HPN Humanitarian Practice Network

Improving humanitarian action in urban areas - an action-oriented roundtable

Wednesday, December 5, 2012 LONDON – UK

Meeting Notes

Participants

Wendy Fenton – HPN ODI (Chair)

Samuel Carpenter – British Red Cross

Simon Levine – HPG ODI

Francois Grunewald – Groupe URD

David Hockaday – ECB Project

Jonathan Hanson – ECB Project (Minutes)

Sean Loughna – HPG ODI

Victoria Maynard – Habitat for Humanity GB

Juliano Fiori – Save the Children

Linda Poteat – ECB Project

Paul Knox Clarke – ALNAP

Lilianne Fan – HPG ODI

Kevin Savage – World Vision Int

Andrea Stewart – ECB Project

Simone Haysom – HPG ODI

Dr Lucy Earle – CHASE, DfID

Franziska Orphal -ALNAP

Laura Phelps – Oxfam

1. **Summary of Key Questions:**
   - Are urban and rural responses really that different?
   - What capacity skills and competencies are needed to respond to urban challenges?
   - How are urban, rural and conflict/violence issues linked?
   - What are the principles that define the relationship between NGOs, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and national authorities?
   - What are the limits of urban response work?
   - How do we measure quality in urban contexts?
   - What are the ideal targeting and mapping methods?
   - How will technical areas such as Shelter and WASH work in urban response scenarios?
   - Can existing urban programmes be scaled up?
   - Will the internal structure of agencies change to respond to urban challenges?

2. **Current urban initiatives in different organisations**

Save the Children's current initiative aims to build links between Save and academic institutions, including the Architectural Association and University College London (UCL) Development Planning Unit. There are two main themes. 1) Asking the question 'How do humanitarian agencies conceptualise the urban question?' 2) Challenging the concept that urban initiatives are the next big issue. Save is in the early stages of this process. They are also interested in what the implications for humanitarians, architects and urban planners might be over the next few years.

The **British Red Cross** has an urban learning project focussed on using operational learning to improve the relevance, quality and impact of its programmes in urban areas. The inception phase of

the project culminated in the recent publication of a scoping study, Learning from the City (available here), drawing on a literature review and interviews with practitioners from the British Red Cross, National Societies and the ICRC. In 2013, two case studies will be undertaken in Haiti and Nepal to go into greater depth on the themes of economic recovery and engaging with at-risk communities in in urban areas. The outputs of these case studies will be used to inform the mainstreaming of urban considerations within the British Red Cross recovery framework, 'pilots' in urban areas and, looking forward, potentially also training with emergency response rosters. Participants from the meeting interested in engaging with the project were encouraged to contact Samuel Carpenter (scarpenter@redcross.org.uk), the lead on the project.

Oxfam has identified two gaps in the urban sphere: urban emergency targeting and early onset triggers. Oxfam's focus is on early onset triggers.   It is working to see if the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) tool can be used in urban contexts. A global urban framework is in place; this links work across all 17 Oxfams, and explores how to develop urban resilience. There will also be an eight country pilot over the next three years to develop models to include what urban programming will look like in one country.

World Vision's (WV) focus is on long term urban development. A centre of excellence in Australia is looking at pilot studies in South Asia. The WV humanitarian department is focusing on urban violence and to conceptualise urban violence with resilience and risk in the Latin American context. WV is also undertaking an internal literature review of urban response program analysis, including interviews with staff in urban emergencies. This is called a 'strategic learning process' and it is hoping to find new ideas and niches within urban response. A major focus for the future is to adapt the organisation for urban response programming. There will be a workshop in March 2013 with the regional office in Asia.

Groupe URD has developed case studies about war in cities (Kabul), war around cities (North Mali and Colombia) and war outside but affecting cities (Peshawar). There were 13 project proposals but these did not result in much donor or NGO interest. Groupe URD has also published three books which deal with urban issues: *Afghan cities and urban challenges - Issues at stake in the post-conflict reconstruction of Afghanistan, Post-tsunami housing reconstruction in Aceh*, and *Wars in cities and cities in wars*. The team produced a study on the cities in the Philippines which is currently being updated, and will be on the website soon. URD also conducted a literature review which is updated to March 2012 (presented at the ALNAP conference in Chennai 2012). Now URD is focusing on war in cities, urban natural disasters and cities and displacement. Collaboration is key as a lot has been done on the subject in English so there is no point in duplicating work. Groupe URD is currently working on a learning exercise with UN Habitat. Research and development projects are looking into land issues in disaster affected countries in Port au Prince and Kabul. Too often the focus is on a big disaster in a big city so one of URD's aims is to raise the profile of the disasters which take place in smaller cities, e.g Groupe URD's work in large and small cities in the Philippines.

ALNAP is looking at the concept of "Meeting the urban challenge" and is producing a literature review and lessons to create a guidance document for the field level led by David Sanderson. There are currently a good number of questions that need operational answers and ALNAP members are

working towards this. ALNAP is harvesting the learning and experience of agencies and disseminating this through the Urban Portal (the online library has 1200 documents) on its website and through webinars and meetings (likely to be virtual or online as they are used more often by partners in the South). ALNAP also wants to link to the work of the UN through a partnership with UN Habitat. ALNAP will look at conducting a lessons learned exercise around urban violence if no one else is planning to do this. (On February 7, 2013 David Sanderson hosted a webinar, the first of a series on the ALNAP in 2013).

Over the past 3 years, **HPG** has researched urban displacement, including protection, advocacy, legal and livelihood issues. It has undertaken case studies in Nairobi, Sudan, Gaza, Damascus, Amman and Kabul. A synthesis report is in progress following a conference in **Copenhagen February 7-8 2013**. HPG thinks it is less of an issue of urban versus rural, and more an issue of situation: Are there defined camps or are people dispersed? What are the control factors and how do they differ? HPG is in the process of planning its new two-year Integrated Programme of research within which further work on urban issues will be undertaken. A new steering group for this work will be created in the spring of 2013.

CARE International is new to urban response, although it has experience with rebuilding houses in Haiti and evaluating the housing/shelter program. CARE is involved with the ECB Project and the Cluster work on resilience and accountability.

DfID /UKAID is exploring how to innovate and improve humanitarian response. DfID asked the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) to look into research gaps, including the nature of risk in urban areas, how hazards overlap, extensive versus intensive risks in smaller cities and why less is known about smaller cities. It is trying to channel funding into academic research. There is research work ongoing on urban violence looking into the 'nature and scale of risk in urban areas' and DfID is looking for research council partners.

ACF has post crisis programs in many cities that include rehabilitation and preparedness, and it is currently consolidating experiences. The broad lessons include programming improvement in urban areas and to focus on research into rural and urban links, especially on child malnutrition.

3.   **Urban concepts and issues discussed by the participants**

Urban Violence
Participants discussed the complexity of urban violence, noting that it is part of the political economy of cities. Three conceptual challenges were raised: 1) Dynamics within cities are linked and this differs from rural areas so they can't be treated in the same way. 2) Local amenities are handled differently in different cities. Humanitarian programming may look like development programming as the line between them becomes blurred. 3) Engagement with local communities is important. Urban communities interact differently than rural ones and each city is different.

On a practical side, there was the concern that whilst urban violence is a critical theme, researching it is dangerous. The way NGOs engage with it is the most critical element, e.g. staff with the correct experience and calibre have to be found.

Urban (v) Rural

Some participants focused on differences between urban and rural response. Urban and rural responses tend to be the same, with examples from Haiti. Every context is different, so we should start by understanding the context. Another way to improve urban response is to have more proactive coordination and engagement with federal and municipal systems, in particular the national disaster management authorities (NDMAs) – something that is not so always necessary (or possible) in rural areas. These linkages are not always good enough at the moment. For example focus needs to be placed on targeting beneficiaries in urban environments, developing a neighbourhood approach, and discussing what to do with WASH, especially sanitation. Another neglected area of research is chronic violence in urban areas and extreme poverty in slums.

Others focused on the rural and urban linkages. Discussions also noted the need for clarification on how to identify slow onset emergencies in urban areas as there is not enough data.

Participants also emphasised the importance of looking at individual city contexts and the need to use more than one lens to study urban response. It is possible to identify similarities between different cities but we should also study the differences between them and avoid creating generic urban responses. Specific key areas of engagement were noted, including housing, land and property; legal aid; urban violence and livelihoods. There are a lot of small scale projects that work in cities which can be scaled up.

World Vision said that work over the last year has shown that although ideas about urban and rural response are similar, the details are challengingly different. Thought needs to be put into the practical ways that agencies work. How can agencies adapt to the challenge? World Vision felt that chronic violence in urban areas and extreme poverty in slums also need to be studied. WV questioned whether this is part of the humanitarian sector scope of work or could be a collaboration with development colleagues?

HPG argued that the urban-rural divide is a red herring. The conceptual challenges that Groupe URD mentioned are relevant but the challenge is to synthesise findings between different cities. There are a lot of small scale projects that work in cities which can be scaled up.

Should we have a humanitarian or development lens?

For an urban response urban development lenses were often used and therefore work was seen differently. As international agencies the questions are similar but the answers depend how NGOs see their roles in the future.

City size, urban emergency indicators and thresholds

Discussions touched on the importance of considering city size. Medium-sized cities are often overlooked and large scale disasters distort the system and the response. There have been lessons from Haiti but peri-urban areas and secondary cities are key too. Urban emergency indicators and

thresholds are important to develop, for example on when to respond. Humanitarian agencies can't respond to all challenges so they need to understand what the roles and capacities are of municipal, national, local and private sector counterparts and engage with them. Agencies also need to be aware that contexts change, communities are dynamic and geographical distribution is more complex in urban areas – this is difficult if the agency is not based there or is new to the context. **Groupe URD** noted that urban systems are sophisticated and interlinked for both small and big cities.

4.   Urban response - lessons to learn

Participants suggested that there are examples of urban planning in developing countries, including China, Chile or Mexico. We can learn from countries whose urban programs are more evolved. **DfID** said that Haiti was a worst case scenario, urban areas in countries like Chile regularly have disasters – there is no analysis on these contexts but there should be as this could help with our understanding in more impoverished or fast-growing cities. DfID asked what role the donors could play in improving sector response. **DfID is to hold a review on this issue.**

ACTION: Participants to email DfID their thoughts on how donors can help the sector to improve.

5.   Urban response - areas for research

Participants highlighted the lack of disaggregated data for urban response. Without this how can cities be ordered in terms of priority? None of the big agencies have urban strategies and there is a real dearth of skills in humanitarian governance. However, some participants warned that things change extremely rapidly. It is trendy to collect data but data is often wrong or outdated.

Another key area of research is coordination with state and national disaster management authorities. There are often already structures in place and agencies are operating in the dark if a strategy already exists.

It was also noted the lack of engagement between humanitarian and development actors. HPG's urban conference speakers are mainly from the development world, most humanitarians don't know anything about it. World Bank is to research this in 2013.

Urban response and collaboration

The need for collaboration between civil, government, academic and private sector actors was reiterated. Cities are built by governments and private sector actors (formally) and by people (informally). Shelter and WASH are difficult in urban response but as the private sector has experience in these sectors, we should consider how best to work with them. The private sector also has experience in multi-hazard risk assessment of urban areas.

- The [Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network](#) has worked with civil society, municipal governments, the private sector and academic institutions to understand potential climate

change impacts on their city, map vulnerabilities and capacities, develop action plans and projects to reduce the vulnerability of poor and vulnerable groups and build urban resilience. While this programme focuses on building climate change resilience the methodology is applicable to disaster risk reduction more generally and there are many lessons to be learned from this collaborative process.

- The World Economic Forum undertook research with Arup to analyse the role of the private sector in disaster response: Engineering & Construction Disaster Resource Partnership - A New Private-Public Partnership Model for Disaster Response

- Urban' environments are very different in different contexts – with different stakeholders playing very different roles. The C40 Cities: Climate Leadership Group has mapped power of mayors to help understand the variances. While not focussed on disaster response this research highlights the importance of understanding the city governance context and the roles and responsibilities of different actors when undertaking humanitarian response http://www.arup.com/Home/Publications/Climate_Action_in_Megacities.aspx

- The UCL doctoral training centre in Urban Sustainability and Resilience has a specific focus on urban risk reduction and response (resilience). NGOs can partner with the Centre for Urban Sustainability and Resilience to develop research proposals for doctoral (EngD) students to work with humanitarian organisations on tackling some of the challenges of urban response.

Another area of collaboration is with civil defence and municipal authorities, who are often involved in national disaster management. These entities are becoming more and more sophisticated and are frustrated that the humanitarian sector usually doesn't engage with them. Agency staff can be trained to engage and work with these agencies through United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) training. Participants did note however that perhaps the point is not to just talk to the authorities but for NGOS to work through them and where possible and appropriate embed themselves within the relevant state structures.

6.   Urban response - Looking forward

Participants reflected that in Haiti rural areas do not have strong government actors. In the urban context beneficiaries may be more empowered and demanding. In Port au Prince NGOs didn't want to take on the responsibility for informal camp settlements because they didn't feel they could ensure security, which is a key component of camp management. The ECB Project asks what skills sets agencies want field staff to have in the short term? What needs to be adapted? What things can be worked on to move things forward as longer term research takes place?

Several questions were raised about the funding strategy:
- How will we define the funding strategy? Is it a program to attract development money and actors? Strategy is more critical and more difficult to define and an exit strategy is not easy.
- Where are we needed the most? How can we exit? Urban data is focused at the country level not the sub country / city level so it will be harder to make decisions.
- What gaps can be identified and where can information be shared? There are few achievable goals on urban preparedness response / resilience so what can be done to help

field staff? How can beneficiaries be engaged in cities? How can thought leaders be identified? What lessons are there from Haiti? This is the practical level of the discussion ECB would like as well as the long term aims. What can be done in the short term to support change in the long term?

Participants suggested that ECB Project agencies should find out what other agencies are trying to do, what blockages or constraints exist and what will help. All problem analysis should start with the problem. A training program could be developed to train people to find and engage with the right people and agencies in the local municipality or community. The ECB Project could build on this and create some models for urban DRR and urban modelling, such as mapping cities with regular disasters. Where will the disaster strike? Where should NGO resources be focused? Who should do this? This would be an excellent resource to develop.

The ECB Project highlighted that their project structure could be helpful because at the field level opportunities for engagement are open for all NGOs. Simulations could be used to help analyse urban projects. For example there was a December 2012 ECB Project simulation in Kenya, Nairobi that included UNICEF, ACAPS, UNOCHA and the ECB agencies. The simulation tested pre-election preparedness both at the capital city level, but also at other major city levels in some of the large urban centres in Kenya. A report should be available soon on the [ECB Project website](#).

Participants noted that long term DRR planning has been done in certain cities of the ACCCRN and there is a lot to learn from this but short term risk planning should also be included. However, other participants noted that there can be a problem with scenario or contingency planning in that it doesn't not involve long term planning and vice versa. NGOs must consider what people in an urban disaster will naturally do too.

7. **Other resources shared during the discussion:**
    - USAID's '[Making Cities Work](#)' website.
    - A report by Groupe URD: *[Humanitarian aid in urban settings: Current practice, future challenges](#)*
    - [ALNAP Urban response portal](#). ALNAP *Responding to Urban Disasters: Learning from previous relief and recovery operations* (Nov 2012) http://www.urban-response.org/resource/7772

8. **Summary of major research gaps identified:**
    - Governance and humanitarian urban programs
    - Urban programs and displacement
    - Protection in urban environments
    - Energy supply and climate change adaptation
    - Risk mapping