



Urban crises and the new urban agenda

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ABSTRACT This paper highlights how the global policy framework for crisis response needs to change to remain effective in an urbanizing world, where disaster risk is increasing and most refugees and half of all internally displaced people are in urban areas. This includes a need to understand how affected populations are inserted within complex urban contexts – and the current and potential roles of city and municipal governments. This implies a focus on bolstering or repairing existing systems – markets, infrastructure and provision of utilities – so that affected populations are quickly able to meet their needs in ways that are familiar to them. Assisting affected populations through existing city systems also helps ensure that emergency interventions contribute to longer-term urban development goals. Camps can create dependency where populations are discouraged from working. They are expensive, generate stigma, and can be the site of violence and exploitation. The humanitarian imperative to save lives and preserve dignity can be aligned with an approach that helps towns and cities get back on track, and even flourish, after a crisis. It is to be hoped that Habitat III's "new urban agenda" reflects this.

KEYWORDS humanitarian crises / local governments / refugees / urban contexts

I. CHANGING RESPONSES TO HUMANITARIAN CRISES

We are all aware that the world is urbanizing. The statistics and projections are routinely repeated, along with references to a new urban world and our urban future. Urbanization has the potential to bring prosperity to less developed nations, as well as opportunities and social and cultural freedoms to urban dwellers. But if not well managed, urbanization will also bring major risks. Rapid, largely unplanned urbanization, combined with climate change and massive displacement into urban zones as a result of war and natural disasters, will have a significant impact on the nature and scale of humanitarian emergencies in urban areas. Despite the likely increases in the intensity and frequency of such emergencies over the coming decades, urban crises have yet to receive the attention they deserve in the global policy arena. This paper sets out the current global policy framework for urban crisis response, discusses the imperative to change the way the international community approaches emergencies in towns and cities, and sets out a series of recommendations that could bring about meaningful change for people affected by urban crises.

The year 2016 provides a number of opportunities to focus attention and to take action so as to ensure that towns and cities are prepared for crisis events, and that emergency response is tailored specifically to

the urban environment. The first of these opportunities is the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) to be held in Istanbul in May 2016. The summit is not a member state process, and the agenda will be structured around the findings of extensive regional and thematic consultations held over the course of 2014 and 2015. These consultations highlighted the growing risk of crises in urban areas, the critical need for humanitarian actors to engage with municipal actors, and the importance of delivering assistance through existing institutions and systems.⁽¹⁾ They further drew attention to the specific and highly topical challenges in providing assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) dispersed across towns and cities. A second opportunity is the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), to be held in Quito in October 2016, at which UN member states will agree on a new urban agenda for the next 20 years. Despite the fact that urban crises should be a priority for low-, middle- and high-income countries alike, at the time of writing, it is not yet clear how humanitarian issues will be covered at Habitat III.

Institutions and individuals committed to bringing urban issues to the WHS and humanitarian issues to Habitat III will be able to benefit from the success of the global Urban Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Campaign. The WHS will be the first major international summit, and Habitat III the first member state conference, after the launch of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in January 2016. Both events will undoubtedly refer to this milestone, and the inclusion of a standalone urban goal within the 17 goals that make up the 2030 Agenda provides an important launchpad for further campaigning. The urban goal (number 11)⁽²⁾ calls for cities and human settlements to be inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. It is a marked improvement on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that preceded the SDGs. Within the former, urban issues were relegated to a couple of targets within the goal on environmental sustainability. The MDG target to achieve, by 2020, “a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers” was widely criticized as imprecise and virtually meaningless. As the target focused on an absolute number, rather than relative proportion of slum dwellers, it was reached quickly, as a result of the exponential growth of slums around the world.⁽³⁾

The inclusion of the urban goal in the 2030 Agenda perhaps represents the start of a shift in mindset amongst the international development community. The widely publicized urban “tipping point” in 2008, when demographers calculated that the majority of the world’s population was living in urban areas, appears to have spurred recognition that a new urban world requires some new urban action. Those involved in the campaign for the standalone goal, and others who advocate for a greater focus within the aid industry on urbanization and its impacts, have been fighting a hard fight. And it is not over yet.

Although there is recognition that the world is increasingly urban, campaigners for a greater focus on urbanization still struggle to get their issues on the agenda of many donors, NGOs and multilateral aid agencies. This may seem surprising, but there are a number of reasons why this is the case. One is the ongoing prevalence of the urban bias thesis.⁽⁴⁾ Another is the fact that aggregated statistics for urban areas mask high levels of poverty, elevated mortality and morbidity, and limited access to basic services.⁽⁵⁾ This leads donors and agencies to maintain

1. The outcomes of the consultations and the Synthesis Report are available at <https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org>.
2. <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/cities/>.
3. The term “slum” usually has derogatory connotations and can suggest that a settlement needs replacement or can legitimate the eviction of its residents. However, it is a difficult term to avoid for at least three reasons. First, some networks of neighbourhood organizations choose to identify themselves with a positive use of the term, partly to neutralize these negative connotations; one of the most successful is the National Slum Dwellers Federation in India. Second, the only global estimates for housing deficiencies, collected by the United Nations, are for what they term “slums”. And third, in some nations, there are advantages for residents of informal settlements if their settlement is recognized officially as a “slum”; indeed, the residents may lobby to get their settlement classified as a “notified slum”. Where the term is used in this journal, it refers to settlements characterized by at least some of the following features: a lack of formal recognition on the part of local government of the settlement and its residents; the absence of secure tenure for residents; inadequacies in provision for infrastructure and services; overcrowded and sub-standard dwellings; and location on land less than suitable for occupation. For a discussion of more precise ways to classify the range of housing sub-markets through which those with limited incomes buy, rent or build accommodation, see *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 1, No 2 (1989), available at <http://eau.sagepub.com/content/1/2.toc>.
4. For a discussion, see Jones, G and S Corbridge (2010), “The continuing debate about urban bias: the thesis, its critics, its influence and its implication for poverty-reduction strategies”, *Progress in Development Studies* Vol 10, No 1, pages 1–18.

5. Mitlin, D and D Satterthwaite (2013), *Urban Poverty in the Global South: Scale and Nature*, Routledge, Abingdon.

6. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2014), *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision, Highlights*, New York, accessed 20 October 2015 at <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/Highlights/WUP2014-Highlights.pdf>.

7. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2014), *Global Estimates 2014: People displaced by disasters*, Geneva, accessed 20 October 2015 at <http://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/2014/global-estimates-2014-people-displaced-by-disasters>.

8. Dodman, D, D Brown, K Francis, J Hardoy, C Johnson and D Satterthwaite (2013), "Understanding the nature and scale of urban risk in low- and middle-income countries and its implications for humanitarian preparedness, planning and response," Human Settlements discussion paper series, Climate Change and Cities 4, International Institute for Environment and Development, London.

9. Crawford, N, J Cosgrave, S Haysom and N Walicki (2015), *Protracted displacement: uncertain paths to self-reliance in exile*, Overseas Development Institute, London.

10. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2015), *Home sweet home: Housing practices and tools that support durable solutions for urban IDPs*, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Geneva, page 5.

their focus on rural poverty, which appears to be more prevalent. But there are also institutional obstacles. Urban is neither a cross-cutting theme nor a sector: it is a context, and, as such, is hard to place within bureaucracies. There are no clear "owners" of the urban agenda within donor departments or operational agencies. While urbanization and its impacts are of relevance to a large range of programming areas, urban expertise within the development and humanitarian sectors is limited, partly as a result of dwindling demand from donors over the past decades. As a result, programming in urban areas may not be scrutinized by urban specialists, and initiatives that seek to support governments to manage risks, prepare for disasters, and make the most of urbanization are not as common as they should be.

II. THE URBAN CRISES AGENDA

The statistics are frequently cited: the world urban population is estimated to increase from 3.5 billion today to 6.2 billion in 2050, with almost all population growth occurring in small to intermediate-sized African and Asian towns and cities.⁽⁶⁾ Less well known is the fact that over the past 40 years, the urban population in lower-income and fragile countries has increased by 326 per cent.⁽⁷⁾ Roughly one billion people live in low-income and informal urban settlements (often referred to as slums), representing one-third of the population of low- and middle-income countries. Slum dwellers often live on land exposed to hazards and without adequate protective infrastructure, decent housing and access to basic services. The informal nature of these areas limits opportunities to reduce these vulnerabilities. They accumulate acute and structural vulnerabilities and are frequently adversely affected by different shocks and stresses. The increasing vulnerability of cities and their populations is noted by Dodman et al., who record that since the middle of the last century, there has been a "much-increased concentration of people and economic activities in low-lying coastal zones or other areas at risk from flooding and extreme weather events".⁽⁸⁾ Residents in these areas may not have secure tenure, and when homes are destroyed, or people are displaced, those who cannot prove their rights to land or housing can be severely disadvantaged.

And it should be stressed that the displaced are part of this global urban population: worldwide, 59 per cent of refugees are in urban areas, a figure that is increasing year on year.⁽⁹⁾ Half of all IDPs are also in urban areas.⁽¹⁰⁾ Large influxes of displaced people impact host communities and neighbourhoods, often putting a critical strain on service provision, even in areas where services were previously meeting needs. Where these new arrivals settle in already deprived areas, the additional stress on inadequate basic services can exacerbate social problems.

Elsewhere in the city, poor urban planning, lax enforcement of planning legislation, and inappropriate, unaffordable or poorly enforced building codes put populations at risk – rich and poor alike. The interdependence and density of urban infrastructure and social systems and the multiplicity of hazards make multiple, "domino-effect" disasters, such as the 2011 Japanese earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident, a real danger.

These trends are fundamentally shifting the landscape of crises to cities – and to cities that already have systemic challenges to the delivery

of basic services, security, and welfare. A series of emergencies in urban areas over the past decade has demonstrated that the humanitarian community is not well prepared for the consequences of these demographic shifts. Perhaps the most eye-opening of these events was the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, which caused immense loss of life and damage to the capital, Port-au-Prince. A difficult and chaotic response ensued, and humanitarians have been criticized for the fact that several years on, hundreds of thousands of people were still living in camps, despite the huge scale of the response and elevated levels of funding. The many criticisms – which are still being levelled⁽¹¹⁾ – have led agencies to question the relevance, efficiency and equity of their interventions in the Haitian capital. A different, but no less challenging, urban crisis has been evolving in the Middle East over the past four years. Refugees from the war in Syria have largely sought refuge in the towns and cities of neighbouring countries; only a minority are in camps, estimated at 16 per cent.⁽¹²⁾ Again, humanitarian agencies have struggled to find the most efficient and appropriate way to provide services to urban refugees and ensure that they are aware of their rights and entitlements, and to do so in a way that does not inflame tensions with host communities.

Perhaps the main reason for humanitarians' lack of preparedness and readiness to operate in towns and cities stems from the fact that their tools and approaches were largely developed in response to rural crises: droughts, famines, and movements of refugees over remote borders. In these far-flung areas, with little to build on, agencies have tended to put in place their own systems, and established camps so as to best manage displaced populations. Further, many humanitarian professionals have a background of working in conflict-affected environments. This, along with their adherence to principles of neutrality, means they have mixed experiences of collaboration with local governments, and may shy away from it. This legacy presents problems in the "new urban world".

At present humanitarian response is fundamentally at odds with the way that towns and cities are organized and the way that urban life plays out, and this can limit the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. While urbanists would look at an emergency situation and see a city in crisis, humanitarians have a tendency to see a crisis in a city – the context is an afterthought, not the starting point for the design of a response. In a paper on meeting the challenges of urban climate change, Da Silva et al. argue that urban areas must be understood by looking at the range of different systems of which they are composed, rather than just their individual parts. These systems include governance, infrastructure, markets and social systems, amongst others, and to take them all into account requires a more holistic and spatial approach in which urban areas are understood as "complex 'living' systems".⁽¹³⁾ However, humanitarian actors are not yet operating in harmony with and supporting these complex systems.

As noted in a review by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), urban humanitarian response is a topic with "many unanswered questions" where lessons are not being learned and findings are not being tested in a range of contexts. "Urban areas present unique challenges in terms of complexity and scale, and many existing ways of working were originally developed to address rural crises, and may not work as well in cities."⁽¹⁴⁾ This is not to suggest that humanitarian response in rural areas is simple. The point is that urban areas have some quite specific characteristics that problematize

11. See, for example, Sullivan, L. (2015), "In Search of the Red Cross' \$500 Million in Haiti Relief", NPR, 3 June, available at <http://www.npr.org/2015/06/03/411524156/in-search-of-the-red-cross-500-million-in-haiti-relief>.

12. UNHCR (2014), *2014 Syria Regional Response Plan: Strategic Overview*, page 17, accessed 15 October 2015 at <http://www.unhcr.org/syriarrp6/index.html>.

13. Da Silva, J, S Kernaghan and A Luque (2012), "A systems approach to meeting the challenges of urban climate change", *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development* Vol 4, No 2, pages 125–145.

14. Sanderson, D, P Knox-Clarke and L Campbell (2012), *Responding to Urban Disasters: Learning from previous relief and recovery operations*, ALNAP, London, page 1.

traditional humanitarian approaches, and that most agencies have yet to equip themselves to deal with these. Some of the lessons emerging from the ongoing reflection on urban crisis response may well have relevance for rural areas too – particularly the need to work more closely with local governance actors, and to take long-term development concerns into account. However, it is increasingly clear that humanitarian actors are struggling to deal with the complexity of towns and cities and to take full advantage of the capabilities and resources present in urban areas. This complexity is widely recognized in the literature on urban humanitarian response – although the field is in its infancy. For example, a special edition of *Disasters* in 2010, on urban vulnerability and humanitarian response, captured a number of the problems; these have also been summarized by Sanderson et al.⁽¹⁵⁾

The next stage is to consider what can be done to overcome these complexities and the lack of readiness on the part of humanitarian actors. This has been the focus of the Urban Expert Group for the World Humanitarian Summit. This group of practitioners, academics and policymakers has been diagnosing why humanitarian agencies struggle to operate well in urban areas, and, since the Medellín World Urban Forum in 2014, has been formulating recommendations for the WHS and Habitat III.⁽¹⁶⁾ The following section summarizes the group's analysis, and the recommendations for action to address the challenges of urban crises.

15. See reference 14.

16. For more information see https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/whs_urban.

III. URBANIZING EMERGENCY RESPONSE – SOME SUGGESTED APPROACHES

a. Working with the city

Over the past few years, and particularly after the Haiti earthquake and the escalation of the Syrian refugee crisis, there has been a discernible shift in the policies of many humanitarian agencies, and efforts to revise programming and operational tools so as to respond to the urban context and engage with its existing systems and institutions. But more needs to be done to improve and better implement existing policies so that they fully harness the potential of cities and their inhabitants. The current approach to assistance often 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. The traditional household or individual level of analysis in humanitarian response does not capture the complex interconnectedness of the formal and informal and the way that households engage with the fabric of the city. Humanitarians also have a tendency to provide assistance piecemeal, 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.

Humanitarian response revolves around the cluster system, which promotes coordination amongst agencies working in the same sector, for example shelter, health, food security, and water and sanitation. This approach does not facilitate the multi-sectoral and integrated

programming needed in complex urban environments. At present, the way the cluster system is operationalized in an emergency does not promote joint working or collaboration with local authorities. The tendency to take a “comprehensive” approach as outlined above, rather than a facilitative or collaborative one based on engagement with local actors, institutions and authorities, means that opportunities to bolster or restore existing service delivery mechanisms or utility providers are not taken up.¹⁷ The potential for a broader and longer-lasting positive impact on urban life and livelihoods may then be lost. In the worst cases, emergency responses may distort and damage informal or formal systems, particularly if humanitarians establish parallel service provision.

Rather than focusing on individual or household needs and operating within sector silos, there are now calls for humanitarian assistance to take an area-based approach to programming and coordination.¹⁸ This should mean assessing the existing services and support already available in a particular area (preferably following existing administrative boundaries) and using this as a starting point for prioritizing interventions. Area-based approaches can be combined with targeted assistance to the most vulnerable to ensure those most at risk can access services and support. The approach implies bolstering or repairing existing systems – markets, infrastructure and provision of utilities – so that affected populations are quickly able to meet their needs in ways that are familiar to them. It rejects the idea of direct service provision by humanitarians, or interventions narrowly focused on one sector.

Area-based approaches should operate at different scales, taking into account how individuals use systems and services at the neighbourhood level, how this neighbourhood is connected to other areas (by roads and other shared infrastructure, for example), and also how this neighbourhood is related to the wider town or city (how it is managed and the relationships with city government).¹⁹ Taking the neighbourhood as the starting point for a range of connected interventions is not currently how the humanitarian system operates, and will have implications for coordination. It will require strong leadership – preferably from city or municipal authorities – and should, as far as possible, reflect the way the city or town was managed prior to the crisis.

Alongside a more geographically focused approach, there is a need for greater collaboration with local authorities and other actors who best understand the local environment. Humanitarians are used to the idea of “surge” – sending existing staff or rapidly recruiting standby personnel to support operations in an emergency. Agencies do this internally, and donors often fund external specialists to support UN operations. But municipal and city authorities could also do with this support – they may have lost staff and/or equipment, and after a crisis have to do more with fewer resources. Maintaining the basic functioning of a town or city while also responding to affected populations requires additional personnel, some of them with specialist skills. This type of surge could be managed at national or regional level – it does not necessarily require support from expensive international consultants.

b. Supporting urban systems and thinking longer-term

Humanitarian response is about saving lives and preserving dignity. Ways of working are designed around a swift entry and exit, and are based on

17. For further description of the comprehensive versus collaborative approach, see Ramalingam, B and J Mitchell (2014), “Responding to changing needs? Challenges and opportunities for humanitarian needs”, ALNAP, London.

18. This was acknowledged by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Principals at their meeting in Nairobi in May 2015.

19. It should be recognized that “area-based approaches” have been interpreted differently in urban humanitarian response. For further discussion see Parker, E and V Maynard (2015), “Humanitarian response to urban crises: a review of area-based approaches,” Human Settlements working paper, International Institute for Environment and Development, London.

20. See reference 9.

21. See reference 1, WHS Synthesis Report.

22. Haar, R, S Naderi, J Acerra, M Mathias and K Alagappan (2012), "The livelihoods of Haitian health-care providers after the January 2010 earthquake: a pilot study of the economic and quality-of-life impact of emergency relief", *International Journal of Emergency Medicine* Vol 5, No 13.

23. Lehman, C and D Masterson (2014), *Emergency Economies: The Impact of Cash Assistance in Lebanon*, International Rescue Committee, London.

24. Jacobsen, K (2006), "Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Urban Areas: A Livelihoods Perspective", *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol 19, No 3, pages 273–286; also Betts, A, L Bloom, J Kaplan and O Naohiko (2014), *Refugee Economies, Rethinking Popular Assumptions*, Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford.

25. Metcalfe, V and S Haysom with E Martin (2012), *Sanctuary in the City: Urban Displacement in Kabul*, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, London.

26. Sweismarch, R (2015), "Despite Good Intentions, Vacancies in Refugee Camp in Jordan for Syrians", *New York Times*, 15 March.

short-term interventions and direct provision of material and logistical assistance. There is increasing awareness, however, of the protracted nature of many crises, particularly displacement crises, which now last an average of 17 years.⁽²⁰⁾ This fact in itself is triggering a re-evaluation of how such crises are funded and approached,⁽²¹⁾ but is particularly important in urban areas, where temporary fixes can generate long-term problems. For example, transitional shelters built to last just a few years can morph into slums and have long-lasting negative impacts on the fabric of the city, and the likelihood of a well-planned urban environment in future. Direct provision of food, water and services to affected populations undermines small business and distorts local markets, and can generate dependency. In Haiti, for example, free provision of healthcare negatively affected local private clinics.⁽²²⁾

Understanding how urban systems function, why and where they are under strain, and who is best placed to repair or restore them should be a first step in any context analysis following an urban emergency, or indeed, a preparedness plan. Efforts are underway by a number of different agencies to improve the ability of humanitarian and other actors to undertake this type of analysis and assessment after a crisis. Assisting affected populations through existing city systems is a way to help ensure that emergency interventions contribute to longer-term urban development goals and is part of the area-based approach, as outlined above.

There is also a growing body of evidence that cash transfers can be more appropriate and effective than provision of food and "non-food items" (e.g. buckets, soap, blankets and tents) in urban areas affected by crises. People in urban areas are accustomed to using cash; and banks and money transfer agencies are likely to be more accessible than in rural areas. With the right support, markets that already exist (including rental markets) can supply the goods people need after an emergency, thus minimizing the need to ship in materials and goods that can be procured locally, and contributing to getting markets and small businesses back to normal quickly. When affected people are provided with cash, the demand for goods and services can serve to stimulate urban markets and generate local employment.⁽²³⁾ The use of cash further taps into the potential of urban refugees and IDPs, many of whom bring assets, skills and resources to their host cities, which they can use to expand and diversify existing markets.⁽²⁴⁾ This is a particular opportunity for women, who are more likely to gain income and financial independence in urban areas.⁽²⁵⁾

c. Moving away from a focus on camps and assisting the urban displaced

In the public imagination, refugees are associated with rows of white tents in remote areas. In reality, the majority of refugees worldwide are not in camps, and do not aspire to be. Al Azraq Camp in Jordan, for example, holds a fraction of its capacity.⁽²⁶⁾ Jordan's hundreds of thousands of refugees are mainly in urban areas, and prefer this to living in a camp. Camps in or near urban centres can, over time, often become permanent and generate further satellite settlements and slums, potentially expanding the city limits in ways that do not fit with sustainable urban planning, and generating the need to extend basic services such as water and electricity to new areas. Camps can create dependency where populations are discouraged from working, and, as centres for distribution of assistance,

can draw in people from rural areas. They are expensive, generate stigma, and can be the site of violence and exploitation.

Their history of establishing and working in camps means that agencies mandated to work with refugees and IDPs are not well prepared to meet the protection and basic service needs of the urban displaced. These populations may “disappear” into the city, and have very limited interaction with the agencies that have been set up to assist them. This, in turn, means they may not be aware of their rights and entitlements and the services available to them. Urban refugees may choose not to register with humanitarian agencies or the government for a variety of reasons, which again isolates them from agencies that provide support based on status. The current migration crisis has highlighted the fact that the majority of refugees from Syria are not in camps, and that new and more efficient ways of delivering assistance to them must be found.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has published a policy on “alternatives to camps”. While this is highly laudable, in order to make it a reality, there will need to be sustained engagement with governments that have an encampment policy, as well as advocacy to ensure that refugees have the right to work. There is also a need for research on the cost–benefit analysis of support to refugees in urban areas, rather than in camps. Where there is no political will to have refugees settled outside of camps, much more can be done to help camps operate like dynamic small towns and to provide opportunities for refugees to contribute to local economies as producers, entrepreneurs and consumers.

There is also a need to be much more proactive about finding ways to communicate with the displaced, to make sure they are aware of their rights and entitlements, and what they can do if they have difficulty accessing services, or have experienced exploitation and abuse (from landlords or employers, for example). Giving the urban displaced this type of voice, and a choice in how they communicate, will require investing in technological solutions, using community outreach, and employing mobile teams.

Finally, the onus is on humanitarians to advocate for and support the extension of existing urban services to displaced populations. Refugees might be reluctant to use services that are specifically designed only for them. They may not wish to identify as refugees, and fear being visible in the city. Channelling services through existing providers is one way to get around this problem. It is cost-efficient, and strengthening and improving service provision generally also benefits host communities.

IV. FROM THE 2030 AGENDA TO THE WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT AND HABITAT III

Returning to the 2030 Agenda, the inclusion of the standalone urban goal and its associated targets is paving the way for greater collaboration between humanitarians and development actors. Target 11.5 specifically references disasters, and calls for a significant reduction in the numbers of deaths and the scale of economic losses associated with these. The language of the overall urban goal, with the use of the terms “resilience” and “inclusion”, also provides a platform for collaboration among humanitarian agencies, local authorities and development actors on reducing risk, building local crisis response capacity, and ensuring that

towns and cities are welcoming places for the world's increasing numbers of refugees and IDPs. The humanitarian imperative to save lives and preserve dignity *can* be aligned with an approach that helps towns and cities get back on track, and even flourish, after a crisis.

The discussions above will have reinforced the often-cited recommendation to “bridge the humanitarian development divide”. It should be clear exactly how relevant this is for urban contexts, where short-term interventions have long-term consequences for the systems and institutions that urban residents rely upon. To date, the knowledge and expertise of urban development actors, and of the formal and informal institutions they operate within, are not routinely informing humanitarian action. 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. 2016 provides two clear opportunities to start to make progress towards the urban goal, and bring about significant change in the way the humanitarian system responds to urban crises.

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