post-analysis processes that facilitate uptake and use — including efforts to secure funding and to enhance organisational capacity' (Kamatsiko, 2016:28).

- Give leadership responsibility for context analysis and its follow-up.

- Support integrated approaches and breaking down siloes.

- Foster 'a culture of learning and flexibility in the organisation to improve programming effectiveness' (Kamatsiko, 2016:28).

- Plan analysis to coincide with planning processes to allow for findings to feed into something upcoming (Garred et al., 2015).

5.2.3 Supportive Environment

The organisational environment within which analysis takes place also plays a role. A number of environmental qualities were mentioned during the research as having a positive impact on an organisation's ability to develop or use a tool to understand the context. These different attributes are described below.

Self-reflection and critique: Some felt that the ability of their organisation to self-reflect, review and critique (JIPS, 2017; Wu, 2011; MacLeman et al., 2017) was important, with one interviewee noting that the increased focus on understanding context came 'in part from a recognition that we were often doing programming perhaps five or six years ago that wasn't as contextually relevant or continuing to do models without necessarily understanding the context itself'. Another felt that the use of context analysis came from realising the need to shift direction rather than do the same thing time and again.

Flexibility: A more flexible environment recognises that information changes, that there is more than one way to do things, and is therefore open to change (Kamatsiko, 2016).

Learning: Related to flexibility and openness to change, an environment which promotes learning and innovation was seen as important. One interviewee explained, 'We've got a mindset of saying we always want to do things different, we always want to think outside the box', which drove the context analysis process. Others described needing space for new ideas.

Open to failure: Organisations willing to adopt new approaches and build on what others are doing were compared to those which seemed more resistant to change and unwilling to share, possibly due to fears about competition and organisational risk. This suggests something about an organisation with some appetite for risk, and willingness to be open about learning, which will always include successes and failures.

Diverse perspectives: Interviewees highlighted the importance of an organisational environment which encourages a broad range of perspectives and expertise, so that people feel they have a contribution to make. These organisations were able to tap into the connections and skillsets of various team members, as described by one interviewee, by 'looking at your own team and your own resources and what the strengths that you have within your team are. Or the connections or knowledge they have and what opportunities they afford you'.

Analytical capacity: There were mixed opinions about analytical skills within the organisation. Some felt that a strong capacity for analysis enabled their organisation to champion things like context analysis. Others argued that a history of analytical capacity was not needed, and could even be a hindrance. One interviewee who had worked with many organisations felt that those with a strong analytical capacity may be more resistant to adopting new approaches, having invested in other forms of analysis. Similarly, another noted, 'organisations who have strong data collection and analysis capacity within their organisation are less keen to collaborate. It also becomes a bit of a territory fight between existing systems and you trying to introduce a new approach. So generally, it's easier for those who don't have that within their organisations to do it themselves, to want to collaborate because they'll directly benefit from it and they're not able to do it for themselves'.

Neutrality: Some described their organisation's ability to act as a 'neutral broker'. Organisations such as JIPS and OECD were able to convene and work with others.

Several other organisational aspects came up, including: pressure to get things done can compromise quality; a preference to work with formal institutions can reduce understanding of the informal; established assumptions about how aid works can be hard to shift; a tendency to inflate the importance of any one actor, including the organisation itself; a lot of turnover can make it hard to develop a sustained understanding of context (Duncan & Williams, 2010:17); and many competing organisational interests and demands can make it hard to create the space to consider the findings of analysis (Kamatsiko, 2016).

5.2.4 Organisational Specialism and Bias

All organisations have visions and mandates which shape how they view problems, pose questions and conduct analysis (Bolling, 2015; Slotin, Wyeth & Romita, 2010; Dahl-Ostergaard et al., 2005). In this way, 'analyses are shaped by the organisations which create them (Bolling, 2015:3). One example of this is conflict analysis, which is shaped according to how the organisation understands the origins of conflict. For example, if an organisation believes the origins of a conflict are economic or are about divisions/ inequalities the analytical outcome would differ (Bolling, 2015; Slotin, Wyeth & Romita, 2010). This is illustrated by an IPI study cited in Bolling (2015) which looked at five different conflict analyses in Sri Lanka, each conducted by a different donor with its own understanding of the nature of conflict, with the result that each produced different recommendations.

As well as informing how questions are shaped, biases and political interests also influence how far the findings are taken forward (Slotin, Wyeth & Romita, 2010). Knowing the extent to which organisational bias can shape analysis, it is important to resist the urge to use it to justify predetermined choices, and ensure it is conducted objectively and decisions made based on evidence (UNICEF, 2012).

This is particularly a problem where analyses are conducted solely by one organisation, as there is a greater risk that they will be used to justify its 'favourite approach or methodology' (Harvey et al., 2012:105). Involving

various organisations can help to mitigate this risk, as working collectively combines, and helps organisations to appreciate, others' expertise and perspectives.

Another impact of organisational bias is the reinforcement of institutional silos, which can impede conducting and using contextual analysis (Kamatsiko, 2016). Although humanitarian principles and charters emphasise the importance of responding 'to priority needs in the most appropriate way possible…the humanitarian architecture has evolved such that aid agencies tend to select responses and modalities that reflect their specific mandates. This in turn has promoted internal technical expertise and the development of systems that are tailored for a particular type of response' (McHattie, 2012:8). While technical and specialist expertise is valuable, a siloed approach 'tends to lead to formulaic response choices that focus on outputs and resource delivery, rather than on the outcomes' for crisis-affected people. (ibid:8). These organisational siloes make it harder to understand the context effectively and make good use of information.

There is, nevertheless, a strong case for the value of institutional capacity and expertise. Several organisations could draw on their particular expertise, for example, UN-Habitat's urban and planning background, in order to produce well-informed and skilled analysis.

This is not to diminish the importance of specialisation, but to recognise it does carry these risks. Research on peacebuilding found that many organisations 'limit their analysis only to those things that are relevant to the specific expertise of the agency or its beliefs or theories about how to bring about positive change' (USAID, 2011:5). When organisations see themselves in strictly sectoral terms, this limits their ability to approach analysis from the perspective of vulnerable people, and contextual awareness and understanding of interconnectedness are missed (MacLeman et al., 2017).

No organisation can do everything, but this 'not our problem' sort of approach can limit an organisation's ability to be effective in a complex urban environment where everything is interconnected. There will be issues an organisation will not address because they are beyond its operational expertise or remit, but it is still worth making time to understand them, referring them to relevant actors, and so on. Strictly sectoral thinking can thus limit organisations' ability to find opportunities to work together

> " As well as informing how questions are shaped, biases and political interests also influence how far the findings are taken forward. "

from the outset when 'agencies tend to act separately because they start by thinking separately: assessment instruments tend to be limited to the sectoral expertise of the organization conducting the assessment' (USAID, 2011:5). As noted earlier, deliberately working with other organisations to broaden the perspective of the analysis mitigate these problems.

5.3 Individual Factors

Who undertakes analysis matters. Beyond how to decide which group of individuals or organisations should conduct the analysis, as discussed in Section 4.4, some aspects will come down to the individuals involved.

This may be due to a person's (real or perceived) seniority, which could influence, for example, who is willing to participate in an interview. It could be because high staff turnover can mean some loss of institutional knowledge, but also enable new team members to bring in fresh ideas and be a catalyst for re-thinking old ones.

Three areas relating to individuals are discussed below – the ability to understand complexity, bias, and skills and capacities.

5.3.1 The ability of individuals to understand and embrace complexity

Understanding urban contexts is about understanding complexity. For context analysis tools to be useful, the individuals employing them must be able to consider new issues, grapple with a mess of interconnectedness and be comfortable with 'known unknowns'. This is demanding, and quite new for most people, even when they are already familiar with working in urban areas. Many described themselves or their colleagues being pushed beyond their comfort zones in the analysis process.

One interviewee shared an illustrative example. When piloting one of the tools reviewed for this paper, the country office dutifully followed its approach. The analysis output included a list of relevant issues in that environment, and housing issues were high on the list. Several days later, however, the topic had been removed from the list. Asked what happened to housing and land issues, the country colleagues said, 'We have no experience with that, we didn't know what to do with it so we just took it off the list. Instead we focused on the issues we knew'. In the end, 'all of the interventions they were proposing were just a subset of the interventions

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>
> No organisation can do everything, but this 'not our problem' sort of approach can limit an organisation's ability to be effective in a complex urban environment where everything is interconnected.
>
> "

they were doing in rural areas again because coming up with something new and different was very uncomfortable'.

Similar anecdotes were shared throughout the research. One person described how, after the first day of analysis, the team met to look at the data, followed by 'literally 20 minutes of silence'. People felt so outside their comfort zone, they had no idea what to do. Another reflected 'You go through the whole options at the end, come up with 12, and invariably, you were getting back, you know, "Oh, well we decided we were going to do water and education, because that's what we have the capacities in"'. Or, 'you do this pretty good analysis and then when it comes to program implications, you only do small tweaks to your existing programming rather than thinking outside of the box'.

These anecdotes illustrate the potential significance of individuals involved in the analysis. In the first example, the tool did what it should – but that was not enough. The individuals' willingness to embrace the reality and complexity of that urban environment was essential for the tool to be useful.

Similar issues were raised with organisations using tools that considered concepts that not everyone may be familiar with – for example, resilience, assets, risk, or conflict sensitivity. As one interviewee noted, 'colleagues were not necessarily comfortable with some of the concepts like risk and there was little common understanding. There is nothing wrong with the tool in this regard but it takes time for people to understand those concepts'. Another, describing a tool which had been used for several years, described its gradual simplification so that people would be more at ease with using it.

The degree to which people can learn to embrace and understand complexity is debatable. One learning exchange participant felt, 'It requires a certain amount of thinking. If you don't have it, you don't have it'. Others felt that it could be fostered and supported through leadership and capacity building – having someone, for example, 'that would be able to come in and push, "have you thought of? Have you thought of? Have you thought of?"'

> " For context analysis tools to be useful, the individuals employing them must be able to consider new issues, grapple with a mess of interconnectedness and be comfortable with 'known unknowns'. "

5.3.2 Individual Bias

As with organisational bias discussed earlier, individual bias is hard to avoid. Bias can, for example, make one more inclined to focus on certain issues (Darcy et al, 2007) or to be influenced by preconceived ideas about the situation or stakeholders (GPPAC, 2015). Individual bias can affect, in positive and negative ways, how a methodology is used or how findings are understood.

However, individual bias in analysis is seldom questioned (JIPS, 2017).

Everyone involved in the analysis will have some bias. Researchers from within and outside the context will have biases, pre-existing ideas about the context, shaped by their experiences. Bias will also affect local people participating in KIIs and FGDs, who will interpret questions and may feel they need to respond in a certain way, particularly if they feel this could affect their access to future aid or benefits. They may also be influenced by the differences in power between themselves and interviewers.

A number of ways to address individual bias were raised, including:

- Involving a diverse group of individuals in the analysis (GPPAC, 2015).

- Intentionally reflecting on preconceptions and positions before starting the analysis (Melim-McLeod, 2012b; Saferworld, 2004).

- Deliberately making time to consider gender equity, diversity sensitivity and conflict sensitivity before starting the analysis (Wu, 2011).

- Paying careful attention to the selection of KIs, FGD participants, interviewers, enumerators and researchers (SIMLab, 2017d).

- Triangulating all data sources (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014).

- Daily debriefings throughout the process to share emerging findings with the entire team and get potential biases out into the open.

- Adhering to research ethics and obtaining informed consent (SIMLab, 2017d).

- Using protocols in analysis design and execution.

- Being transparent in showing the methodology behind analysis, allowing users to critique or challenge findings if they suspect bias (Knox Clarke & Darcy, 2014).

5.3.3 Skills and capacities of individuals

It is important to acknowledge that the quality of the analysis will depend on the capacities of the people involved (Saferworld, 2004). As Slotin, Wyeth & Romita (2010:14) explain, 'People matter. Certain skills and competencies appear to be particularly valuable in generating an assessment

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> Coming up with something new and different was very uncomfortable.
> "

that can be easily understood and effectively used. A focus on these competencies may be more important than the tool itself'.

5.4 Funding and donor support

5.4.1 Current and future resources for analysis

Most of the urban analysis exercises done in humanitarian contexts have been funded as part of tool-development processes. Some organisations have also used core funds to undertake analysis, and some have obtained funding, such as from the Start Fund's Analysis for Action Grant (see Box 2). Other tools examined for this paper have been used more in development and resilience work – some have been funded just to carry out the analysis, others have used core funding or brought various stakeholders together to share costs.

Unlike other forms of analysis more widely used in the humanitarian sector, such as needs assessment, which have become a standard part of humanitarian response budgets, the research found no examples where context analysis was funded as part of programme funding. Some interviewees suggested that, as it has become an accepted norm to allocate a portion of humanitarian programme budgets for evaluation, it may be possible to allocate resources at the beginning and throughout a programme, for analysis to understand the context.

Given the potential value which better understanding of context could bring to urban humanitarian responses, there is a clear need for more donor funding and support to ensure this sort of analysis becomes a standard part of urban humanitarian response. It is hoped that the issues presented in this paper can be used to show that this analysis is critical in urban environments, and requires funding. Funding may also be more forthcoming if analysis is undertaken jointly by several organisations, with clear objectives, audiences and a plan for how findings will be taken forward.

"

There is a clear need for more donor funding and support to ensure this sort of analysis becomes a standard part of urban humanitarian response.

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Box 2: Start Fund's Analysis for Action Grant

One potential funding source for analysis to improve understanding of urban contexts is the Start Fund's Analysis for Action Grant.

Originally called the 'Drawdown Fund', the Analysis for Action Grant provides funding for analysis which can help organisations better plan and prepare for anticipated crises. The grant was developed in 2015 in response to a need to learn more about the context in Burundi before the scheduled presidential elections. Since then, several GECARR analyses have been funded by the grant, which can provide up to £10,000 for inter-agency analysis and information gathering.

The grant is run by the Start Fund, a pooled funding mechanism with 42 member organisations. It focuses on crises which may be ignored and uses a collaborative decision-making approach. Start Fund also operates a 1% learning fund. Organisations that have had a project funded by the Start Fund are able to apply. The Juba context analysis carried out by World Vision was funded under the 1% learning fund.

More information about the Start Fund is available at **https://startnetwork.org/start-fund**

5.4.2 A change in incentives and a role for donors

In addition to making funds available for analysis of context in urban response, the learning exchange and interviews reflected on the current incentive structure for operational humanitarians seeking funding. At the learning exchange, one participant noted that, 'right now the incentives are wrong…the incentive is not [for a humanitarian organisation] to say, "I need to know more"…the incentives are to make yourself seem like you know everything you need to know' in order to obtain funding. An interviewee similarly explained, 'People overstate their knowledge of a context in order to get funding because donors want you to know the context. It's happening in the wrong order. Even if you've been working in a place [for some time] and you're doing a new project, you're not going to know everything… organisations don't feel like they can admit that there are questions that they can't answer to…Because of that, donors don't see a need to supply funding for a context assessment because they already have these people applying, saying they know the context perfectly' even if they don't.

Discussions also revealed that donors could play a critical role in shifting this dynamic by advocating for context analysis. Learning exchange participants felt there was an onus on donors to encourage a better understanding of the urban environment. One participant explained, 'If we're saying context analysis is really important, in fact, necessary to work in an urban environment, because there are these power dynamics, there are everything interconnected, so therefore you can't effectively work in an urban environment without understanding where you're working…. if you've got a proposal, as a donor, that's going to be responding in an urban environment, and it includes no elements of any kind of contextual understanding… [you can say] "Oh wait, how are you going to possibly do that?"'. Donors could make this sort of analysis a standard requirement in urban humanitarian responses, which would make a significant difference. It would change the current incentive structure, where humanitarians may feel unable to acknowledge they need to do an analysis to better understand the urban context, and so encourage all humanitarians to demonstrate their understanding of context in order to obtain funding for urban humanitarian response.

This idea is similar to conflict analysis, where some have argued that donors should 'require funding applicants to demonstrate considerations for conflict analysis and how the analysis has been factored into shaping proposed interventions…reporting, monitoring and evaluations' (Kamatsiko, 2016:27).

5.4.3 Implications for funding models

While there is a need for more donor support to improve understanding of context in urban humanitarian crises, greater analysis will present challenges to existing funding models and approaches. In many ways, funding needs to be more creative and flexible to maximise its impact in urban settings (WRC, 2016b).

In order for analysis to be most useful, it needs to be followed through and kept up to date. As information changes or new information is obtained, programme funds need to be flexible enough to respond to the 'emerging issues [about the context, or about the changing situation] identified through regular analyses' (Kamatsiko, 2016:11). This would mean donors needing to be more open to flexibility in funding allocations, and willing to accept findings which may suggest courses of action that differ from those initially planned. Learning exchange participants felt that some donors are

> " People overstate their knowledge of a context in order to get funding because donors want you to know the context. "
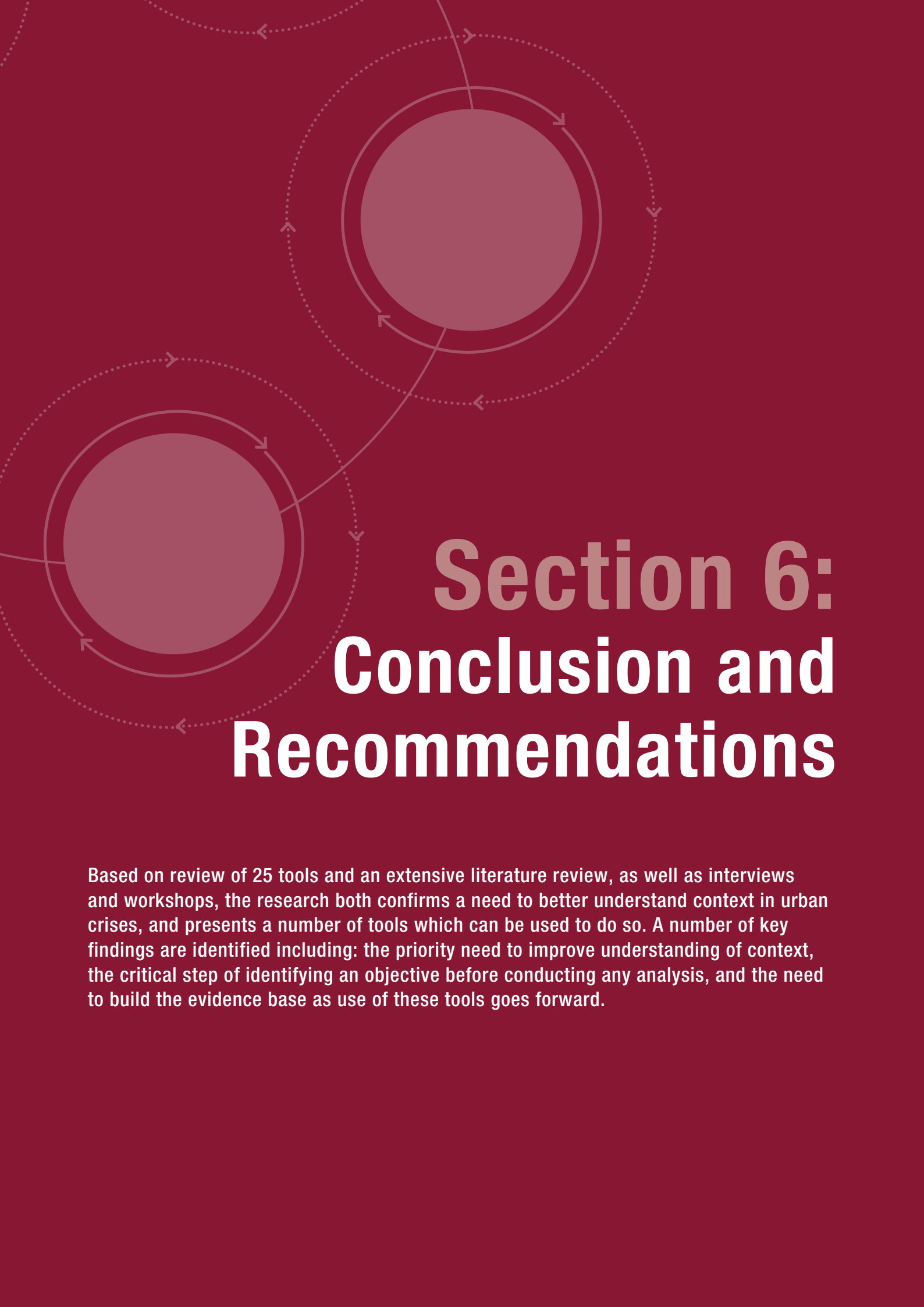
> "Donors could play a critical role in shifting this dynamic by advocating for context analysis. It would change the current incentive structure [and] encourage all humanitarians to demonstrate their understanding of context in order to obtain funding for urban humanitarian response. "

already open to being flexible, but others are not.

For donors which are still resistant to this approach, it might help if they were actively engaged in analysis and had a strong engagement with organisations conducting it (Kamatsiko, 2016). This need for more flexible funding echoes discussions on the need for flexibility in protracted crises (Diep, 2017; Obrecht, 2018). Some organisations have mechanisms in their programme budgets which account for unanticipated changes in the context (Kamatsiko, 2016).

Another potential challenge concerns the current arrangements for funding and programming of humanitarian response. Context analysis does not focus only on one sector and emphasises the interconnectedness of issues. Its findings may run up against the fact that most humanitarian organisations and donors are set up by sector, rather than in an integrated way (USAID, 2011).

Section 6:
Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on review of 25 tools and an extensive literature review, as well as interviews and workshops, the research both confirms a need to better understand context in urban crises, and presents a number of tools which can be used to do so. A number of key findings are identified including: the priority need to improve understanding of context, the critical step of identifying an objective before conducting any analysis, and the need to build the evidence base as use of these tools goes forward.

Section 6: Conclusion and recommendations

This paper has to explored how humanitarians could improve their response to crises in urban areas by better understanding the context. It examined whether there were tools which would facilitate this understanding of context and thus improve humanitarians' ability to think and act more effectively in urban environments. Based on review of 25 tools and an extensive literature review, as well as interviews and workshops, the research both confirms a need to better understand context in urban crises, and presents a number of tools which can be used to do so.

The research also underlined the need to be clear about the meaning of 'context', defined here as the environment and circumstances within which something happens and which can help to explain it. The context can be differentiated from a specific situation or conflict, and from understanding, for example, the needs of crises-affected people and the experience of specific population groups.

The research identified 16 tools that are relevant to understanding the context and thus improve urban response, and several others which are also useful to learn from, or can be used alongside, context tools. These tools can and have been used to improve understanding of urban contexts, and so enhance the effectiveness and context-relevance of humanitarian response, recognise and support existing systems and structures in the city, and contribute to a holistic understanding of what's happening in urban crises and how things are interconnected.

What are the key findings about using tools to understand context?

This paper is aimed at a number of different audiences and is accompanied by several 'bite-size' materials which capture key points from different angles (available at **https://www.alnap.org/our-topics/urban-response**), but the following points are likely to concern all audiences:

Key findings about using tools to understand context:

1. Urban humanitarian response does not adequately understand context. It is a priority to improve this. The tools identified can help improve this understanding, and the analysis they generate has specific operational relevance and use.

2. There are many different tools for understanding context, depending on the available resources, the timeframe, the most appropriate methodology and the purpose of conducting the analysis.

3. It is critical to identify the objective, and consider how analysis will be used, before using any tool to better understand the context. Decisions about scope depend on the objective, to ensure that the analysis is not a purely academic exercise and is kept relevant to its purpose.

4. At the same time, organisations should not restrict the analysis scope too narrowly, and miss important aspects of context. All aspects of the urban context are interconnected, and only on conducting the analysis will it be clear which are relevant to the objectives. Organisations will have to balance this with sticking to an objective. For this, there is no perfect formula – organisations will need to make conscious decisions throughout the process of where to strike the balance.

5. Understanding context requires a shift in how humanitarians think and act. It is an ongoing process, which can be supported by using tools at critical points, and on a continuous basis.

6. Both international and local actors find it helpful to employ tools to understand context. These are best used by a diverse team which includes both, and from a range of organisations. Those who are actively involved in producing an analysis are more likely to make use of its findings.

7. The tools alone are not enough to understand context. Organisations and individuals need to be committed to the need to understand context. Organisations need to foster a supportive environment and commitment to understanding context and making use of analysis findings. Donors can advocate the need to understand context and make structural changes in order to create space for the use of context tools and the uptake of their findings.

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> have been used to
> improve understanding
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> structures in the city,
> and contribute to a
> holistic understanding
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> interconnected.
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Where is further work needed?

While the research has found that context tools can contribute to more effective humanitarian response, it also found some important limitations that need further work.

The first is that the evidence of the usefulness of most of the tools is largely anecdotal. Many have only recently been launched, some are still being finalised, and some have been used only once. Even for those which have been around for a longer time, there has been no attempt to understand or evaluate their effectiveness. The lack of a rigorous body of evidence to support the usefulness and importance of these tools is an important gap. During the learning, one participant reflected that 'I think these things don't get funded because we haven't built up the case that we're actually using this information'. Further study about the how analysis of context is used and its specific impacts on improving urban humanitarian response is needed.

The second is that none of the tools is especially strong in helping to understand the interconnectedness between the different aspects of context. Several focus only on certain aspects, while others explore the entire urban context but by focusing on each aspect in turn. While organisations using the tools may reflect on interconnected issues during the analysis phase, currently none of the tools is particularly good at helping them do so. Given the nature of urban environments, where so much is interconnected (see Campbell, 2016), further work on how the tools could help users better identify critical connections and what to do about them would be useful.

Finally, despite the research finding that carrying out analysis as a joint activity has significant advantages, most of the tools have so far been used by single organisations. The risk is of duplication, reducing the uptake and impact of analysis, and missing opportunities. This is discussed more thoroughly in Section 4.7. Having more examples of joint analysis of context would add value, particularly in demonstrating where this may have increased the impact of using these tools.

Endnotes

1. 'The New Way of Working can be described, in short, as working over multiple years, based on the comparative advantage of a diverse range of actors, including those outside the UN system, towards collective outcomes. Wherever possible, those efforts should reinforce and strengthen the capacities that already exist at national and local levels' (OCHA, 2017:6).

2. Holistic is understood to mean 'characterised by the belief that the parts of something are intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole (Parker & Maynard, 2015:11).

3. See recent work by NRC et al. on **UMVAT** and the **Global Food Security Cluster**'s Adapting to an urban world project.

4. Framework here used to mean a theoretical basis which informs a process/methodology which is the tool.

5. PEA is a framework often used in development and governance analysis, which explores the interactions of political and economic processes in society, including 'the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time' (Collinson, 2003:3). Development practitioners have used PEA to understand political dynamics in order to generate more effective, and politically feasible, strategies (Mcloughlin, 2014) and to inform/ design a context-appropriate response (Kooy & Harris, 2012:1).

6. Social networks describe individuals' connections with each other, for example in organisations and communities (IRC, 2016b). Social Network Analysis (SNA) is the process of mapping these relationships, creating a network structure, and analysing influence exerted between actors (IRC, 2016b).

7. See **http://www.emma-toolkit.org/what-pcma**

8. **https://www.rescue.org/resource/strategy-2020-outcomes-and-evidence-framework-evidence-maps**

9. **https://www.concern.net/resources/how-concern-understands-extreme-poverty**

Further reading

To save paper, the full bibliography is available online only. You can download it at:
https://www.alnap.org/help-library/urban-tools-paper-bibliography

The following general publications are recommended for those wanting to understand more, in addition to reading more about specific tools.

Meaux, A., & Osofisan, W. (2016) A review of context analysis tools for urban humanitarian response. Working Paper. London: International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

> » Before creating the urban context analysis toolkit, IRC completed a review of existing tools. This paper focuses on their strengths and weaknesses and is the basis for its toolkit.

Asibon, E., Breckenridge, S.G., Malhotra, Z. & Raschko, K. (2017) Conflict analysis: Linking humanitarian action and peacebuilding. pp. 1-44. London: LSE.

Kondo Rossier, M. (2016) 'Conflict analysis for conflict preparedness: An OCHA case study', Public Diplomacy Magazine Summer: 8-13.

> » OCHA & LSE conducted a piece of research similar to this paper, focused on the use of conflict analysis tools.

Sardesai, S. & Wam, P. (2006) Effective conflict analysis exercises: Overcoming organizational challenges. Washington, DC: World Bank.

> » This paper is particularly useful for learning more about roles/ownership of those doing the conflict analysis, dissemination and getting the analysis used.

Saferworld. (2004) Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding: A resource pack. London: Saferworld.

> » This comprehensive resource package is a helpful to get started. While it focuses on conflict analysis, much of its guidance is also relevant to other sorts of analysis.

Klassen, S., Pickwick, S. & Eldebo, J. (2016) From analysis to action: World Vision's journey of rapid context analysis in humanitarian emergencies. London: World Vision UK.

Kamatsiko, V.V. (2016) Macro-level conflict analysis: Addressing the uptake-and-use challenge in fragile and conflict-affected context. Nairobi: World Vision International East Africa Regional Office.

Garred, M., O'Reilly-Calthrop, S., Midgley, T., & Scott, M. J. O. (2015) Making sense of turbulent contexts: Local perspectives on large-scale conflict. Uxbridge: World Vision International.

> » World Vision has produced a number of useful papers based on its use of the GECARR tool which present case studies, explore the issue of getting analysis used and other challenges. These are just some of the materials available, others can be found in the bibliography.

Campbell, L. (2016) Stepping back: Understanding cities and their systems. ALNAP Working Paper. London: ALNAP/ODI.

> » This paper, the first in ALNAP's research on urban response and complexity, explores how cities are interconnected, and the importance of understanding their different aspects.

Kobo Toolbox – http://www.kobotoolbox.org/

JIPS Dynamic Analysis and Reporting Tool (DART) - http://dart.jips.org/

> » These platforms offer templates and technological solutions that are particularly helpful for surveys and interviews. They can help to ensure organisations don't start from scratch and can also be useful for making data available for broader use.

Annexes

Annex A: Tools

A detailed summary of each of the 25 tools reviewed in this paper is available in an annex to this report. You can download it here: **https://www.alnap.org/help-library/urban-tools-paper-annex**

Annex B: Full methodology

There were several inputs to this paper including a literature review, review of documents and interviews tracking 27 different tools, a learning exchange, as well as the author's participation in other events. Each aspect of the methodology is explored in detail below, starting with the research question and approach, and ending with a reflection on limitations of the research.

Research question and approach

Following the publication of 'Stepping Back: Understanding Cities and their Systems' in 2016, ALNAP identified several follow-up questions. One of these was how humanitarians can obtain the information they need to respond effectively to the systems and complexity of urban environments. 'Stepping Back' argues that this information is important and offers some examples of the types of urban systems and stakeholders which humanitarians should consider. However, the question of how humanitarians can obtain the necessary information about the urban context, and how this information can be used to improve practice, remained.

While carrying out research for 'Stepping Back', a number of newly developed tools were identified. The focus for this research is to consider whether these emerging tools, and any others already in use, can help humanitarians get the information they need about urban areas, and if so, how this information can be used to inform practice.

The primary research question is therefore: **Can tools to understand context improve humanitarians' ability to think and act more effectively in urban environments?**

This question was amended during the course of the research. The original research question specified 'context analysis/city profiling tools', but it became apparent that a wide range of terms are used, and that even the terms originally identified lack consistently used definitions. Therefore, the terms 'context analysis/city profiling tools' were replaced by the more descriptive 'tools to understand context'.

Several sub-questions are also addressed in the paper, which are necessary in order to answer the primary research question:

- What is context and why do we need to understand it to respond more effectively to urban crises?

- What are 'tools to understand context'? How do these tools differ from one another, and from other sorts of analysis?

- What is needed in order to use these tools most effectively?

Identification and analysis of tools

In total, 25 tools were explored, organised in three groups:

16 'Core' tools – specifically developed for, or used in, urban or sub-national contexts, in an emergency/crisis context, and deal in whole or in part with context.

6 'Supplemental' tools – deal in whole or in part with context. Some focus on a country level in a crisis context or on an urban level but in a development or planning context.

3 'Related' tools – address context in some way but better described as another sort of tool.

In order to capture relevant information about each tool, a questions matrix was developed in Excel and used to identify what information was still needed.

For all 25 identified tools, the following steps were taken:

1. Identification either through literature review search or word of mouth referral

2. Focused Google search to identify all related documentation available online

3. Contact with one or more individuals to request further documentation

4. Filling out the questions matrix with all available information from documentation

5. One or more interviews to address gaps in the questions matrix

6. Completion of the questions matrix

Interviews

Interviews were held between November 2015 and August 2017. The first interviews were conducted for an earlier piece of ALNAP research (Stepping Back) but are acknowledged here as the interview content contributed to both papers. Some individuals were interviewed several times, particularly regarding specific tools. Many interviews were short and informal. A total of 76 interviews with 62 individuals have informed this research.

Learning Exchange

In April 2016, ALNAP organised a one-day learning exchange in which 26 participants to share their experiences and discuss the potential for using tools to better understand urban contexts. In addition to presentations of 11 tools and plenary discussions, six breakout discussions explored how to balance depth, timeliness and rigour, the perspective of analysis users, working with local stakeholders to do analysis, presenting analysis, how the tools fit alongside other humanitarian information, and what do organisations need to do to support analysis of context. All the discussions at the learning exchange were recorded and transcribed and were a critical input to this research.

List of Interviewees & Learning exchange participants

The following individuals contributed to this research through interviews, participation at the learning exchange, and in some cases, both. They are acknowledged, with many thanks.

Name	Organisation	Name	Organisation
Tarek Abdel-Monem	UN-Habitat	Andrew Meaux	IRC
Christopher Adan	Independent	Claudia Melim-McLeod	Independent
Tom Aston	CARE	Jalal Mesady	UN-Habitat
Natalia Baal	JIPS	Justin Mortenson	Save the Children
Jo Berg	UN-Habitat	Ben Mountfield	Independent
Synne Bergby	UN-Habitat	Olga Mushakarara	World Vision
Bevan Bhoke	IRC	Hanin Nammari	UN-Habitat
Alan Brouder	Habitat for Humanity	Kode Nasimento	IRC
Luke Caley	Start Network	Maclean Natugasha	IRC Nigeria
John Chettleborough	Oxfam GB	Wale Osofisan	IRC
Kelly Church	SIMLab	Chris Pain	Concern
Silvia Ciacci	Oxfam Italia	Laura Phelps	Independent / Former NRC
Filiep Decorte	UN-Habitat	Sarah Pickwick	World Vision
Luana DeSouza	Impact Initiatives	Supatsak Pobsuk	IRC
Johan Eldebo	IRC / Former World Vision	Aline Rahbany	World Vision
Julien Eyrard	ACF	Jimi Richardson	WFP
Colin Fernandes	Red Cross GDPC	Katell Rivolet	ACF
Giulia Frontini	CRS	Laura Ronkainen	JIPS
Laura Heykoop	London Borough of Hackney	Jennifer Rosenberg	WRC
Anjad Hithnawi	UN-Habitat	Jo Rowlands	Oxfam GB
Kees-Jan Hooglander	ZOA	Samer Saliba	IRC
Ishaq Idrees	IRC	Katja Schaefer	UN-Habitat
Karen Jacobsen	Tufts University	Margaret Scott	SIMLab
David Jones	Start Fund	Matt Scott	World Vision
Aynur Kadihasanoglu	American Red Cross	David Sweeting	Save the Children
Fiona Kelling	Norwegian Refugee Council	Ombretta Tempra	UN-Habitat
Sarah Klassen	Start Network	Manish Thakre	Save the Children
Paul Knox-Clarke	ALNAP	Gaia van der Esch	Impact Initiatives
Riham Kuwatli	UN-Habitat	Eric Vaughan	MercyCorps
Eric Levron	Independent	Lora Vicariot	Solidarités International
Hugh MacLeman	OECD	Laura Walker Macdonald	SIMLab
Suzanne Maguire	UN-Habitat	Melissa Weihmayer	JIPS
Sanulal Maharjan	Save the Children	Gavin White	IFRC
Ansa Masaud	Norwegian Red Cross	Kevin Wyjad	WFP
Jane Mbgai Mutua	Save the Children		

Other inputs to the research

This research has also been informed by the author's participation in a number of events run by other organisations. These include:

- UN-Habitat Urban profiling and needs identification workshop, Beirut, 18-19 March 2016

- Red Cross Red Crescent Urban Assessment Workshop, Copenhagen, 20-21 June 2016

- UN-Habitat Urban Crises Conference, Beirut, 27-28 October 2016

- Impact Initiatives Informing humanitarian in out-of-camp refugee contexts final workshop, Dead Sea Jordan, 23 May 2017

- Stronger Cities Consortium, Urban Humanitarian Response Symposium, London, 29-30 June 2017

- Interaction Continuous Context Analysis Webinar, Online, 25 July 2017

Coding/Analysis Process

All documents identified through the literature review, as well as notes from events attended and general interviews, were coded using MaxQDA qualitative research software. Codes were not weighted. The paper draws on either coded segments from MaxQDA, relevant sections of the tools questions matrix, or a combination of both.

Limitations of this research

A number of limitations of this research are explored below. Where possible, the author has identified measures used to mitigate this limitation.

All documents reviewed and interviews conducted were in English. As a result, relevant documents and experiences may have been missed. The author attempted to address this by ensuring diversity among interviewees, who themselves have knowledge of and access to material in other languages.

The focus of the research was on tools already in use by international humanitarian actors, which could be identified through internet search or shared through word of mouth. The limitation here is that, particularly due to inconsistent language and terminology, it is likely

that there are others in use which were not identified. It is also likely that there are less formalised tools and approaches being used, particularly by smaller organisations involved in humanitarian response, especially local and national actors. Although this paper has not attempted to present an exhaustive list of the tools available, but has focused on how these tools add value, it is hoped it will still be of use to those using, or interested in using, tools other than the specific ones identified.

The range of materials available to the author about each tool varied greatly. Each tool explored in depth for this paper was at a different stage of development/use. This meant it was not always possible to ask the same questions of each tool. Similarly, primarily due to sensitivities in certain contexts, it was not possible to obtain potentially useful information about some tools, but thanks to the relationships and trust the author developed with some individuals, more access was granted to certain tools than to others. In some cases, the author was able to participate in internal discussions and view over 30 documents. In other cases, the author conducted one interview and reviewed up to five documents. Therefore, the depth of information provided by each tool varied greatly.

The author attempted to mitigate this by using a consistent matrix of questions and attempting wherever possible to answer each question for each tool in at least some detail. However, this was not always possible.

Related ALNAP publications

Previous ALNAP reports on urban

Stepping back: Understanding cities and their systems

Ebola Response in Cities: Learning for Future Public Health Crises

Responding to Urban Disasters: Learning from previous relief and recovery operations

Other ALNAP publications

Dynamic gridlock: Adaptive humanitarian action in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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