

CITIES IN CRISIS CONSULTATIONS - Bangui, Central African Republic



Overview of Urban Consultations

By 2050 over 70% of the global population will live in urban areas. This accelerating urbanization trend is accompanied by an increasing vulnerability of cities to both natural and man-made disasters. More and more, humanitarian actors are responding to urban crisis. They are however often badly equipped to understand and effectively engage with cities' complex socio-economic dynamics and governance structures. Recognizing these challenges, the World Humanitarian Summit has mandated an Urban Expert Group to identify key recommendations for promoting better humanitarian response to urban crisis.

With a view of contributing to this discussion, IMPACT Initiatives and UCLG's Task Force On Local and Regional Government Disaster Response facilitated a series of consultations in six cities affected by natural or man-made disasters. In collaboration with local authorities and aid actors, each city identified key lessons and guidance to inform future responses, outlined in city-specific reports and compiled into a comprehensive report which will be presented in May 2016 at the World Humanitarian Summit, in partnership with the Urban Expert Group.

The Consultation Process:

- 1 Guiding questions for all cities agreed upon with the Urban Expert Group
- 2 Bilateral interviews held with city-level authorities and civil society, UN Agencies, NGOs and donors involved in the response
- 3 Final consultations hosted by local mayor(s) to identify lessons learned and develop recommendations for future response to urban crisis
- 4 Findings from interviews and consultations summarized in city-specific and overarching reports

INTRODUCTION

Bangui has been affected by violence and displacement over the past 4 years and currently hosts over 50,000 internally displaced people. The crisis has put significant strain on municipal services, which have lacked the required resources and capacity to meet the evolving needs of Bangui's increasingly vulnerable population. As a consequence, the provision of basic services has become heavily reliant on international humanitarian stakeholders. Due to a multiplicity of factors, linkages between humanitarian stakeholders and municipal actors have remained weak, contributing to sub-optimal coordination and affecting the efficiency of humanitarian planning and targeting. With the recent elections and a renewed hope for stability in the CAR, strengthening this linkage must become a priority in order to support the recovery effort and the re-establishment of municipal services.

KEY FINDINGS

The humanitarian response in Bangui has been characterized by several challenges. Prior to the crisis, no city-level preparedness measures existed which encompassed both local and international actors. As the crisis erupted, municipal actors lacked the resources to meet the shifting needs of Bangui's increasingly vulnerable population. Humanitarian funding to provide services such as health, education and water was primarily provided to international actors, such as INGOs and the UN. Although some coordinated bilaterally with local stakeholders at an operational level, the overall response was planned and implemented without systematised coordination between international and local responders. Due to lack of coordination and to perceived sensitivities linked to conflict dynamics, many international actors didn't establish and formalize linkages with local authorities and response mechanisms. This contributed to a persisting lack of information and understanding by aid actors on humanitarian dynamics in Bangui, especially at neighborhood-specific level.

Based on lessons learnt from Bangui, the following recommendations were outlined by both international and municipal stakeholders in order to improve current and future urban responses:

- **More inclusive and structured coordination mechanisms** should be established between the humanitarian system and municipal authorities, at both central and neighborhood-level;
- Humanitarian actors should mainstream **capacity building components** for local responders, including authorities, in their programs;
- **Humanitarian actors should adopt multi-sectorial area-based approaches** which build on local response capacity

Crisis Overview

2013: Outbreak of violence in Bangui

Since March 2013 Bangui has been affected by armed conflict, displacement and inter-community tensions. This, combined with pre-existing vulnerabilities, have generated a complex and severe crisis, including massive displacement, widespread poverty, food insecurity, lack of livelihoods and limited access to basic services. Since the outbreak of the crisis, municipal authorities in Bangui have lacked the required resources to respond to the increasing and shifting needs of its population. To fill this gap, international humanitarian actors have to a large extent taken over the role of the Municipality in the delivery of essential services.

2015: Heavy reliance of on aid

Most neighbourhoods of Bangui are reliant on aid actors for the delivery of services. Over half of the population of CAR, corresponding to 2.3 million people, are dependent on humanitarian aid for their survival. Coordination among the international aid system and Bangui's local authorities remains limited and ad hoc, with no clear exit strategy to ensure Municipal actors have the required skills and financial capacity to fully re-establish their service delivery functions.

2016: A renewed hope for Bangui?

Following peaceful elections and a renewed hope for stability, it is key to establish linkages and partnerships between humanitarian actors and Bangui's governance structures in order to enable a smooth transition towards recovery and an effective leadership of local authorities in providing services and protection to their constituencies.

KEY CHALLENGES

- 1 Lack of city preparedness planning and measures to prevent and respond to crisis:**

Prior to the crisis, there was a general lack of preparedness measures in place which encompassed local authorities and international actors alike, both in term of crisis prevention and in terms of response to sudden displacements and increase in humanitarian needs.
- 2 Due to resource and capacity constraints, municipal structures became reliant on external support to respond to the crisis:**

Municipal stakeholders lacked financial resources and capacities to respond to the rapid increase in demand for public services during the crisis. Municipal actors have thereby become heavily reliant on INGOs to ensure basic services are provided to their constituencies. As Bangui recovers from the crisis, local authorities still lack the means, resources and capacities to enable an effective shift of service provision from INGOs to local authorities.
- 3 Lack of information on the crisis and limited understanding of local dynamics as a basis for planning:**

Local authorities and humanitarian actors alike reported that there was a general lack of reliable information on displacement and humanitarian needs during and after the crisis. As of today, there is still limited reliable data on the number of displaced people, priority needs, their area of origin and intentions of return to inform programming and an efficient support to displaced and host communities. Moreover, aid actors only have a limited understanding of neighbourhood-specific contexts in Bangui, limiting their capacity to effectively engage with local communities.
- 4 Lack of coordination and communication between local authorities and humanitarian actors:**

Since the outbreak of the crisis there has been no systematised coordination mechanisms between humanitarian organisations and local actors, including authorities from the Bangui Municipality at central- and neighbourhood-level. This is due to numerous reasons, including the limited presence of local authorities in some neighbourhoods during the crisis, the complex power structure of local informal and formal leaders, the sensitivities linked to perceived affiliations of local leaders, and a focus of aid actors on delivery of immediate support primarily in displacement sites. This has led to a limited and ad hoc implication of local authorities in the planning and delivery of aid responses, and had implications on aid actors' security and acceptance from local populations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE URBAN RESPONSES

1 **Coordination mechanisms between local authorities and humanitarian actors should be established in the early stages of a crisis:**

Such mechanisms should support (a) information gathering and sharing on humanitarian needs and displacement; (b) the development of joint preparedness and response plans; (c) the follow-up of aid delivery and service provision, including the hand-over of specific infrastructure/services to municipal authorities when relevant. Such mechanisms should also facilitate good planning and coordination at neighbourhood level, promoting linkages between humanitarian actors and neighbourhood level stakeholders.

2 **Mainstreaming of capacity building for local responders and authorities:**

International humanitarian actors should mainstream training components for local responders and authorities in their programs. Training topics should include service management and delivery (including budget planning), crisis mitigation and crisis management.

3 **Humanitarian actors should adopt an area-based approach:**

During the crisis, numerous aid actors focused their response on IDP sites in Bangui and faced serious challenges in identifying and supporting IDPs hosted by families in urban out-of-camp settings. During the consultations, the adoption of area-based-approaches by aid actors was identified as a priority for a more efficient response in urban areas. Aid actors should work in conjunction with affected communities and local informal and formal authorities in order to define an area of intervention (based on and analysis of administrative areas, the evolving socio-economic dynamics, power structures, service catchment areas, etc.), conduct an analysis of local response capacities (by local communities, local formal and informal authorities, service providers, etc.) and identify ways of supporting local response dynamics and mechanisms, promoting multi-sectoral planning. This approach will ensure communities, both displaced and host, are actively involved in the identification and response to their needs, fostering social cohesion, while in parallel building capacity of local responders and authorities and resilience to future shocks.

Best practice: Coordination mechanisms between local and international actors

Who: Mayors of Arrondissement

Some Mayors of arrondissements established a local committee responsible for coordination with aid actors. Such committees include various profiles from the Municipality, such as local authorities and community leaders and sector-specific specialists (health, education, water, etc-) that can liaise with humanitarian partners working under their specific sector of expertise.

Best practice: Handover of service delivery

Who: DRC, IRC, PU-AMI and ACTED

INGOs are working closely in several arrondissements of Bangui with local authorities from the area. Good practices include INGOs building infrastructures and handing over this infrastructure to local authorities through an official hand-over. During the consultations it emerged that this hand-over did not sufficiently include budgetary planning, which has been hindering the longer-term maintenance of infrastructure and services by the Municipality - and which should become a key component in future hand over plans.

Best practice: Area-based responses to returns

Who: OCHA, ACTED, DRC, NRC, Oxfam, PU-AMI

With expected returns taking place in the coming months, some humanitarian stakeholders have jointly developed a neighborhood-based response plan in areas of Bangui which are likely to witness returns. Humanitarian partners are working closely with affected communities and local authorities to assess the socio-economic profile of the neighborhood, needs and the social dynamics between displaced and host communities. Based on this analysis, if a response is deemed necessary, humanitarian partners will plan a multi-sectorial intervention, with each partner focusing on an area of expertise, to support local response capacities and address needs of affected populations through a multi-sectorial and neighborhood-based framework.

IMPACT Initiatives is a Geneva-based international association, aiming to shape practices and influence policies in humanitarian and development settings in order to improve efficiency of aid responses and positively impact lives of people and their communities. IMPACT implements assessment, monitoring, evaluation and organizational capacity-building programmes and has established field-presence in over 15 countries.

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is a global network of cities and local, metropolitan and regional governments. UCLG has established a Task Force on Local and Regional Government Disaster Response, in order to provide a platform for local governments to exchange knowledge and expertise on disaster management.

Cités Unies France, a federation of French local and regional governments involved in international relations and, in particular, in decentralized co-operation, is responsible for the Secretariat of UCLG's Task Force and has been directly supporting this consultation process.