ALNAP

Meeting the Urban Challenge

ADAPTING HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS TO AN URBAN WORLD

CONTENTS

I   INTRODUCTION

This document provides an overview of current thinking and emerging good practice related to humanitarian action in an urban environment. It is based on the discussions held at the 27th Meeting of the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) *Meeting the Urban Challenge* and on a review of recent literature on humanitarian responses to urban crises. It considers how the nature of urban space and of urban populations influences disasters in cities; it outlines how the humanitarian community is adapting to address the challenges posed by urban areas; and it proposes some 'next steps' for the humanitarian community.

ALNAP's members have conducted preparedness, relief and early recovery work in urban environments for many years, in contexts as diverse as Huambo, Kabul and Kolkota. In many cases, this work has been seen as a relatively small part of larger programmes, or as 'atypical' or a 'one off'. As a result there has been comparatively little analysis of urban humanitarian action as a category.

For many in the humanitarian community, the earthquake that devastated Port-au-Prince on 12 January 2010 served as 'a wake up call', as Francois Grunewald of Groupe URD put it at the meeting. The scale of the disaster, the challenges that humanitarian actors faced in responding to it and the large number of evaluations and learning activities that occurred as a result of the response, focused attention on the topic of urban disasters.

As discussions at the meeting confirmed, urbanisation presents a significant and urgent challenge. In recent decades, there has been a massive increase in the number of people living in cities and who are vulnerable to disasters or conflict (Pelling, 2003; IFRC, 2010). The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) Report *Urban Disasters – Lessons from Haiti* (DEC, 2011) suggests that in the next 10 years, there will probably be another three to five big urban disasters. Any one of these could result in tens of thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of people in need of emergency assistance. The meeting heard that, in the event of an earthquake in the Kathmandu valley, up to 100,000 people would be killed and over a million would need relief assistance (Piper, 2012). Disasters of this magnitude pose a challenge of scale. They also, according to many participants, pose a challenge through their nature: urban disasters differ in important ways from rural disasters, and force the humanitarian community to rethink fundamental tools, approaches and assumptions when deciding how best to respond.

Against this background, the 27th Meeting of the ALNAP Network, held from 17 to 19 January 2012 in Chennai, India, brought together participants from around the world to address the issue of how the humanitarian system could better adapt to urban disasters. There was general agreement that the international humanitarian sector is currently inadequately prepared to address both the scale and nature of the urban challenge (ALNAP, 2009; DEC, 2011; Satterthwaite, 2007). Urban disasters both expose the system's existing weaknesses, and bring new challenges to light.

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Successfully addressing these challenges will require concerted action by many groups and organisations outside the formal humanitarian system: pre-eminently national and municipal governments, and also civil society groups and development actors. However, the experience of ALNAP's membership and that of other humanitarian actors outlined in this report helps to identify areas where progress is required, and – in some cases – provides suggestions as to how that progress can be achieved.

Box 1 Focus on Chennai, India

As Mihir Bhatt of All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) reflected in his opening remarks to the ALNAP Meeting, the chosen location – Chennai, southern India – was in many ways ideally suited to the urban theme. Chennai is an historically important port, a booming metropolis – one of the largest in a rapidly urbanising country – and a coastal city. It contains both opportunity and vulnerability. Alongside increased prosperity and accelerated global connectivity, there are large and growing slums, with high poverty and marginalisation levels. These informal settlements were badly hit by the 2004 tsunami, and the politically complex recovery process that followed has still not finished. Similar examples of urban vulnerability to disasters are to be found in cities all around the world.

II   THE GROWTH OF CITIES

The growth of cities in the 20th century was unprecedented. The total global urban population, which stood at just 10% of the global population at the start of that century, had by the first years of this century reached an unprecedented 50% (UNDESA, 2010). This amounted to some 3.5 billion people, a figure which is projected almost to double in the next 40 years (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 **Urban and rural populations, 1950–2050 (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 2010**

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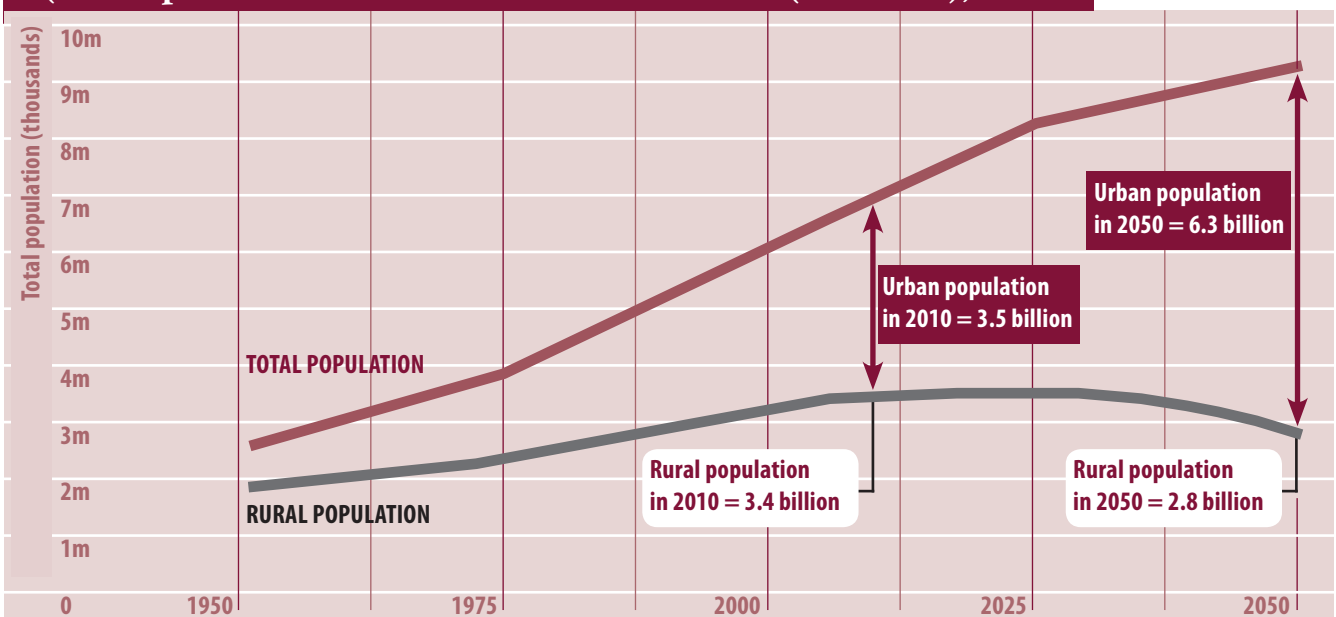
This midway point to a completely urban world has been described as an irreversible tipping point (Crane and Kinzig, 2005) or the threshold of a new 'urban millennium' (UNFPA, 2007). Socially, urbanisation is seen as the most significant change since the rise of agriculture. Physically, it is one of the most visible and powerful forces on earth (IHDP, 2005). It is no exaggeration to say that urbanisation, at its current scale and speed (see Box 2), is redefining both human civilization and its relationship with the planet (IHDP, 2005).

Box 2 Key facts about urbanisation

- In 1900 there were 16 cities around the world with populations of 1 million or more people, almost entirely in developed countries. By 2000, there were 400 cities with populations of more than 1 million around the world, three quarters of which were in developing countries (UNDESA, 2010).
- By 2030, the global population will stand at 9 billion, and the global urban population will account for up to 60% of this figure (ibid.). Almost all population growth in the next 30 years will take place in urban settings. To put this shift into perspective, there will be almost twice as many people living in cities in 2030 as there were people living on the planet in 1970.
- Most of this urban growth will be in small and medium-sized cities rather than mega-cities, with about half of the world's urban population residing in cities of 500,000 people or fewer (UN-Habitat, 2009). These urban areas will account for up to 90% of all global economic activity (UNDESA, 2010).
- In terms of sheer numbers, Asia will continue to house the largest number of people in its towns and cities. Africa, although the least urbanised continent today, will become home to 1.2 billion urban dwellers by 2050, with a significant youth majority (ibid.).

III   THE NATURE OF URBAN DISASTERS AND URBAN VULNERABILITY

It is well established that cities can be much more efficient and effective in providing for the needs of their populations than rural settings (Ravallion et al., 2007; ALNAP, 2009). It is often easier to provide for basic needs, as well as deliver social and cultural services, to people living in close proximity to one another and within reach of better quality infrastructure (World Bank, 2010). However, urbanisation also has its costs, often considerable. As cities grow, stresses on the environment, infrastructure, economy and social networks increase. As a result, human vulnerability to disasters increases and, arguably, new forms of 'disaster' and of vulnerability to disaster arise.

For humanitarians to develop an improved common understanding of urban disasters, and to plan effective responses to these disasters, we need first to understand and agree on some fundamentals: what 'urban' actually means (Cohen, 2003); whether there are specifically 'urban' types of disaster; and what the specific vulnerabilities of urban populations are to disasters and crises.

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3.1   WHAT IS A CITY?

Despite numerous reports (including those cited in the Introduction) that the world is becoming more urban in nature, the definition of urban itself is ambiguous and dependent on context (Frey and Zimmer, 2001)[1]. Defining the basic terms 'urban' and 'rural' in a universal way is the subject of on-going debate (Cohen, 2003). What is increasingly clear is that a simplistic either/or categorisation is unhelpful and does not match the reality of how human settlements are evolving. As the study *Beyond Rural-Urban: Keeping up with Changing Realities* (IFPRI, 2005) notes:

> **The labels "urban" and "rural" fall far short of capturing the dynamism and diversity of reality. Conjuring up visions of crowded cities and isolated countryside, they suggest separate worlds and ways of living. They mask the many ways urban and rural overlap and intertwine, as well as the variety of livelihood strategies within urban or rural areas. (IFPRI, 2005: 2)**

One way of conceptualising the difference between urban and rural environments that goes beyond a simplistic binary distinction is to consider the three factors of diversity, density and dynamics. In general, the larger the population centre, the more diverse, dense and dynamic it will be. This is true in terms of population (a mega-city will generally have a more heterogeneous, densely packed and mobile population than a small town) and also in terms of other factors, including infrastructure, services and technology. Critically, however, there is no simple 'cut off' between urban and rural: no level of density, or diversity, which defines an area as urban. Rather, we should imagine a continuum from the very rural at one end (for example, small hamlets in the highlands of Ethiopia) to the very urban at the other (mega-cities such as Dhaka and their sprawling peripheries), with villages, small towns, regional centres and medium-sized cities in between. We should also recognise that the place of any particular settlement on this continuum will not be a function of its size alone: the degree of diversity, density and dynamics will differ from one large population centre to another: and – as several participants noted – humanitarians will often encounter contexts such as large internally displaced person (IDP) camps which have become 'city-like' in some ways (such as density) but not in others.

The World Development Report 2009 (World Bank, 2009), which focused on economic geography, provides a useful graphic representation of the 'continuum' model, in contrast to the older 'either/or' model of the city.

Participants at the meeting also noted the importance of recognising the amount of economic movement that occurs along this continuum, and considered the implication of urban-rural linkages for emergency preparedness and response. In Guinea and Zimbabwe, Action Contre la Faim (ACF) found that urban-rural linkages had a major effect on food security and nutrition: rural production often plays an important part in supporting family members who have moved to the city (Vaitla, 2012; Egal, 2011). Conversely, many participants noted the degree to which rural populations are often dependent on urban markets for food and wages.

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1 UN data, which is the basis of many of the projections, is reliant on national statistics. Different countries define urban populations in different ways. In Angola and Ethiopia, for example, up until relatively recently, any locality with more than 2,000 inhabitants was automatically classified as urban. In other countries, such as Benin, the figure is higher. In some countries such as Bangladesh or Pakistan, urban settlements are those with a certain kind of administrative or bureaucratic structure (Cohen, 2003).

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Figure 2 **Beyond Rural and Urban from World Development**

THE OLD EITHER/OR MODEL

THE CONTINUUM MODEL

(World Bank, 2009)
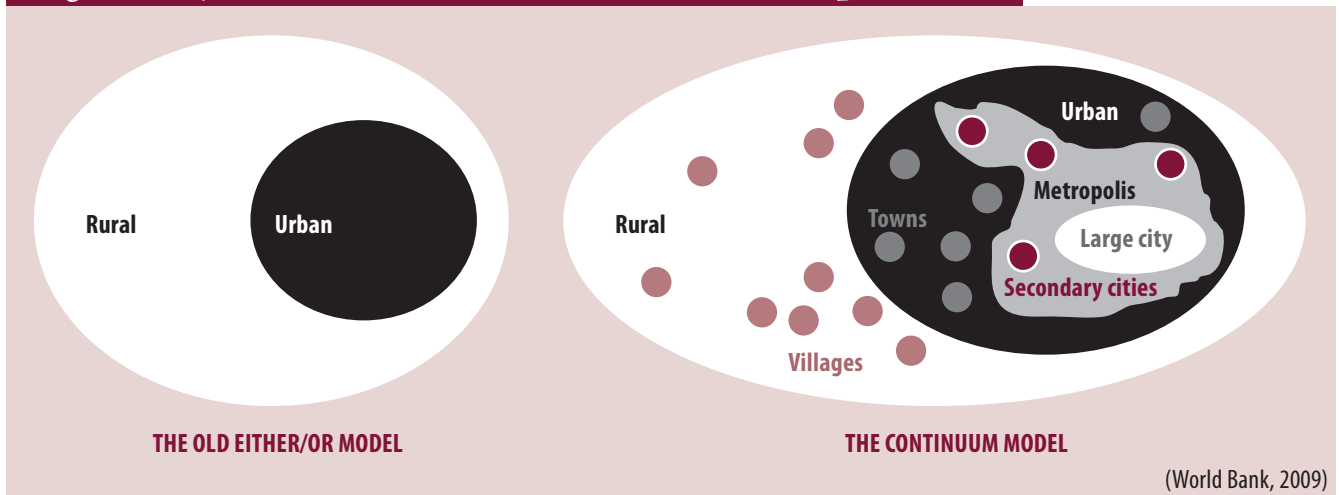
In short, cities differ in important ways from rural environments, but there is no 'one size fits all' definition of a city, and in most cases the boundary between urban and rural is porous and indistinct. Our understanding of the impact of a disaster in any given urban area needs to be grounded in an understanding of that specific urban context, and our vision should stretch beyond the formal 'city limits'.

3.2   NEW TYPES OF DISASTERS?

Recent history suggests that urban centres, broadly defined, are threatened by the same types of natural disaster as rural areas. In the last three years alone, there are examples of cities suffering earthquakes (Port-au-Prince), tsunamis (Sendai), flooding (Bangkok), 'declared' military conflict (Gaza), and even drought (Dadaab).

Cities are also often affected by disasters that occur elsewhere, as massive numbers of impoverished people seek shelter in an already overloaded urban environment (Egal, 2011). However in addition to these natural and man-made disasters, some participants at the meeting felt that the urban environment is giving rise to new, specifically urban, types of emergency.

Discussion focused around two potentially new categories of disaster. The first is a 'new kind of armed conflict … a variation of warfare, often in densely populated slums and shanty towns [involving] … pitched battles between state and non-state armed groups' (Muggah and Savage, 2012; Grunewald, 2011). As Kevin Savage explained (see Case Study 1), humanitarians have tended to avoid working with the consequences of these undeclared wars, seeing them as 'law and order' rather than humanitarian issues. The increasing prevalence of this form of violence, however, means that humanitarians may be required to re-categorise undeclared urban conflict, and work to address its humanitarian consequences. Some work is already occurring in this area. The protection clusters in Nairobi and Bogota have developed innovative approaches to provide protection against localised violence from armed actors, gangs, drug cartels and crime syndicates (IASC, 2010).

The second distinctly 'urban' type of disaster discussed at the meeting was the chronic urban emergency, where specific socio-economic groups continually display levels of ill health or malnutrition which, in another envi-

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ronment, would be classed as an emergency, but which is rendered invisible by a lack of data or a lack of disaggregated data (Egal, 2011; UN-Habitat, 2011). These situations, while similar to other 'chronic' situations to which humanitarians respond (either periodically, as in northern Kenya, or continuously, as in parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)) are arguably distinct in that the 'emergency' is not necessarily related to any specific geographical area. They are particularly challenging to humanitarian actors because they lack clear 'triggers' for engagement due to their chronic nature (DEC, 2010; UN-Habitat, 2011).

More work is needed to explore these and other potentially new urban-specific types of disaster, and the implications for humanitarian action.

3.3   URBAN VULNERABILITY

Humanitarian emergencies are commonly seen as the outcome of a trigger event (such as an earthquake, or an outbreak of fighting) combining with the underlying vulnerability of the population to that event. While the trigger events in cities are often the same as those in non-urban areas, urban settings are associated with particular, heightened forms of vulnerability to disasters.

At its simplest, the extreme vulnerability of many urban populations to disasters can be attributed to a dangerous combination of large numbers of poor people in areas with inadequate infrastructure.

As of 2008, estimates were that one third of all urban residents were poor, representing a quarter of all the world's poor (Ravallion et al., 2007). This amounts to approximately 290 million people in urban areas in developing countries who are living below the poverty line of $1 per day in 2002. If the $2 per day figure is used, the figure rises dramatically to 750 million people. With continued urbanisation, the numbers of urban poor are predicted to rise, making poverty increasingly an urban phenomenon (ibid.). Although, as previously discussed, it is important to recognise the specific situation of each city, it is fair to say that the urban poor tend to face a number of common daily deprivations which make them particularly vulnerable to crises. For example:

◆   Poor city dwellers often have limited access to income and employment, limited access to 'wild foods' and inadequate sanitation, all of which can result in some urban groups having very poor nutritional status and high levels of disease morbidity in 'normal' times. Participants noted that, for example, in the informal settlements of Nairobi, Kenya, global acute malnutrition (GAM), under-fives mortality and overall mortality rates are the highest in the country (UN-Habitat, 2011).

◆   In low and middle-income countries, between one third and one half of the urban population lives in slums. These informal settlements house around 1 billion people globally. At current growth rates of 25 million people per year (UN-Habitat, 2009) they are set to double in size. Slum dwellers are more likely to encounter disasters than residents in other urban areas: these settlements are often in areas prone to landslides, flooding, seismic activity or industrial accidents (Grunewald, 2011). In the event of a disaster, they are also more vulnerable as a result of overcrowded living conditions, limited services, and a lack of adequate infrastructure. Carlos Padolina, in detailing the Citizens Disaster Response Centre's (CDRC) experiences in responding to flooding

in the Philippines suggested that these factors led to the poor being most affected (Padolina, 2012; see also World Bank, 2008).

◆ High dependence on food produced outside cities make urban residents vulnerable to droughts, flooding and other extreme weather events that occur some distance away. The urban poor are the most vulnerable. Studies conducted by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in urban areas show that a 10% rise in the price of a staple can hurt the bottom 20% of the income distribution the most (FAO, 2008).

◆ The dynamic nature of urban environments means that at any given time (and particularly in periods of livelihood stress in surrounding rural areas) urban centres may host large numbers of recent rural-urban migrants who have not yet developed the skills and networks to survive in the urban environment (Egal, 2011). As Morwenna Sullivan of ACF reminded the meeting, these people – often dispersed throughout the city – may be particularly vulnerable in time of disaster.[2]

◆ The existence of higher levels of government infrastructure in cities can decrease the vulnerability of some population groups, as national and municipal governments can more easily mobilise emergency response in urban areas during disasters than they can in rural areas. However, as the meeting heard, (in the case of Nepal) this can also make the often large numbers of poor and marginalised people who are not officially registered even more vulnerable, as they are excluded from support (see also IRIN, 2011).

As a result of all these factors, levels of poverty and vulnerability in urban environments tend to be at least comparable to, and in many cases greater than those in rural areas. However, this vulnerability is often dispersed across the entire city, and can be hard to identify with existing approaches to identifying 'vulnerable populations' (Boyer, 2011). As Emily Rogers of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) pointed out in her presentation at the meeting on accountability mechanisms in Port-au-Prince, humanitarian organisations need to reconsider their approaches to 'local communities' when they engage with the urban context (Rogers, 2012). In many cases the 'community' is not a geographical entity, but a dispersed network or religious or livelihood group. In this context, we should not expect to find vulnerability at the level of the (geographically located) community, and will need to refine how we identify those most in need. This issue is discussed more in Section 4.3, on rethinking response.

The vulnerability of urban populations – and particularly the poorer sections of these populations – to external shocks is greatly increased by poor urban infrastructure. Urban growth in developing countries is frequently haphazard and overwhelming, far exceeding these cities' capacity to plan adequately and control development. As a Chinese official at the Asia Pacific Urban Forum in June 2011 noted, during rapid urbanisation, many critical infrastructure and institutional arrangements are ignored in favour of other priorities (Alertnet, 2011). The resulting lack of infrastructure, or in many cases lack of safe and appropriate infrastructure, increases the vulnerability to disasters of populations who are already vulnerable.

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2 UNHCR in 2009 published a policy on refugee protection in urban areas (UNHCR, 2009). While the focus of this policy is on refugees, many of the issues identified are also of relevance in contexts of displacement and rural-urban migration.

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Case Study 1 **Urban violence as a humanitarian issue (based on a presentation by Kevin Savage, World Vision International)**

Half of the world currently lives in cities, with many of these people living in slum dwellings. While intra- and inter-state conflict is decreasing, acute violence by armed groups is affecting large numbers of people, and those in urban contexts are exposed to extreme and shocking levels of vulnerability as a result. This issue has not been generally recognised by the humanitarian community.

Some 1.5 billion people are considered to live in chronic fragility and instability in urban centres and cities. There is a clear correlation between urbanisation and increased violence. There are multiple causes: violence is multi-faceted and emerges from local contexts. There is not a linear causal relationship; mega-cities do not necessarily imply more violence. However, those cities with the highest homicide rates, such as Santo Domingo and Panama, are also those where rapid growth is expected in the near future. This is representative of a broader shift from fragile states to fragile cities. As a result cities are now a focal point for strategic military planning. The UK riots show that violence can also be highly contagious.

There are advantages to working in cities, which include informal systems of governance. Urban planners are looking at ways to change infrastructure and services to make streets safer and improve social cohesion. There is a need to look at applying new experimental approaches in chronically violent cities and using human resilience to tackle violence. This is a particular issue in Latin America.

Here, as with many other urban issues, the divide between development and humanitarian efforts becomes highly problematic. Joint work is needed to strengthen community structure and improve social cohesion at neighbourhood level. There is also a need to engage with the national framework of violence prevention and local institutions. This means everything from better understanding of legal and institutional mechanisms, analysing gender issues within violence, and developing better early warning systems, through to engagement and negotiation with armed groups, especially where the state is retreating. Disaster risk reduction needs to incorporate violence and conflict as a key hazard factor. Disaster responses may occur in places with extreme violence; while violence may not always be the cause, it can work to increase and shape patterns of vulnerability. (Savage, 2012).

Robert Piper of UNDP usefully illustrated these issues in his keynote address at the meeting, focusing on Kathmandu and its vulnerability to earthquakes. Current scientific consensus suggests that Nepal is likely to have a large earthquake soon. The last time there was a major earthquake in Nepal, in 1934, 8,000 people died in Kathmandu. However, the population at that time was relatively small – 150,000 residents. Today, by comparison, there are 2.5 million people living in a sprawling metropolis, with population density estimated at 13,000 people per square kilometre. Under these conditions, the Nepal Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) estimates that an earthquake would cause 100,000 fatalities. Weak infrastructure would both contribute to immediate fatalities and to the ability of the population to respond after the earthquake. Estimates suggest that all the city's hospitals, 60% of housing and 50% of schools would be destroyed; that there would be inadequate water in the weeks following an earthquake; and the city could be cut off for up to two weeks as a result of collapsed roads and bridges.

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3.4   ARE URBAN DISASTERS DIFFERENT?

A key recurring question at the meeting was: are urban disasters different? Do they differ from rural disasters in their fundamental nature, or only in terms of scale?

While the meeting did not achieve consensus on this issue, participants did identify a number of elements that would appear to be specific to urban disasters, most of which are related to the nature of cities, and the nature of urban vulnerability as previously discussed. These fell into three broad categories of density, diversity and dynamics.

Urban disasters are different because of the density of a city
- High population density means that when disasters occur more people are likely to be killed and injured within a small space, and the level of needs may overwhelm the ability of the humanitarian system to provide support.
- The concentration of governance institutions in cities (as opposed to rural areas), and the political importance of urban areas means that governments will more often expect and be able to take a lead role in emergency response. This requires a fundamental rethinking of the role of international actors, who need to re-orient themselves to work more effectively in a support role. However, this concentration of government decision-makers in cities is also a source of vulnerability: in some situations (as in Port-au-Prince) government staff and structures may be victims of the disaster.
- The dense physical nature of cities means that there will be more damaged infrastructure to manage, such as buildings, roads, business areas, sewers. The challenge for emergency response in this context is not just a lack of infrastructure, but removing and repairing large amounts of damaged infrastructure in order to launch relief operations.
- The dense physical nature of cities also means that, in general, access to free goods and services (particularly land and water) may be extremely limited. This constraint should be a foundation element of planning for emergencies.
- The role of cities as central logistics hubs may mean that, after an urban disaster, many of the elements required for successful large-scale emergency response (ports, airfields, storage facilities) may be unavailable.
- Recent urban disasters (particularly the earthquake that hit Port-au-Prince) have seen very large numbers of humanitarian organisations becoming involved. Coordination – always a challenge in humanitarian response – is particularly difficult under these circumstances.

Urban disasters are different because of the diversity of a city
- The diversity of urban populations means that within any given area, the needs of affected populations will be highly differentiated. At the same time, populations with similar needs will be spread throughout the city. Targeting approaches that focus on networks, rather than geographical communities, will tend to be more effective.
- Urban populations are often highly skilled, and have a greater diversity of skills, than rural populations. Many of the skills required for response will be available locally.
- The diversity of government institutions will mean that humanitarians have more potential interlocutors.

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Urban disasters are different because of the dynamics of a city

◆   Urban populations tend to have multiple, fast-moving sources of information: high population density means that 'word of mouth' information and rumours spread rapidly, while FM radio, relatively high levels of mobile phone use and, in some cases, Internet connectivity, provide the potential for information (and rumour) to be spread rapidly to large numbers of people.

◆   At the same time, access to goods and services through the market will generally be higher in cities than in rural areas, and markets will be more highly developed. Again, the existence and role of the market is a fundamental element of planning for emergency response in urban areas.

◆   Complex economic connections between 'urban' and 'rural' areas may mean that the impacts of disaster are felt far beyond the city limits. Humanitarian actors need to be sensitive to potential 'knock-on' effects and, at the same time, to consider the possibility of support from rural areas.

◆   Chronic urban violence may require humanitarians to work with many different groups of armed, non-state actors operating in the same area.

Taken together, these factors suggest that those involved in disaster management work will have to become used to working in a dramatically different context as they engage more with urban disasters (World Bank, 2010). As the DEC evaluation of the Haiti response suggests:

> **[Agencies need to] learn "new rules of the game" in urban post-disaster response. Issues of complexity, range of actors, space, the importance of commerce and trade, services, infrastructure and sheer concentrations of people require a consideration of how to operate compared to rural contexts (DEC, 2011: 2).**

IV   EMERGING RESPONSES TO URBAN DISASTERS

What might these new 'rules of the game' look like in practice? Despite the long experience of many ALNAP members in urban contexts, and the existence of a variety of bodies and partnerships established to address issues related to urban disasters (see Box 3), there was general agreement at the meeting that our collective understanding is patchy, informal and still largely undocumented. It is still too early to say how best to respond to the challenge of urban disasters: the rules have yet to be written. However, in the aftermath of the international response to Haiti, there has been an increased focus on improved policy, procedures and practice. The meeting provided a useful forum to discuss these developments. This section of the report outlines some of the key themes and examples that came out of these discussions, under the (sometimes overlapping) headings of disaster risk reduction; disaster preparedness; and disaster response.

4.1   RETHINKING DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (DRR)

Several factors point to the need to decrease the risk and potential impact of disasters in urban areas. These

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Box 3 Initiatives to address urban disaster-related issues

Many members of ALNAP are engaged in a variety of initiatives that relate to urban disasters. While some of these initiatives are fairly new, others have been in place for over a decade. These initiatives include:

- The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) project on urban humanitarianism
- UNESCO's initiative on urban biospheres
- The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment
- World Bank's Cities Alliance and Cities in Transition
- International Human Dimensions Programme (IHDP) urbanisation science project
- Diversitas science plan on urbanisation
- International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) Urbanisations and Health Working Group
- US National Academies' Panel on Urban Population Dynamics and Roundtable on Science and Technology for Sustainability's Task Force on Rapid Urbanisation
- UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction's (UNISDR) Asia disaster risk reduction network
- Efforts within specific agencies – International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Oxfam GB, World Vision.

include the high risk of disaster events occurring in poor urban environments; the extreme damage that these events can cause; and the fact that damaged infrastructure can worsen the impact and hamper the response.

There has been a recent and welcome increase in interest in the area of urban disaster risk reduction. At the international level, 2010 saw the launch of an important new UNISDR campaign on 'resilient cities', to which more than 1,000 cities have signed up at the time of writing (UNISDR, 2011),[3] while the World Bank's Global Fund for Disaster Reduction and Recovery is supporting the development of a multi-hazard Urban Disaster Risk Index (UDRI) as a tool to provide a baseline against which risks can be mapped and progress towards resilience measured over time. Initiatives are also under way at regional levels, including the Regional Strengthening and Disaster Risk Reduction in Major Cities in the Andean Communities run by UNDP and the Rockefeller Foundation's Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network. In addition, many national governments have recognised disaster risks in their cities and have initiated risk assessment, preparedness and in some cases, mitigation programmes. Turkey, Jordan, Indonesia, the Philippines, India, Uzbekistan, Ecuador and Colombia all have active national urban DRR programmes.

However, as the 5th Asia Pacific Urban Forum highlighted in June 2011, much more needs to be done. The forum posed the question: 'Complex urban disasters – are we ready?' The answer from experts in Japan, China and Bangladesh – representing the spectrum from high to low-income countries – was: 'no, not yet'.

Participants at the 27th ALNAP Meeting recognised that the role of humanitarians in urban DRR, while potentially important, is limited. The experience of Nepal and the Philippines suggests that in order to be effective,

3 As part of this campaign, UNISDR have created a useful self-assessment tool for cities to use in judging their own resilience, and a handbook for local governments.

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initiatives should ideally be government-led, involving new legislation, rethinking departmental targets and priorities to include risk reduction, and enforcement of existing legislation, planning decisions and building codes. The discussions highlighted the importance of governments in bringing a broad range of actors into the DRR process: for instance, in Nepal, the risk reduction consortium includes international agency, civil society and private sector actors. In the Philippines, community-based organisations, such as CDRC, work with local government to ensure that information is transmitted effectively from the meteorological office to vulnerable communities.

Discussions also identified areas where the specific nature of urban vulnerability may require DRR practitioners to consider issues which are not (yet) regularly addressed. The experience of ACF in Sierra Leone and Guinea suggests that governments may wish to develop infrastructure which connects rural producers to urban markets as a way of making cities more resilient in the face of food insecurity (Vaitla, 2012b). Several participants also called for DRR planning to see urban violence as a disaster, and to incorporate violence prevention efforts in urban planning. Margaret Stansberry of IFRC outlined one example of good practice: the mapping of violent incidents in Haiti and the use of these maps in urban design. Participants also considered CRS's Gaza Risk Reduction and Mitigation Programme, which, with the support of the Humanitarian Innovation Fund, aims to develop a new programmatic framework for urban areas in complex emergencies with the intention of reducing violence.[4]

A common challenge to urban DRR identified by the participants was the difficulty that governments find in mainstreaming risk reduction across a variety of departments and bodies. Successful approaches (such as that used in Nepal) require working between ministries and making the case to each one, focusing first on the city level and then working upwards. However, even when successful, those working to embed urban DRR in government planning often find that competing timelines and priorities within the government present challenges, and that as the memory of a disaster recedes, funding is reallocated to other priorities (Alertnet, 2011). This is particularly true where there is already a lack of resources. Here, humanitarian agencies can play an advocacy role: using each disaster response as an opportunity to amplify and reinforce the importance of planning to reduce risk.

4.2   RETHINKING PREPAREDNESS

The importance of preparing for urban disasters was mentioned repeatedly at the meeting, echoing many recent reports and evaluations. At one level there was agreement that the system as a whole is not well prepared for urban disasters – there are serious questions as to whether existing standards, assumptions, and operating procedures are relevant in urban contexts. At another level, there was a general consensus that individual cities, and particularly those at high risk of disaster, should be better prepared.

While preparedness is a central part of all humanitarian action, it is particularly important in the urban context. The potential scale of need generated in an urban disaster would overwhelm the human and material resources

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4 See www.humanitarianinnovation.org/projects/large-grants/grram for more information.

Box 4 UNISDR 10-point checklist

As part of the Resilient Cities campaign, UNISDR provides the following 10-point checklist for urban DRR:

1 Put in place organisation and coordination to understand and reduce disaster risk, based on participation of citizen groups and civil society. Build local alliances. Ensure that all departments understand their role in disaster risk reduction and preparedness.

2 Assign a budget for disaster risk reduction and provide incentives for homeowners, low-income families, communities, businesses and the public sector to invest in reducing the risks they face.

3 Maintain up-to-date data on hazards and vulnerabilities, prepare risk assessments and use these as the basis for urban development plans and decisions. Ensure that this information and the plans for your city's resilience are readily available to the public and fully discussed with them.

4 Invest in and maintain critical infrastructure that reduces risk, such as flood drainage, adjusted where needed to cope with climate change.

5 Assess the safety of all schools and health facilities and upgrade these as necessary.

6 Apply and enforce realistic, risk-compliant building regulations and land use planning principles. Identify safe land for low-income citizens and develop upgrading of informal settlements, wherever feasible.

7 Ensure education programmes and training on disaster risk reduction are in place in schools and local communities.

8 Protect ecosystems and natural buffers to mitigate floods, storm surges and other hazards to which your city may be vulnerable. Adapt to climate change by building on good risk reduction practices.

9 Install early warning systems and emergency management capacities in your city and hold regular public preparedness drills.

10 After any disaster, ensure that the needs of the survivors are placed at the centre of reconstruction with support for them and their community organisations to design and help implement responses, including rebuilding homes and livelihoods. (UNISDR, 2010)

of most organisations, unless they have specific approaches in place to access additional resources at short notice. In addition – as we have seen in Haiti and in the north-east Japan earthquake and tsunami – urban disasters often 'decapitate' the governmental and international organisations which would normally lead the response, making access to affected populations difficult or impossible (the US PACOM estimates that, if an earthquake hit Kathmandu, the city would be cut off for two weeks: Kathmandu Post, 2011). If unprepared, the humanitarian response could easily be inadequate, uncoordinated and stuck at the docks. Unsurprisingly, then, a growing body of evidence points to the beneficial impacts of preparedness in terms of lowered overall costs of relief assistance, reduced loss of life and livelihoods, greater use of safer techniques, engagement with local capacities and resilience, and enhanced capacity to rebuild and recover faster (IASC, 2010).

The first, and perhaps most crucial, element of preparedness highlighted at the meeting lies in building and clarifying relationships between the organisations which would be involved in a humanitarian response, potentially including development, diplomatic and military actors (HFP, 2008). Recent country case studies conducted by the IASC Task Force (IASC, 2010) have shown that humanitarian assistance is more effective when clear and effective strategies for multi-stakeholder partnerships are developed before a crisis hits, or failing that, as

early as possible afterwards. 'Recent experience in the aftermath of floods in Manila demonstrates that joint implementation plans with host governments and service providers, including the private sector, are most effective if forged prior to an emergency' (IASC, 2010: 4).

In developing these partnerships, the IASC report goes on to say that international actors 'need to recognise that the host government must lead, or at the very least coordinate, an emergency response'. This point, while fundamental, is not new: in 2007 the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC) reported that agencies need to move away from thinking 'how can we establish partnerships with local and national actors to better deliver our assistance', and instead invert the relationship to consider 'how can we be better partners and supporters' of national and city-level efforts (TEC, 2007). The point was echoed on several occasions at the meeting, by representatives of national disaster management authorities and by participants from donor organisations, INGOs, the UN and the Red Cross movement. However, participants also recognised that, in many cases, this will require a significant change in organisational attitudes and assumptions. As Zetter and Deikun (2010) wrote:

> **…Perhaps the biggest challenge for humanitarian actors – and also a major opportunity – is to develop ways of working with the existing institutional framework of municipal and civil society organisations which exists in most towns and cities in the developing world… (Zetter and Deikun, 20010: 6).**

Working effectively with municipal authorities may well be a challenge for national governments, as well as international actors. Participants at the meeting noted that in many countries the system of governance gives municipal authorities only limited power, and that central government efforts might effectively ignore the potential of municipal authorities to manage disaster response. For international humanitarian organisations, working with government – national or local – might also pose very real challenges to the humanitarian principle of neutrality in situations where the government is a combatant in an urban conflict.

Participants made several concrete and practical suggestions in terms of strengthening and clarifying relationships before they were tested in an emergency. The first was to consider in advance, at a national and municipal level, how the cluster system can best articulate with the varied ministries and offices of national and local governments. The cluster system, while recognised as a useful first point of contact by many national disaster management agencies (ALNAP, 2012) did not prove compatible with local coordination structures in Haiti (Grunewald et al., 2010). More broadly, participants also suggested that agencies and government bodies should, as a part of their preparedness planning, clearly delineate their roles with respect to one another; use smaller urban emergencies to test their levels of preparedness; and establish 'back up' measures, alternatives and redundancies to allow continuity of response even if key figures were killed or incapacitated.

Hearteningly, Jenty Kirsch-Wood, in a presentation explaining the activities of the Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium, outlined how many of these recommendations are already being put into effect in Kathmandu, where the Central Natural Disaster Rescue Committee (CNDRC), is the designated government link to the cluster system. The CNDRC also recently appointed a multi-stakeholder team that has drafted the first Emergency Response Framework for Nepal, a critical step in clarifying roles and responsibilities in the event of an urban disaster. In Sierra Leone, the government, INGOs (including ACF) and national NGOs have also learnt the importance of clearly defining roles when working on multi-sectoral urban initiatives (Sullivan, 2012).

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Another set of relationships that should be developed as part of a preparedness strategy are those with civil society and community organisations. In urban disasters (as in disasters more generally) the affected population are invariably the first responders (Grunewald et al., 2010), and they remain as important providers of shelter and support even when external actors arrive (IASC, 2010). Moreover, urban populations often have skills and knowledge, including language skills, which international actors lack. In the Philippines, as previously noted, community organisations such as CDRC provide important early warning and response services to the urban population (Padolina, 2012). Community organisations can also support the population to prepare for disasters, through schools, youth groups, and other networks. In Nepal, the IFRC is building community preparedness through a programme of support to community organisations (Kirsch-Wood, 2012). When considering working with community bodies, the experience of CRS in Haiti suggested that it is important to define what we mean by 'community' and 'community representatives'. Communities are often not based on geography, rather they are 'common purposes, networks, livelihoods and where people gather' (Rogers, 2012). It is also important to recognise that 'community' actors, like all others, may have their own agenda and, in contexts where there are high levels of violence and organised crime, they may be involved in or subject to the influence of illicit groups such as gangs.

A second important element of preparedness is ensuring that all actors expecting to engage in an urban response are able to access the necessary number and profile of skilled personnel. The Haiti response showed that certain skills – such as field management of injuries – are in overall short supply: this was an important determining factor in the very high rate of amputations. In this and similar cases, the humanitarian and academic systems may need to consider increasing the number of teaching courses to meet needs associated with urban disasters. In other cases, the skills exist, but are not regularly used by humanitarian agencies. At the meeting there was much discussion of 'urban expertise'. Urban planners were important in ensuring the success of early water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions in Port-au-Prince (Grunewald, et al. 2010), and urban community development specialists had been essential to IFRC's needs assessments in Haiti (Stansberry, 2012). Overall, participants agreed with the IASC's strategy for meeting humanitarian challenges in urban areas, that humanitarian agencies need to adapt and upgrade the skills base of their staff to address urban-based challenges (IASC, 2010). However, they also noted that it is not yet clear which skills need to be upgraded, and they recognised that, given the limitations of funding and team size, it will always be difficult to have all the necessary skills represented in any one team.

A third element of preparedness discussed at the meeting was – perhaps unsurprisingly – the creation of specific emergency plans. Discussion around planning focused on four areas: scale, content, the incorporation of entry and exit strategies, and the importance of testing plans.

On the basis of experience in the north-east Japan earthquake and tsunami, the JICA representative, Tsukasa Katsube, cautioned that planners should identify multiple and combined hazards as part of the planning exercise, and plan for the most extreme cases. In Japan, the 'duty of care' owed by the state to the people, and hence the ability of the state to respond to disasters, is an important electoral issue. As a result, there was a high level of preparedness for a tsunami: warning systems and seawalls were in place. However, the three-metre walls were overwhelmed by the unexpected size of the waves (Woodsome, 2011).

In terms of the content of plans, participants recognised that they would differ significantly from one city to another. However, there were some issues identified which will be common to most urban contexts, all of which

relate, in one way or another, to land and the ownership and use of land (what Beatrice Boyer calls 'the property labyrinth' (Boyer, 2011)) These issues include: identification of areas for mass casualty management and disposal of dead bodies; the allocation of physical space from which to launch response; and, in certain circumstances, identifying suitable space to be used for temporary shelter. On the basis of experiences in Haiti (and particularly the Corail camp), several participants noted that the identification of physical space for temporary shelter should be conducted in collaboration with representatives of the government urban planning authority, to prevent long-term conflicts over land or the creation of long-term settlements in hazardous locations. Dan Lewis, of Habitat, reminded the meeting that plans should not automatically default to temporary shelter, but should first consider options for the rehabilitation and construction of permanent housing.

The often high levels of chronic poverty and conflict in many urban environments produces difficulties in classifying what is, and what is not, a humanitarian emergency. With this in mind, participants agreed with the lesson outlined in the DEC evaluation of the Haiti response (DEC, 2011), that agencies should, at the planning stage, identify clear objectives for their interventions, indicators of progress, and predetermined exit strategies. Many participants also thought that agencies should clarify their position with respect to the 'chronic emergencies' taking place in the poorer parts of many cities, and plan for humanitarian programmes even when there was no clear 'trigger event'.

Recognising the dangers inherent in a bad plan, participants identified the importance of testing and improving plans through simulation exercises. Several examples of successful simulations were given at the meeting: the Indian National Disaster Management Division has conducted several city-wide simulations involving a range of early responders (Dr Muzaffar Ahmad, welcome address); ACF has conducted simulations of cholera response activities in Guinea. In both cases the simulations identified bottlenecks and constraints, and helped to improve the planning process. The utility of simulations, even quite small scale, 'table-top' exercises, was demonstrated at the meeting, in an exercise facilitated by David Sanderson of Oxford Brookes University (see Case Study 2).

The fourth key element of preparedness discussed at the meeting was the pre-positioning of emergency stocks. Existing stocks were an important element of the rapid response in the Haiti earthquake (Bhattacharjee et al., 2011; Grunewald et al., 2010) and are one of several key preparedness measures advocated by the IASC (IASC, 2010). However, participants also noted the difficulties of stockpiling for governments with limited funds to address pressing existing issues, and the importance of establishing clear criteria under which stockpiles would be released – particularly given the frequent lack of clarity around what constitutes a disaster in an urban setting.

4.3   RETHINKING RESPONSE

ALNAP's 2009 paper, *Learning from urban disasters*, points to the clear need to adapt existing international response mechanisms and processes in order to make them more relevant to urban contexts (ALNAP, 2009). The paper identifies areas such as mobilisation, needs assessment, targeting and monitoring and evaluation as requiring reassessment.

Case Study 2 Simulations for disaster preparedness

The simulation

In this meeting session, participants divided themselves into 13 groups, each representing different organisations involved in preparing for, and responding to, an earthquake in the (fictional) Himalayan city of Mishal. In part 1 of the simulation, each organisation was asked to develop a five-part plan for disaster preparedness in Mishal. A representative from each organisation then attended a meeting, in which the various groups attempted to create a single, cross-organisational five-point plan. In part 2 of the simulation, participants were told that an earthquake and dam-burst had occurred in Mishal, and were given information about the effects of these twin disasters. Again, each organisation was asked to provide a five-point plan, and then all organisations met to discuss these plans. The exercise concluded with a debriefing, which aimed to identify main themes. These divided into process issues, good ideas and general challenges to address going forward.

Lessons from the process

On the process side, it was felt that governments need to develop and strongly express their priorities for response and recovery. The UN should support but not substitute for government leadership. A particular area of good practice was to strengthen local government in sustainable ways. There were also felt to be a number of practical considerations of allowing everyone a seat at the table. There are trade-offs between meaningful coordination and information sharing at high levels of the system – where it is successful, coordination is a decentralised system.

There is a real need to use control, command and coordination in different ways as necessary. The simulation highlighted how quickly a lack of awareness of others' actions can develop, which highlighted the importance of strong communications. Comprehensive preparation and communications in advance of disasters was considered essential.

A number of participants concluded that there were currently very low levels of preparation for the complexity of urban disasters and that there was an urgent need to work on contingency plans for different cities at risk.

Participants at the meeting tended to concur with the findings of the ALNAP paper. Based on the experiences of their organisations, they provided a number of examples of how processes are currently being reassessed. One guiding principle for this work seems to be that urban responses should follow an urban logic: in order to be successful, urban response should look like the life of the city itself. A simple but telling illustration of this principle comes from Haiti, where agencies attempted to build latrines (a standard humanitarian response) despite the difficulty of digging in concrete and bedrock. Observation of local practice for disposal of human waste would have led to an earlier and more widespread institution of more appropriate responses. For example, before the 2010 earthquake in Port au Prince, many inhabitants of informal settlements, who did not have access to toilets, defecated into plastic bags which they then threw away; the 'peepoo' bags, which were ultimately distributed widely, build on this idea (Bhattacharjee et al., 2011; Grunewald et al., 2010).

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Participants suggested a variety of ways in which humanitarian organisations were starting to apply the principle of making the response 'look like the city'. Recognising the importance of the market – and particularly of local small-scale traders – as a distribution mechanism in urban areas, many agencies have already begun to provide relief assistance through market channels. Urban bakeries were used for food distribution in Kabul from 1996 (WFP, 2004), and in Haiti, agencies were able to ensure people met immediate food needs by working with existing local food vendors (IASC, 2010). IFRC, realising that, before the earthquake, 80% of the population of Port-au-Prince were tenants, decided to build rental shelters. They also engaged local private sector contractors to remove rubble (Stansberry, 2012). Of course, a market-based approach requires the disaster-affected population to have access to cash, and many organisations have re-oriented their operations from provision of goods to the provision of cash to better engage with markets. In urban areas of Sierra Leone, for example, ACF used cash for work to support the rehabilitation of the water system (Sullivan, 2012) and in Haiti, several agencies provided cash to disaster-affected people, often through electronic payment systems (Smith et al., 2011). While many of these approaches are still experimental and would benefit from further evaluation, they have the potential to provide aid rapidly, protect existing livelihoods, and – by fitting into the local context – have fewer negative unintended consequences. Providing rental property may, for example, prevent disputes over land rights and squatting, while the use of street vendors could in some circumstances obviate the need to distribute cooking fuel.

In the same way, many relief providers have begun to recognise the ubiquity of information and communications technology in the urban setting, and to incorporate these technologies into their programming (Smith et al., 2011). Cities are by no means the only context where humanitarians are using mobile phones, GPS and cash transfer technologies, but they are particularly well adapted to their use: high levels of mobile phone ownership, for example, make the use of cellular technologies possible, while the very large numbers of people requiring assistance and information make their use desirable. At the meeting, Padolina shared his experience of using mobile phones as part of an early warning system in the Philippines, while Stansberry discussed IFRC's use of text messaging and of an Interactive Voice Response (IRV) system, supported by the Humanitarian Innovation Fund, as approaches to communicating with urban beneficiaries.

A third area where humanitarians are beginning to adapt responses to make them more 'urban' is in the understanding of urban social groups and population dynamics, and the implications of this for urban programming in general and for needs assessment and targeting in particular. Urban populations are more diverse than rural populations, and needs may differ hugely in size and nature even within fairly small geographical areas. Particular groups, such as refugees and recent migrants, often have heightened levels of vulnerability compared to other city dwellers (Jacobsen, 2011). In addition, those sections of the population such as women, children and the elderly, who in many contexts suffer from heightened vulnerability to disasters, may be vulnerable to specific additional risks in an urban context: see Box 5 (Human Rights Watch, 2011; Graham, 2011).

However, while the need to refine vulnerability and needs assessments methodologies for urban areas is increasingly well understood, tools to measure and assess urban vulnerability are only now being developed.[5] The urban context also challenges 'traditional' approaches to aid targeting. As Rogers explained at the meeting, urban populations, tend to form communities around common interests or pursuits, rather than co-location.

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5 Two useful guides are: Cash Transfer Programming in Urban Emergencies: A toolkit for practitioners (Cross, T. 2012) and the Profiling Toolkit for Displaced People in Urban Areas (Jacobsen, 2011).

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Box 5 Vulnerability in urban areas

Recent research identifies how the vulnerabilities of certain parts of the population can be exacerbated in an urban context. In Haiti, Human Rights Watch found that women and girls living in displacement camps in post-earthquake Port-au-Prince faced additional risks to life and health, in addition to those encountered by the population as a whole. These included decreased levels of reproductive and maternal health, and high levels of gender-based violence.

While these issues are not unique to urban disasters, they were exacerbated by the urban context. The fact that the earthquake occurred in a densely populated area meant that it destroyed a large number of clinics, and killed a large number of Creole-speaking medical staff. The earthquake and subsequent displacement also destroyed the dispersed social networks of which many women were a part. Once in displacement camps and unable to rely on these networks, many women felt unable to leave to obtain care, as they were concerned that their property might be stolen in their absence. They were also more vulnerable to sexual violence, since they lacked the security provided by their networks. The displacement also disrupted the income-generating activities on which many of the women, living in an urban, market-based environment, depended.

Urban contexts also pose specific – and diverse – challenges to refugees and migrants, who may lack the relationships and cash needed to survive in a market economy, and the skills suited to the urban labour market. In many cases, the specific vulnerabilities of migrants can be easily ignored, particularly where they wish to remain invisible, or are rendered effectively invisible by a lack of documentation. Where agencies recognise these vulnerabilities, they may be tempted to see all migrants as a single 'vulnerable group', and fail to differentiate between them. A recent report from the Feinstein International Centre at Tufts University suggests that agencies should assess migrant vulnerability using livelihoods-based criteria such as employment security, housing security, financial security and physical safety.[6]

As a result, models of aid targeting and delivery which involve a single large agency office working as a 'hub' and village committees conducting activities for 'their' community may not be appropriate in many urban environments. Agencies may need to open a larger number of small offices in different parts of the city, as CRS have done in Port-au-Prince (Rogers, 2012) and to make greater use of self-targeting mechanisms, rather than community targeting. The meeting heard how several agencies are exploring approaches to targeting in the urban context, including the members of the IASC reference group on meeting challenges in urban areas, and Groupe URD, who are looking at how to adapt thinking on community targeting mechanisms to make them successful in urban environments (Groupe URD, 2011). As with assessment, targeting appears to be an area where the humanitarian system has some way to go in adapting to the urban context: in general, the vast majority of humanitarian assessment and targeting tools appear still to be geared for use in rural settings.

The mobility and diversity of urban populations, and the lack of immediately identifiable 'communities' also creates particular challenges for accountability to disaster-affected urban populations. As Rogers noted, 'urban

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6 Jacobsen, K. and Furst Nichols, R. (2011) Developing a Profiling Methodology for Displaced People in Urban Areas. Feinstein International Center, Tufts University.

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settings do not challenge our definition of accountability but they do change how we achieve it'. This is another area where information technology offers some potential solutions – allowing large numbers of people to obtain information, provide feedback and register complaints, and also providing access to media and other mechanisms through which agencies can be held to account (Wall, 2011). It is also an area where we may need to rethink the relative roles of the agency and the state. As Ahmad of the Indian National Disaster Management Authority suggested during the meeting, accountability is based on the duty of national and municipal governments to their citizens and there is a need to take up the urban citizen's right to safety and safer cities. This means putting 'citizens in the centre, [focusing on] his or her identity and dignity, and [developing] ways to make them more active in our ultimate struggle to make the world a safer place from humanitarian crises'.

The nature and scope of urban response means that standard ex-post evaluations may not always be sufficient to address learning and accountability needs. Rather, there may need to be a more developed menu of evaluative options. At the very least, Grunewald suggested, this should include new approaches to urban real-time evaluations, more participatory and inclusive forms of multi-stakeholder evaluation, and context-specific ways of dealing with impact assessment in dynamic and fluid environments.

Overall, if we are to make responses look like the life of the city, we will need to make them as dynamic as the cities in which they occur. This may mean designing responses around theories of change which encompass the complexity and diversity of the city, and do not simply propose a linear logic between an input and a result (Ramalingam, 2009). Agencies will need to work hard to think through how different interventions might work, and be sceptical about their ability to plan all results in advance (Boyer, 2011). Recognising that interventions may not 'work' as expected, they will need to monitor the effects of interventions, and revisit their logic and expectations on a regular basis so as to enable the necessary adaptations to take place. Ultimately, agencies need to be more open to programmes that end up looking very different to the original proposals. This idea of urban complexity is informing World Vision International's on-going work in adapting that organisation to the new challenges faced (Savage et al., 2011).

Box 6 Smart evaluation in urban contexts (key points from Francois Grunewald's presentation)

Evaluation approach
- Get urban specialists on board early.
- Engage with emerging principles, rather than being wedded to existing ones.
- Be open to discarding old habits and blueprints.
- Accept that existing practices may need to be reshaped and adjusted for an urban setting.

Evaluation focus
- Identify how humanitarian actors have been working with national and municipal actors.
- Focus on the relevance of response, looking at how social, cultural and economic systems in urban areas have been taken into account and analysed.
- Assess what level of preparedness pre-dated the crisis and the impact of this on the response.
- Adapt evaluation questions according to the type of urban disaster, and the different responses that were needed.

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4.4   RETHINKING DEVELOPMENT

Although not the primary focus of the ALNAP meeting, it is also important to highlight the role that development actors must play in mitigating the risk and vulnerability of urban areas to disasters. The latest thinking from the World Bank and others on urban development strategies (World Bank, 2009) recommends that developing countries take a three-pronged approach to urbanisation, each element of which has relevance for the issues covered already in this paper.

♦   *Design national and municipal policies and institutions that anticipate urbanisation and maximise resilience.* At the national level this includes macro-economic policy frameworks that promote trade and capital flows, national frameworks for land and labour markets, and sound inter-governmental fiscal systems which influence how cities manage their finances and development (ibid).

♦   *Ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to facilitate national, regional and local policy coordination and decision-making for resilient development.* Countries more successful in managing the urban transition have relied on dedicated commissions, forums and other such networked institutional arrangements that link all levels of government and policy-makers with urban planning institutions, universities, NGOs and the private sector. If this approach is to work, it is especially important that it is grounded in sound data collection and analysis systems and in robust means of designing and testing different resilience approaches (ibid).

♦   *Establish closer collaboration across all tiers of government and the international community.* Urbanisation is not exclusively a challenge for cities. To be effective, developing countries will need efficient, multi-tiered coordination mechanisms to support policy formulation and coordinated interventions between national, regional and local governments and the international system of actors. New technologies have a considerable role to play here (ibid).

Research done on donor efforts in urban development suggests some clear shifts in thinking in the international donor community on engagement at the municipal level (Milbert, 2004). During the 1990s, urban projects were often negotiated at the national level with minimal engagement of local government institutions. Since then, several donor countries have engaged in long-term partnerships with local governments and have been increasing support for international and local NGOs engaged in urban areas. Such interventions recognise the key role of municipal and local authorities and civil society (Milbert, 2004).

Perhaps the most significant new area in development policy as it relates to the urban environment has been the growing attention paid to ideas of resilience, an approach which encompasses Disaster Risk Reduction and Preparedness, and links them more explicitly to Development issues. This approach has developed from, among other areas: work on climate change; policy responses to global crises in food and finance; and developments in social protection. It is increasingly seen as a shared framework for bridging the gaps between previously disparate areas of international aid. Work done by the Rockefeller Foundation's Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network shows what this kind of collaboration might look like in practice. For example, in Quy Nhon, Vietnam, a multi-sectoral working group composed of international, national, development and

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humanitarian actors is assessing the impacts of alternative flood and inundation scenarios on planned urban development and building capacity to prevent and, if necessary, respond effectively.[7]

This coherent application of a wide range of strategies to reduce the risk and vulnerability of those most at risk to shocks and stresses will, if it is to be effective, require significant changes in the work of both development and humanitarian actors. Both groups may be challenged to create new relationships, and to rethink the timeframes and scope of their work. A small, but successful example of this has taken place in the Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium, which has agreed to work around three to five-year time frames. This has enabled 'classic' DRR agencies to engage with the World Bank and other development actors. The Consortium has also found that common action is best developed through focusing on common indicators, rather than on discrete projects, and by setting ambitious targets to which all members work. Approaches such as this, which allow more coherence between developmental and humanitarian activities, may point the way to broader collaboration around urban issues. If it does, this coordination will need to occur within many (multi-mandate) agencies, as well as between them.

V   NEXT STEPS: A NEW URBAN AGENDA FOR HUMANITARIAN POLICY AND PRACTICE

The experience of the humanitarian organisations represented at the ALNAP 27th Meeting suggests that there is a need for urgent and comprehensive action across the international humanitarian system in order to prepare for future urban disasters. As one participant put it: 'at the moment, we are starting to understand the problems, but we do not have the solutions. And where we do have the solutions, they are very difficult to put into effect.' This sentiment finds many echoes across the sector: according to Care International's President Helen Gayle, both donors and NGOs have, to date, failed to 'co-evolve' with urbanisation as quickly as it has happened (IRIN, 2007). The high risk of a massive urban disaster occurring very soon set against this low level of readiness, is a powerful argument for radically increasing attention to this area.

Many of the challenges identified in the literature and at the meeting are not new. Rather, as one panellist explained: 'the reality of the urban environment means that existing problems [in the humanitarian system] are amplified. Our shortcomings are more obvious in an urban environment'. Responding effectively to disasters in cities requires greater investments in preparedness and capacity building; massively increased engagement with civil society; a recalibration, in many contexts, of the *de facto* relationships between international actors and sovereign states; and radically improved coordination. While these challenges are long-running, and often seem intractable, progress is being made in many areas at a system level, and there are examples of good practice in individual operations.

The meeting also highlighted risks and opportunities that arise specifically from the urban environment itself. These suggest that as well as tackling some longstanding problems, the sector needs to think hard about specific changes that are required in order to work in urban disasters.

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7 see http://www.acccrn.org/

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Faced with this requirement to solve both familiar and new problems, the different constituencies of actors attending the meeting worked to develop a series of priority actions for how they should be changing to adapt to the 'urban millennium'.

◆   National Disaster Management Authorities (NDMAs) felt that their first priority was to identify capacities and capacity gaps on a city-by-city basis, and use this exercise to begin capacity building, to develop and update comprehensive contingency plans for major urban centres. There was also a need to establish better early working systems, adapting existing systems for urban contexts, and to put effort into mainstreaming DRR across different agencies and ministries. NDMAs also felt that they should develop urban emergency operations centres.

◆   Donor representatives felt that they needed to encourage innovative programming solutions for urban areas, and to support agencies to take measured risks, allowing for pilots and failures. More funding for research of innovative ideas for urban areas was seen as a useful start. There was also a critical need to strengthen donors' own capacity on urban issues in humanitarian and development efforts as well as in enhancing resilience as a means of reducing the development-humanitarian divide. They suggested that establishing a cross-donor agency working group on urban disasters would be a useful first step.

◆   Representatives of United Nations bodies recommended that UN agencies need to critically examine all current procedures, frameworks, and tools through an 'urban lens', updating and improving those which were not well adapted to urban action. They also felt that there was a need for ensuring greater predictability from the UN in terms of response – which currently differs greatly from country to country. In the words of one UN staff member: 'it needs to be more obvious who will do what and who will lead'. More work is required to adapt the cluster system to urban contexts. Finally, UN representatives felt that the UN bodies as a whole also need to invest more time with service delivery partners, and work more systematically with local government.

◆   NGOs felt that they needed to put more energy and resources into understanding the urban context and the different kinds of vulnerability that exist, and use this understanding to reconsider and, in some cases, redefine their mandates with respect to urban programming. This could mean, for example, devoting a percentage of funding to urban programming, including preparedness, response, DRR and development linkages. There was, as with the other key actors, a clear need to systematically engage with local urban partners, including local/municipal authorities and NDMAs. As with the UN, they saw a need to adapt existing tools to ensure applicability in urban contexts, working closely with local partners.

◆   The Red Cross and Red Crescent representatives felt that they needed to strengthen the operational capacities of national societies to respond to urban disasters. One key issue was the improvement of data collection, analysis, and learning and evaluation for urban contexts, to enable evidence-based decision-making. Overcoming internal silos through cross-functional working groups around urban issues was also seen as critical.

◆   Academics and the Q&A initiatives felt that they should develop a handbook/good practice review for urban contexts, and be more active in building an evidence base for what works in urban contexts. There was room for such actors to become valuable partners in operational learning, and to become more effective at enabling research uptake. For the universities present, there was an educational challenge to get urban

issues more actively into university teaching. For the Q&A initiatives, a review of existing guidelines to ensure relevance and utility in urban contexts was seen as key.

Together, these priority actions point to an agenda for the range of actors that will be working on urban humanitarian challenges in the future. As noted above, these may be more imminent than we imagine.

Participants at the meeting strongly endorsed the idea of collective advocacy and learning, mobilising resources across the system as a whole, and providing a focal point for shared efforts. The meeting issued a clear call for improved coordination around urban issues, and several constituencies identified similar priority actions. Participants called for agencies, governments and the international humanitarian system as a whole to place greater emphasis on the urban agenda: urbanisation still needs more urgent and strategic attention across all agencies, networks and coalitions in the sector. Mobilisation of leaders of international and national bodies may be one way of doing this – perhaps with the kind of high-level forum that was established for the food price crisis in 2008, chaired by a high-profile figure. In terms of shared learning, participants suggested pooling of data and lessons; sharing of innovative and emerging best practice; joint review of standards and operating procedures; joint training and enhanced national and city level dialogue. Participants felt that the dialogue established at the ALNAP meeting needed to be continued and expanded.

For some, however, all of this points to a massive and potentially daunting agenda. At the meeting, participants worked to develop a pragmatic set of 'next steps', to help orient a shared way forward. As one participant noted, 'urgency and perfection must not be the enemy of the good. We cannot do things perfectly overnight, but we also need to keep some sense of urgency in what we are doing'. The following next steps were initiated at the meeting and have been refined and developed in the subsequent work done by ALNAP.

Step 1 Agencies, and potentially the system as a whole, should establish clear definitions of 'urban crisis'. They should consider the trigger events that would lead to engagement in an urban crisis, and identify in advance what would be their general objectives and exit strategy in any crisis.

Step 2 Each agency, as well as multi-agency bodies, should consider the potential scale and urgency of the challenges posed by urban crises. They should determine whether current levels of resourcing (in terms of time and money invested, and the coordination architecture) are appropriate, or need scaling up. In parallel, national and municipal bodies should urgently identify potential risks and vulnerabilities to urban centres.

Step 3 International, national and municipal organisations should 'stress-test' existing policies standards and Standard Operating Procedures to ensure that they are relevant and useful for urban disaster engagement. This should include more input from urban specialists, from planning, development, and other disciplines. In parallel, national and municipal bodies should ensure that contingency plans are in place, and identify gaps. Where possible, authorities should take the lead in establishing relationships with other key actors, and defining roles and responsibilities as part of the contingency planning exercise.

Step 4 Where knowledge or skills gaps are identified as a part of these exercises, organisations should move to ensuring that these gaps can be filled by training, recruitment, strategic partnerships or stand-by agreements.

Step 5 The humanitarian system and organisations within it should urgently develop better methods and tools for urban assessment and analysis. These could potentially be part of on-going work on needs assessment. Humanitarian actors should also invest in improved preparedness through shared risk assessments.

Step 6 The humanitarian system should establish a forum for sharing and dissemination of best practice and tools related to urban crises: those organisations with specific learning or expertise should ensure that their learning is disseminated through this forum. This learning should be centred on a common conceptual framework which includes DRR, preparedness, response and development, and is open to emerging issues such as 'missing' vulnerable groups; rural-urban linkages; land tenure issues and urban violence.

Step 7 Humanitarian actors should trial new innovative approaches in 'small' urban crises, in preparation for larger crises in the future. Donors and decision-makers in organisations should encourage innovative approaches/technology to increase effectiveness. A particular issue is the development of new mechanisms for effective assessment, response and coordination, on the understanding that these may need to be adapted for each city.

On a more immediate and pragmatic level, ALNAP and UN-Habitat have already agreed to create a shared portal for urban initiatives to be captured online. This portal could potentially serve as one focus for the development of a global community of practice on urban humanitarian issues. At the same time, many ALNAP members are working on improved tools, and in some cases specific urban policies, which can be more broadly shared across the ALNAP Network. The size, complexity and urgency of the urban challenge cannot be addressed by any one organisation alone.

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