**How to Adapt Humanitarian Coordination to the Complexities of Urban Areas?**

**HNPW Side Event 8 February 2017**

**Meeting Report**

**Background:**

Urbanization is accelerating across the world – from 746 million people in 1950, to 3.9 billion in 2014. The intersection of urbanization with conflict, displacement and climate change has been a key challenge for humanitarian response over the past years, leading to numerous shortcomings of humanitarian responses to crises in urban settings. Such shortcomings have put into question traditional ways humanitarians respond to crises, mainly related to: a) Sectoral vs. settlement-based approaches; b) Individual vs. community and territory; c) International vs. integrated local leadership.

In light of these challenges, in 2010 the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) called for a “paradigm shift in humanitarian assistance in urban areas based on a community-based, rather than, an individual beneficiary approach”. This was reflected as part of the IASC Strategy for Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas (MHCUA) endorsed by the Principles in 2011, and reflected in the IASC Reference Group MHCUA strategy.

Global Clusters also launched in some cases urban-specific working groups at global and country level to address these issues, such as the Urban Working Group of the Global Food Security Cluster (gFSC) created in 2013 with the participation of 30 organizations.

Moreover, the Global Alliance for Urban Crises, which aims at delivering a cohesive and strategic approach to humanitarian crises in urban settings, was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. The Alliance emerged in recognition of the need to adapt global crisis response to an increasingly urban world and brings together a coalition of partners from across different sectors and settings, such as local authorities, humanitarian and development actors and professional associations, to provide support and assistance that is more appropriate, effective and sustainable.

**Event Overview:**

A side event on “How to Adapt Humanitarian Coordination to the Complexities of Urban Areas?” was organized in the Humanitarian Networks and Partnership Week in Geneva on February 8th with the aim to bring together different humanitarian stakeholders to explore coordination models for urban emergencies and outline some concrete solutions to these challenges.

The event was attended by approximately 60 people and it was facilitated by Gaia van der Esch, IMPACT Initiatives, Co-chair of the IASC RG MHCUA and Steering Group member of the Global Alliance for Urban Crises; Marina Angeloni, Global Food Security Cluster (WFP/FAO), Urban WG Facilitator; Filiep Decorte, UN-HABITAT, Founding and Steering Group member of the Global Alliance for Urban Crises.

Participants were requested to reflect on the following guiding questions:

- **Creating a joint understanding of the urban context of intervention through area-based analysis:** how can local and international actors gather a joint and common understanding of the urban systems, the needs and capacity within an affected city, and what are the implications for the current IASC coordination model and processes (ex. Humanitarian Needs Overview, etc.)?
Efficient planning and coordination of aid responses to urban crises: how can local, national and international stakeholders ensure efficient response planning and coordination during an emergency response in urban settings? Who are the key stakeholders, and how can city-level coordination be implemented?

Systemic changes: What should be the priority systemic changes for improved coordination in urban crisis settings? Which are the concrete next steps and proposed processes to take this forward through existing (i.e. Clusters/inter-cluster, IASC RG MHCUA) and new (GAUC) bodies.

Participants held discussions and provided recommendations under three different groups.

Key outcomes:

Session outcomes

- Agreed on the need to develop new approaches to gather stronger context understanding of urban areas, including system/service analysis, community areas and vulnerability analysis, and local actors/governance mapping;
- Acknowledged current shortcomings of humanitarian coordination to crises in urban settings, and the need to shift towards more decentralised/city-level coordination, inclusive of local stakeholders;
- Agreed to advance on global-level advocacy and propositions to the IASC Principals for systemic change, mainly through the IASC Reference Group Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas Guidance Note for improving coordination and responses to Urban Crises in the Humanitarian Programme Cycle through the IASC and its Cluster System, the Global Alliance for Urban Crises and the global Food Security Cluster Urban Working Group.

Next steps to implementing solutions

- Consultation process with clusters, inter-cluster, donors and all relevant partners/bodies within the IASC as well as the Global Alliance for Urban Crises for the finalisation of the Guidance Note and for formal endorsement by the IASC Principals end of 2017;
- Piloting of new approaches to context analysis in urban settings through various partners;
- Piloting of new approaches to coordination of responses in urban settings through interested partners and clusters.

Group Findings & Recommendations:

Group 1:

- Clusters could identify urban focal points for their sectors that would regularly liaise with the others to share information and approach and work with key urban stakeholders jointly;
- It’s important to identify key focal points from different communities/stakeholders at city-level with a good knowledge of the urban context including local government, civil society organizations, etc. so that a mapping of communication channels can be put in place to better prepare for sudden onset crises;
- A context and stakeholders analysis is key to ensure that response is matching the local needs and context and that coordination is including the right actors - there is often a discrepancy between geographical mapping of local services and a concrete assessment of local capacity and responsibilities;
- No size fits all, cities are not all the same, urban context can vary significantly not only from country to country but also within a country from a mega city to a more per-urban area – could we have a coordination model for mega-cities, one for smaller ones etc. to group similar characteristics and challenges?
Context can also change between urban areas affected by conflicts and natural disasters - a higher level of granularity in coordination is needed between state actors and non-traditional state actors.

How about a multi-sectoral decentralized city-level coordination rather than a national and/or sub-national including different urban affected areas and divided by sectors? A less strong coordination at the national level and a more decentralized and contextualised one was recommended.

How should “urban” be included in the HRP and HNO, i.e. Syria urban HNO can this be useful to capture the specific needs or it’s only creating another parallel process?

The urban response requires a whole new set of knowledge, skills and profiles different from the rural context – having a pool of experts in place to be deployed when an urban emergency hits is extremely important. Profiles of people facilitating communication between local municipalities and humanitarian actors/cluster system are also being discussed.

There is still need to change the mind-set of humanitarian organizations to be able to be prepared to respond and coordinate responses in urban areas - urban stakeholders knows best.

Enhancing and building local capacity is key to ensure resilience cities - on the other hand humanitarians might lack of specific capacities and can learning from local level, it’s a mutual beneficial relation / a two-way approach.

It was also recommended to increase and have a set structure for sharing of lessons learned across cities in the humanitarian community at global level – in particular look at the good examples of contextualisation like Latin America.

Group 2:

**Challenge to identify beneficiaries / target groups**
- Challenge in urban areas to identify beneficiaries, for instance when it comes to multi-story buildings, communities with chronic vulnerabilities, host communities versus displaced, etc.

**Need for shared understanding of urban context as a starting point for adapted coordination**
- Importance to have a shared understanding of the city, in all its complexity and taking into account its dynamic nature;
- Systems are not limited to hard infrastructure and services but also include social networks, food systems / markets, etc.
- It is important to understand the city within its broader context as it often has a much broader catchment/influence area: source of water/electricity, food production, catchment area for key services (ex. banks, hospitals, etc.) – example of Tacloban whereby the city would double in population almost in day time;
- Systems thinking requires a constant analysis of the impact of interventions made, keeping in mind the do-no-harm principle also and understanding the impact on who does not receive assistance;
- It is also important not just to focus on who needs assistance but also on who can contribute to the solution (ex. small scale businesses, informal networks, civil society, etc.);
- Life in cities is not limited to one physical location. People use different parts of the city to access work, socialize and seek services. This impacts on how they take decisions (in terms of pull and push factors for displacement);
- It is also important to understand the negative coping mechanisms that could get reinforced through humanitarian response (ex. gangs control over services, deliver of assistance, etc.);
- Apart from developing assessment/profiling tools to allow for the above dynamic analysis, there is a need for immediate knowledge transfer/awareness raising/induction within organizations taking into account the huge turnover of staff. Organizations should work on improved awareness as part of preparedness, build much stronger on the insights of local staff and make it part of the induction when deploying;
Other elements to take into account when adapting the coordination mechanisms

- There is a strong push to move from standardized coordination architectures (ex. through the clusters) to much more flexible contextualized solutions build around collective expected outcomes. The Guidance note should take this as a starting point rather than complementing the current cluster system as a contextualized approach is the most needed in urban contexts;
- It is key to tailor coordination mechanism to the local governance systems, maximizing the role of local leadership (through local authorities and/or community leaders);
- A key challenge will be when adapting a systems approach is how to prioritize entry points and sequencing of action. This might result in the need to prioritize one type of sectoral action before the other, even if the expected result targeted is the same (ex. infrastructure repair/upgrading to expand shelter solutions, rather than direct shelter support);
- The information support provided by OCHA to coordination needs to transform much more into a dynamic analysis function, pulling together expertise from across the system;
- There is a need for a much more risk-based approach to complement the focus on needs;
- A key challenge will also be to differentiate the coordination mechanisms at national and city level, ensuring that the city levels are empowered to adapt tools, approaches to the urban context (ex. ebola response Liberia);
- The above will require empowered humanitarian coordination with a stronger leadership function, with delegated authority to the city level.

Group 3:

- Shift towards settlement/area approaches to needs assessments, coordination and response for efficient understanding and responses within a city:
  - Lack of localization, the actual functioning is more at a sub-urban level for more cities. Balancing between the official and unofficial conception of the city, the latter being from the citizens’ perspective.
  - Scenarios of smaller secondary cities affected: very difficult balance between what is tangible (city providers) and intangible (public space/anthropological approach).
  - Housing assessment traditional approach, but new one is to look at the informal neighbourhood and the community level and verify how much they match
  - Importance of the idea of the city functioning through flux (water, etc.) more than goodies. Important to look at all the levels of a city which is multi-layered: it shouldn’t be regarded as either “neighbourhood” or “city as a whole”. Analysing the political context is also critical in urban contexts.
  - Multi sectorial understanding of how to structure humanitarian response in a city
  - Issue of system changes: it is critical to come up with a solution on the system side in parallel to the solution for community/individual needs.
- What is a good model of aid responses to urban areas emergencies?
  - The coordination works better when it is closer to action, and so the approach should focus on smaller areas.
  - Have a multisectorial approach at the city level, including the local representatives, which should be given a leading role when relevant
  - Importance of understanding how humanitarian agencies work in urban areas. Many of the emergency international humanitarian actors have already significant local civil society connections that are not really utilized at the system level.
  - Importance to involve all stakeholders, and be aware of their influence, role and capacity to respond
- What is a good model for the response?
  - Whenever possible leave delivery assistance to local suppliers directly, so that it can be more immediate.

Caveats:
Targeting around vulnerability is also crucial and needs to complement information management. Inequalities can exacerbate after the disaster, important to target the most vulnerable people first.

What is the context we are considering? Because the approach changes a lot (Haiti crisis completely different from Ebola).

Consider also orphan files (e.g. property rights and regulations).