# IMPROVING HUMANITARIAN action in URBAN CRISIS

# - A PERSPECTIVE FROM CITIES IN CRISIS -

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| Date | 16 December 2015 |
| From | IMPACT Initiatives andUCLG’s Task Force On Local and Regional Government Disaster Response |
| To | WHS Urban Expert Group |

1. Background

In preparation of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), a series of consultations have been organized by the purposely-appointed Urban Expert Group to propose a set of recommendations on how to strengthen the resilience of crisis-affected communities in urban contexts. To date, the group has drafted a set of *Urban Recommendations* and a *Global Urban Crisis Charter*, pointing to (among others) the need to ‘foster collaboration between city, humanitarian and development actors’, to promote ‘area-based approaches’ in urban response and to ‘prioritise local municipal leadership in determining response to urban crisis’. The Group’s proposition to establish a *Global Alliance for Urban Crisis* to ‘generate policies and operational practices that will change the way urban crises are responded to’ has been acknowledged as a leading recommendation from the pre-WHS Global Consultations recently held in Geneva.

On October 13th a meeting with potential members of the Global Alliance for Urban Crisis was held at IFRC to explore its potential functions. Participants reaffirmed their commitment for the Alliance to have an ambitious and catalytic agenda, with the ultimate aim of making ‘improved urban crisis response an operational reality’. In order to achieve this a number of priorities have been identified, including:

1. strengthening the evidence-base on humanitarian response in urban crisis, notably identifying key lessons learnt and best practices;
2. building a partnership framework which goes beyond traditional humanitarian actors and which is inclusive of local authorities;
3. clearly formulating what is an effective urban response and the related key tools and processes;
4. further engaging in high level advocacy to promote the urban agenda, seizing the opportunity provided by the WHS and Habitat III.

With a view to contributing to the above priorities, IMPACT Initiatives (IMPACT) and UCLG’s Task Force on Local and Regional Government Disaster Response(UCLG)[[1]](#footnote-1) propose to facilitate a series of broad-based consultations in cities recently affected by crisis. The aim of these consultations will be to translate some of the key recommendations of the Global Alliance for Urban Crisis into initiatives that will contribute to operationalizing them, in line with the New Urban Agenda. Findings will be compiled into a synthetic report, which will be broadly circulated and presented by IMPACT and UCLG, trough the UCLG Task Force secretariat, together with mayors of cities involved in the study at an appropriate global venue, including the WHS side events, and potentially the Habitat III conference.

This short memo outlines this proposed UCLG/IMPACT initiative. It is addressed to the Urban Expert Group to solicit participation in the initiative and voluntary feedback on how members feel it could be integrated with the broader workplan of the Global Alliance for Urban Crises.

2. Objectives of the initiative

Through their joint initiative, UCLG Task Force and IMPACT intend to contribute to the ongoing consultations on improving crisis response in cities, in support to the Global Alliance for Urban Crises’ advocacy in preparation for the WHS and Habitat III.

Specifically, this initiative will contribute to an improved understanding of **how emergency responses can be better tailored to the nature, scale and complexity of cities**, and will **identify concrete ways in which local systems and actors can be best supported** by the humanitarian community prior to the onset of a crisis, building preparedness and resilience, and throughout a response. The initiative will achieve this by:

* **strengthening the evidence-base on humanitarian responses and preparedness/risk mitigation in urban contexts** by facilitating a series of workshops in urban areas recently affected by crisis, gathering the perspective and evidence from local stakeholders on **a)** their role and coordination with humanitarian stakeholders during the response phase to the crisis and **b)** the identification of priority risks that particular cities face with respect to human and natural disasters, to enable governments, humanitarian and development actors to invest in protective factors that build resilience to shocks and crisis prior to the onset of a crisis and during the response to the crisis in preparation of future shocks;
* **fostering a pro-active engagement of local actors, notably municipalities,** by ensuring that the workshops and their findings are driven and presented at the WHS by municipalities and other local actors of urban areas recently affected by crisis;
* **identifying and shaping key global initiatives to operationalize the Urban crisis agenda**, notably with respect to:
  + the adoption of area-based approaches to programming and coordination that build on existing systems while meeting humanitarian requirements for a rapid and principled response;
  + the mapping of neighborhoods, communities and services that can form the basis for humanitarians’ contextual understanding and response planning; and
  + the establishment of a predictable mechanism enabling the rapid deployment of experts to support local authorities’ ability to respond, lead and coordinate in crisis contexts.

3. Outline of the initiative

**3.1 Selection of cities**

Five cities recently affected by crisis have been identified to date to participate in the initiative, each illustrative of a specific challenge of humanitarian response in urban contexts: Bangui (CAR), Mafraq (Jordan), Port-au-Prince (Haiti), Tacloban (Philippines) and Zintan (Libya). For more detail on each selected city and the rationale behind their pre-selection, see section 4 below.

Note that other cities have expressed an interest to participate in the initiative, and may be added to the list in the coming weeks.

**3.2 Facilitation of urban workshops**

For each target city, the following action is proposed:

*3.2.1 Preparation phase.*

For each city a preparation phase will lead to the drafting of a preliminary paper outlining key lessons and recommendations that will be discussed and endorsed during the multi-stakeholder workshop (see below). The preparation phase is likely to take approximately 4 weeks and to include the following action:

* Compilation and analysis of relevant secondary data on the humanitarian crisis and response (with an emphasis on engagement of local stakeholders)
* Bilateral kick-off meeting with Mayor in order to:
  + introduce her/him to the Urban Crises Charter and the related Urban Recommendations,
  + identify key stakeholders (civil society, informal leaders, line-ministries, donors, international aid actors, etc), and
  + plan the city-level consultations (timeframe, workshop venue, etc)
* Bilateral consultations with identified key stakeholders to gather and centralize their feedback

*3.2.2 Organisation of workshops*

In each city a one day workshop will organized by the municipality and include the identified key stakeholders. Facilitated by the Mayor with support of IMPACT and UCLG task Force secretariat, these workshops will be informed by the preliminary paper (see 3.2.1) and by the Urban Crisis Charter. The workshop will:

* Review the humanitarian response to the crisis, through a standardized methodology, notably :
  + The crisis timeframe
  + Levels of pre-crisis preparedness
  + Key vulnerabilities and needs resulting from the crisis
  + The local response - by municipality, line ministries, civil society, other local safety nets, etc
  + The international response and its linkages to the national and local response
  + The humanitarian coordination structure
  + Successes, shortcomings, lessons learnt, missed opportunities
  + Each workshop will also zoom in on a distinct theme or challenge of humanitarian responses in urban areas, for which the targeted urban center provides a good illustration. These are outlined in section 4 below.

Identify concrete ideas to make humanitarian response in urban areas more effective, which could be translated into global initiatives.

*3.2.3 Report drafting and in country validation*

In the aftermath of the workshop, a short (4 page) report will be drafted highlighting key lessons learnt and actionable/scalable initiatives on how to improve humanitarian response based on the city’s experience, with preliminary review at country level before dissemination at global level (see below).

**3.3 Drafting of consolidated report and presentation of findings**

Findings for each city would be presented alongside a short (2-4 page) overview outlining key findings and concrete ideas for initiatives across the series of consultations. These findings would be submitted to the Urban Expert Group / Alliance for comments and endorsement. After inclusion of their feedback, the report would be presented at 1-2 key events prior to the WHS, sponsored by key global municipal actors. The location of the events remains to be determined, but options could include Paris, Geneva and New York.

Finally, pending endorsement of the Urban Expert Group / Alliance, the report would be disseminated and its findings presented at a side event of the WHS and potentially at the Habitat III conference. For such high level events, presentations would be made by mayors of consulted cities, together with 1-2 mayors of key global cities involved in a dedicated panel.

4. Background on pre-selected cities

**4.1 Bangui**

Over the past two years, the Central African Republic (CAR) has experienced violent conflict that has left some 2.7 million people, over half the population, in dire need of assistance. The situation in Bangui, the capital city, remains highly volatile as illustrated by recent spouts of violence that erupted on 26 September and displaced over 42,000 people. The ongoing violence has had a significant impact on the capacity of Bangui’s municipality to meet the basic needs of its inhabitants; let alone to respond to the ongoing violence. Municipal assets and offices have been damaged and pillaged, debilitating the municipality’s capacity to deliver basic services and resulting in the loss of a significant body of knowledge and records. In parallel, the violence has disrupted the socio-economic tissue that traditionally provided a safety net to many of the city’s most vulnerable. While international humanitarian actors have been able to partly fill such gaps, this has been largely achieved in parallel rather than in complement and support to formal and informal municipal actors.

The city of Bangui illustrates challenges of humanitarian action in a context of intense urban violence. The ALNAP lessons paper *Humanitarian interventions in situations of urban violence* (Elena Lucchi, 2013) notes that such conditions affect humanitarian action in that they “generate extreme suffering and vulnerability […], cause displacement, the breakdown of the social fabric, and the breakdown of social and health services and law and order.” The paper recommends notably the development among humanitarian agencies of specialized skills and expertise needed to respond to urban violence crises, including “an understanding of violence and its consequences […] and of cities and urban systems.” This initiative proposes to explore these themes in further detail in the context of the Bangui response, and notably to review the role that municipal actors have played in supporting the crisis response, and how humanitarian actors can better support and establish partnership with local authorities to organize humanitarian response.

* 1. **Mafraq**

Mafraq, located in northern Jordan at a mere 15 kilometers from Za’atari refugee camp, has been severely affected by the influx of refugees from neighboring Syria since 2012. With an estimated pre-crisis population of 56,000 residents, the city and surrounding areas have faced the influx of an additional 76,200 refugees (UNHCR data portal, December 2015). This major population increase has severely affected the ability of local authorities and service providers to deliver basic services, resulting in social tension, frustrations and dire humanitarian consequences for vulnerable host and displaced communities. As noted by UNDP’s Municipal Needs Assessment Report (2014), in Jordanian cities such as Mafraq, “problems of municipal services such as solid waste management, water, sanitation and infrastructure (street lighting and roads) were preexisting, but have been compounded due to the Syrian refugee influx. The situation has exposed the vulnerability of the municipal institutions and local governance.”

Humanitarian and development actors have, since the early stages of the crisis response in northern Jordan, recognized the central role that municipalities can and should play in supporting humanitarian interventions. The Local Governance and Municipal Services task force was thus established in 2013 under the Jordan Response Plan to “target major improvements in service delivery performance in the most affected municipalities, including urgently required investment and capacity building in municipal services and infrastructure” (Jordan Response Plan, 2015). Since, large-scale investments through programs such as the World Bank Jordan Emergency Services and Social Resilience Project (JESSRP) have been launched to help municipalities, including Mafraq, maintain the provision of basic services. While a number of evaluations cover the impact of such programs in terms of service improvements, few have explored the perceptions of local authorities of the aid response. Mafraq therefore presents a unique opportunity to study, through the proposed initiative, how humanitarian and development actors can work to support local authorities and service providers to effectively deliver basic services in a crisis context.

**4.3 Port au Prince**: Haiti, at the time ranked 145th out of 165 countries on the Humanitarian Development Index, was struck in January 2010 by a 7.2 magnitude earthquake that killed over 228,000 people, displaced a further 1.5 million, and decimated the country’s infrastructure, economy and social fabric. This disaster resulted in one of the largest humanitarian and recovery responses to date, which continues to this day. The capital city Port-au-Prince, with an estimated population of 1.9 to 3.3 million (city vs metropolitan area) was severely affected by the earthquake, and has been studied extensively as one of the most complex disaster responses in urban contexts.

While Port au Prince is illustrative of many facets of humanitarian response in urban areas, the initiative proposes to focus on the lessons learnt in relation to the set up of camps in the outskirts of the city to host the evacuated urban population, a solution which has been proposed and implemented in other cities affected by crisis. Among the elements that will be reviewed are: the evacuation; settlement planning and service provision in camps; the shifting vulnerability of the population; the long term solutions; the role of the municipality and its interaction with humanitarian actors

**4.4 Tacloban**

Tropical Storm Haiyan hit the Eastern Visayas Region of Philippines on 8 November 2013, affecting over 14 million people across nine regions, and displacing 4 million from their homes (OCHA). Tacloban, the region’s capital city hosting over 220,000 people, was severely affected and at the heart of the response, both as a result of the typhoon’s destruction and of the ensuing displacement into urban and peri-urban areas of the municipality. A number of evaluations of the Haiyan response have been conducted since its declared completion in November 2014, the majority of which have identified specific lessons learnt linked to the dense and complex urban settings. The Humanitarian Coalition’s *Discussion paper* (SvN rePlan, October 2015) recommends notably that responders should develop approaches that “better reflect complexities of the urban environment, needs of host and displaced populations and capacity of municipal service providers to respond” and “establish partnerships with municipalities and local authorities to plan for, and deliver, integrated ‘relief to recovery’ interventions.” Through the proposed consultations, Impact Initiatives and UCLG Task Force secretariat propose to explore in detail how such an improved understanding of the urban environment and a partnership with local authorities might have helped tackle a fundamental challenge of the Haiyan response, which is recurrent to disaster responses in dense urban contexts: the issue of informal neighborhoods and of No Build Zones.

Indeed, as noted by the IDMC study *Urban informal settlers displaced by disasters: challenges to housing responses*, “Informal settlers are more exposed and vulnerable to natural hazards than the general population and because they tend to live in flimsy, makeshift housing in at-risk areas, they are more likely to be affected and displaced by disasters. Moreover, they tend to receive less housing assistance in their aftermath, because they have only weak or informal tenure.” The study recommends international responders in such contexts to “provide technical and financial assistance on urban governance” to authorities, and notably to municipalities who “can contribute significantly to upholding informal settlers’ right to adequate housing after disasters, particularly in terms of tenure security.” This critical issue and its implications presented critical challenges to the shelter response, as noted in the Strategic Response Plan (OCHA, November 2013). The proposed initiative intends, then, to explore to what degree collaboration between humanitarian actors and local authorities have been able to address this challenge, and what recommendations and best practices can be identified with respect to this engagement.

**4.5 Zintan**

After almost five years since the eruption of violence, conflict and instability, the Libya crisis continues to deepen, with over three million people affected throughout the country (Humanitarian Response Plan). Beyond the impact of service disruptions and insecurity on Libyan residents, the crisis has resulted in the establishment of new migration routes to the EU from Sub-Saharan and North Africa, and affected populations include an estimated 250,000 refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in addition to the 435,000 internally displaced people within Libya. Many of these are undertaking risky migration across the Mediterranean in search of protection and economic opportunities in Europe. Zintan, one of the largest cities of northern Libya with a population of approximately 50,000, was one of the first in Tripolitania to join the Libyan uprising. Due to its location as capital of Jabal al Gharbi district, on route towards Europe, it is an important passing point for many migrants and refugees seeking better opportunities. While in Zintan, migrants play an important role in the local economy, many of whom are employed by municipal authorities in the provision of basic services such as waste collection and management, or infrastructure maintenance.

The role and importance of migrant populations in transit cities has not been sufficiently highlighted so far, but yet represents a key element to understand migration patterns. On the other hand challenges of displacement tracking and monitoring in urban contexts have been well documented, as in the Joint IDP Profiling Service’s (JIPS) *Guidance for profiling urban displacement situations* (June 2014), which notes that “how to locate, advocate for, and assist both [displaced populations] and their host families is a set of unsolved challenges.” The report emphasizes that “profiling is premised on and prioritizes collaboration between different actors”, and that, due to complexities of urban settings, “municipal authorities and technically specialized government agencies are often essential partners” who can add value thanks to their contextual knowledge and political salience. This initiative proposes to review, through consultations co-led by the Zintan municipality, how migrant populations have integrated in the local economy, notably in the provision of municipal services; and how municipal services have and can be engaged in efforts to identify, profile and support displaced communities, including migrants and refugees, that are targeted by humanitarian actors in the city.

5. Tentative action plan prior to WHS

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| **#** | **Action** | **Deadline** | **Focal Point** |
| 1 | Finalise memo with Urban Expert Group, review comments and finalise accordingly | Dec 15th | IMPACT, UEG |
| 2 | Develop methodology, ToR and action plan for each consultations, share with UEG and finalise according to feedback | Dec 20th | IMPACT, UCLG, UEG |
| 3 | Conduct consultations in selected cities | Jan-March | IMPACT, UCLG |
| 4 | Circulate draft of Report to UEG and finalise according to feedback | April 15th | IMPACT, UCLG, UEG |
| 5 | Pre-WHS workshop(s) to present findings | April 15-30th | IMPACT, UCLG, UEG |
| 6 | Presentation at the WHS | May | IMPACT, UCLG, Mayors, UEG |

**- End of memo -**

1. In order to amplify this movement the global network of local and regional governments, UCLG, has created a Task Force on Local and Regional Government Disaster Response. The Secretariat has been delegated to the French section of UCLG, Cités Unies France. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)