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# URBANISATION, DISPLACEMENT AND URBAN PLANNING

themes and issues for the  
humanitarian-development-peacebuilding  
nexus

**RTPI  
Research  
Paper**

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## About this paper

This report reviews the literature on the relationship between urbanisation and forced displacement, highlights gaps in how urbanisation is understood in displacement settings and how planning knowledge is formulated across humanitarian and development practice. It aims to support the two sectors in leveraging urbanisation processes when responding to displacement. It identifies issues around how urbanisation, displacement and response intersect, how we understand the urban character of displacement settings, and the planning approaches used in humanitarian response. In the conclusion, the report identifies three areas for further research on how blended humanitarian-development practice can more effectively engage urbanisation processes.

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## Front and back cover image

Rooftops of Amman. Photo credit: [Who's Denilo ?](#) on Unsplash

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# Executive Summary

This report reviews the academic and grey literature on the relation between urbanisation and forced displacement linked to conflict, violence and disasters, highlights key gaps in how urbanisation is understood in displacement settings and how planning knowledge is formulated across humanitarian and development practice in urbanising contexts. It aims to support planners and other stakeholders across the humanitarian and development sectors in fostering a shared understanding of urbanisation processes and more effectively bridging their efforts to leverage urban dynamics wherever these might be emerging.

Following a steady increase in displaced people found in cities – or urban displacement -, humanitarian actors have recognised that the context for humanitarian operations will increasingly shift towards urban areas and that these present key opportunities to support recovery. Interventions can also align with local trajectories of sustainable development and support peacebuilding - a paradigm known as the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus. However, understanding where these opportunities might arise is not straightforward: urbanisation projections indicate that most of the increase in the global urban population will happen in and around small and medium-sized cities in contexts that already have fewer services available and receive less development support from national and international actors. A significant share of current and future urban displacement is also expected in these areas. If the urban dimension of this displacement is not recognised, this could lead to missed opportunities to capture urban prosperity and support recovery and development.

The report identifies high-level issues around how urbanisation and displacement intersect, how we understand the urban character of displacement settings, and the planning approaches used in response efforts. In particular, we highlight conceptual and practical problems across three areas:

- **The linkages between urbanisation and displacement:** An increase in urban displacement is generally considered to contribute to the growth of urban populations, with urban areas more likely to attract people seeking both refuge and access to improved services and socio-economic opportunities. However, this high-level picture can miss the different, often poorly defined, local dimensions of urbanisation processes, their complex interaction with forced displacement and humanitarian response and their implications for recovery.
- **The urban character of a displacement setting:** Monitoring the spatial aspects of displacement typically involves recording the rural or urban nature of a given setting, and the type of accommodation where the displaced are hosted. However, practical and methodological obstacles have hampered an interpretation of displacement data according to its urban context.
- **Planning expertise in a displacement setting:** Planning expertise is increasingly recognised as key for improving humanitarian outcomes and bridging humanitarian responses with local sustainable development in the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus paradigm. However, established planning expertise used to respond to displacement can be narrowly focussed on spatial standards, while emerging planning approaches used in displacement settings can lack spatial coherence or put the legitimacy

of humanitarian operations at risk.

In the conclusion, the report identifies three areas for further research on how blended humanitarian-development practice can more effectively engage and lever urbanisation processes.

## Introduction

In 2010, the Population Division of the United Nations' Dept. for Economic and Social Affairs (UN ECOSOC) recorded that the previous year the global urban population had surpassed the rural one for the first time<sup>1</sup>.

Following a recorded increase of refugee populations in cities, in 2009, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issued a policy encouraging refugee protection and solutions in urban areas stressing the opportunities that the displaced have in cities<sup>2</sup> linked to the ability of urban systems to foster economic growth. Albeit without providing a definition of urban areas, the policy declared the urban refugee population to be at 50% of the total refugee population. Over a decade on, the evidence base for current estimates of urban displacement remains weak<sup>3</sup>: there is no clear consensus on how to define urban areas for classifying displacement locations and the data to corroborate precise estimates at a global level are considered insufficient for internally displaced people, which represent most of overall displacement numbers<sup>4</sup>.

In 2014, in recognition of the poor humanitarian outcomes prevalent in refugee camps, UNHCR issued a new policy to find alternatives to them, linking it to the older policy on solutions in urban areas<sup>5</sup>. The new policy recognised that refugees have been hosted successfully outside of camps in a variety of arrangements both in rural and urban locations and explicitly extended “the principal objectives of the urban refugee policy to all operational contexts”, rather than just established urban centres.

At the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, a need to strengthen synergies between humanitarian action and development practice was identified: the so-called ‘humanitarian-development nexus’, to which was later added the third element of peacebuilding<sup>6</sup>. There, humanitarian and

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations ECOSOC (2010) *Population Division Urban and Rural Areas 2009*. New York: UN ECOSOC.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR (2009) *Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas*. Geneva: UNHCR.

<sup>3</sup> Cotroneo, A. (2017). *Specificities and Challenges of Responding to Internal Displacement in Urban Settings*. *International Review of the Red Cross*. Vol. 99, n. 904, pp. 283–318.

<sup>4</sup> Anzellini V. and Leduc C. (2020) *Urban Internal Displacement: Data and Evidence*. *Forced Migration Review*. Issue 63, February 2020. Oxford: University of Oxford, Refugee Studies Centre; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2019) *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019*. Geneva: IDMC.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR (2014). *UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps*. Geneva: UNHCR.

<sup>6</sup> Guterres A. (2016). *Secretary-General-designate António Guterres' Remarks to the General Assembly on Taking the Oath of Office*. New York: United Nations Secretary General's Office at UN Head Quarters. For a discussion of key theoretical and practical implications of the nexus see Zetter, R. *Theorising the Humanitarian-Development Nexus: A Political Economy Analysis*, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 34:2, 2021, p. 1766-1786; and Zetter, R. *From Humanitarianism to Development: reconfiguring the international refugee response regime*, Ch. 32 p. 353-362 in Bastia, T., and Skeldon, R. *Routledge*

development actors committed to a “new way of working”<sup>7</sup> based on increased cooperation, leveraging the specific strengths of different organisations and revising timeframes for programming and delivery. The Global Alliance for Urban Crises (GAUC) was also formed; currently chaired by UN-Habitat, the GAUC is a multi-disciplinary, collaborative community of practice bringing together a variety of partners from both humanitarian and development sectors working to address the urban implications of crisis response.

Later that year, at the UN Summit on Addressing Large Scale Movements of Refugees and Migrants, UN member states adopted the New York Declaration<sup>8</sup>, a plan for addressing large scale movements of refugees and migrants. The declaration laid out a vision for a comprehensive response to these movements: the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). Lessons learned in the application of the CRRF paved the way for the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)<sup>9</sup>. Both documents instrumentalised the 2016 Summit providing the policy and operational frameworks for the nexus and for strengthening the impetus to respond to displacement in urban settings.

These developments prompt planners to contribute to a better understanding of urbanisation in a displacement setting, support response and help bridge humanitarian and development efforts with context relevant and appropriate planning expertise. By offering guiding principles for the spatial coordination of humanitarian interventions, planning can not only play a key role in supporting the sustainability and effectiveness of a response to a displacement situation at a strategic level (e.g. at the scale of a city or region) but help bridge humanitarian and development efforts by facilitating a mobilisation of resources, namely around local land use changes, that support better recovery outcomes. In doing so, urban planning can help advance both sustainable development and humanitarian outcomes and foster the achievement of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities, as well as the objectives of the Global Compacts on Refugees and for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

# 1. Urban planning and displacement

## Urbanisation in a humanitarian context

The term urbanisation is broad and its use in a humanitarian context can be ambiguous. In demography, the level of urbanisation is the proportion of the share of an area’s population that lives in cities, and the rate of urbanisation is the degree to which it is increasing or decreasing in a defined area (e.g. in an administrative region, a country, etc.), covering both the natural population growth within cities and the migration of people from rural areas to cities<sup>10</sup>. By extension, the term

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*Handbook of Migration and Development*, R., London: Routledge. March 2020.

<sup>7</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2017). *New Way of Working*. New York: UNOCHA.

<sup>8</sup> UN General Assembly (2016), *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*, A/Res/71/1, New York: UN GA.

<sup>9</sup> UN General Assembly (2018), *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Part II: global compact on refugees*, General Assembly Official Records, Seventy-third, Session Supplement No. 12 (A/73/12 (Part II)), New York: UN GA.

<sup>10</sup> McGranahan G. and Satterthwaite D. (2014) *Urbanisation: Concepts and Trends*. Working Paper,

urbanisation is also used to mean the physical growth of cities' built-up areas, even when the transition of agricultural land to non-farming land uses is linked neither to demographic urbanisation nor to urban population growth.

Humanitarian crises and responses can influence these changes in a short span of time. For example, a conflict-stricken town can decrease its population while not shrinking its footprint<sup>11</sup>; a disaster-hit town can expand its footprint without growing its population<sup>12</sup>; a town can receive a sudden inflow of displaced people increasing both its footprint and population<sup>13</sup>, etc. Cities heavily affected by a displacement crisis can continue to have operating planning systems that restrict spatial development or regulate segments of its housing market influencing how a crisis and urbanisation processes interact and how protection objectives are met<sup>14</sup>.

Despite advancements in understanding the workings of urban systems to improve humanitarian response in cities<sup>15</sup> and relevant work from humanitarian research organisations such as the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) to unpack the meaning of urbanisation for humanitarian operations<sup>16</sup>, there are no shared definitions of urban areas, cities, towns - or neighbourhoods within them<sup>17</sup> -, nor common frameworks to support humanitarians to refer to the different demographic and spatial dimensions of urbanisation.

## Planning and the 'power of cities' to respond to displacement

Planning has an established role in preparedness – particularly for disasters - when it is used to deliver climate adaptation measures, manage urban expansion and mitigate the risk of displacement – for example linked to more frequent extreme weather events and a wider exposure of sprawling unplanned settlements to more frequent lower degree ones<sup>18</sup>. It can also support cities in addressing the accumulation of different types of risk for instance due to weak urban institutions, the poor localisation or standards of new urban expansion and their effects on the

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London: International Institute for Environment and Development.

<sup>11</sup> See for example: World Bank Group (2017) *Syria Damage Assessment of Selected Cities: Aleppo, Hama, Idlib*. Phase III, March 2017. Washington D.C.: World Bank.

<sup>12</sup> See for example: Petter A.-M. et al. (2020) *City profile: Canaan, Haiti - a new post disaster city*. Cities. Vol. 104.

<sup>13</sup> See for example: Osman Ali O. M. and Mohamed Mahmoud U. A. (2016) *From a Temporary Emergency Shelter to an Urbanized Neighborhood: the Abu Shoak IDP camp in North Dārūr*. Sudan Working Paper 2016 n. 3. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute.

<sup>14</sup> Wind B. and Ibrahim B. (2020) *The war-time urban development of Damascus: how the geography and political economy of warfare affects housing patterns*. Habitat International, Vol. 96, February 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Boano C. and Marten Caceres C. (2017) *Think Urban and Learn from the City: Exploring Urban Dimensions of Humanitarianism: summary report*. Urban Crises Learning Partnership (UCLP).

<sup>16</sup> Campbell L. (2016) *Stepping Back: Understanding Cities and Their Systems*. London: Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance.

<sup>17</sup> Sanyal R. (2021) *Making urban humanitarian policy: the "neighbourhood approach" in Lebanon*. Urban Geography. Vol. 1, n. 21.

<sup>18</sup> UNDRR (2020) *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2020*. Geneva: UNISDR.

urban poor and vulnerable<sup>19</sup>.

As humanitarian crises become more complex and the climate crisis deepens, managing urban growth patterns will become increasingly relevant to reduce the risk of displacement in a wider range of crises, including droughts and conflicts: for example, in rapidly urbanising border regions of Sub-Saharan Africa already affected by displacement<sup>20</sup>. Climate change-related slow-onset hazards can also compound the impact of conflicts and produce, among other things, forced migration to cities<sup>21</sup> or influence push factors of displacement, for example when armed groups develop strategies to take advantage of changing environmental and political conditions<sup>22</sup>. As a result, the scope of planning knowledge to support preparedness expands<sup>23</sup> for example to limit the impact of cities on local resource extraction or support large-scale planned relocation away from areas with increasingly adverse environmental conditions<sup>24</sup>.

Nexus approaches however, introduce the principle that planning can be used help align humanitarian responses' spatial interventions to local trajectories of urban sustainable development. The phrase 'the power of cities [to respond to displacement]', from the title of a think piece published by UNHCR Innovation, is sometimes used to convey this idea: the article called to overcome the categories used to define displacement settings by focussing on the opportunities offered by urban dynamics wherever these emerge – in cities as well as in urbanising refugee and internally displaced person (IDP) settlements and camps<sup>25</sup>.

Approaches inspired by a better integration of humanitarian and development practices – the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus – would be deployed through actions for responding to displacement conceived to involve development actors from the onset or as early as possible, so that they can continue as forms of localised engagement promoting development throughout the period of a crisis and beyond<sup>26</sup>. The ability of urbanisation processes to support economic growth would offer opportunities to multiply their impact, making cities and urbanising

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<sup>19</sup> Dodman D. et al. (2017) *African Urbanisation and Urbanism: implications for risk accumulation and reduction*. International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction. Vol. 26 December 2017.

<sup>20</sup> OECD Club du Sahel (2019). *Population and Morphology of Border Cities*. West African Papers n. 21, April 2019. Paris: OECD Club du Sahel.

<sup>21</sup> Goodwin-Gill G. and McAdam J. (2017) *UNHCR and Climate Change, Disasters, and Displacement*. Geneva: UNHCR.

<sup>22</sup> See for example the discussion of Boko Haram's action in the region around Lake Chad by R. P. Curiel at al. (2020) *Uncovering the Internal Structure of Boko Haram through its Mobility Patterns*. Applied Network Science, Vol. 5, n. 28.

<sup>23</sup> See for example on floods and droughts: Raikes J. et al. (2019) *Pre-disaster Planning for Floods and Droughts: a systematic review*. International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction. Vol. 38, August 2019.

<sup>24</sup> See: Science - Special Issue, vol 372, n. 6548. 2021. *Fall Back Strategies: climate-induced relocation*. Science.

<sup>25</sup> Park H. (2016) *The Power of Cities*. Geneva: UNHCR Innovation.

<sup>26</sup> UNDP, UNHCR and UNIRISD (2020) *Responding to Protracted Displacement Using the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Approach*. Geneva: UNIRISD. The World Bank report *Cities of Refuge* outlines key characteristics of nexus interventions conceived for urban areas: World Bank (2017) *Cities of Refuge in the Middle East: bringing an urban lens to the forced displacement challenge*. Washington D.C.: World Bank Group.



regions an ideal backdrop for their deployment<sup>27</sup>.

Planning approaches permeate the local development component of the nexus in the form of interventions that have a long history of experimentation in urban contexts - such as slum-upgrading programmes, community-led data collection, spatial plans co-produced with communities and participatory risk management strategies – adapted to the specific challenges of humanitarian response. However, the role of planning expertise to support recovery at the scale of a city or region affected by displacement is not explicit. Namely, UK development programmes targeting economic growth in cities are underpinned by the theory of urban economies of agglomeration<sup>28</sup> whereby urbanisation processes, by spatially concentrating people and firms would favour overspills of knowledge, technology and productivity across businesses and economic sectors leading to increases in the overall economic output which planning can facilitate through better infrastructure and by sustainably inputting land into an urban economic system<sup>29</sup>. In a displacement setting, if the agglomeration economies typically accompanying urbanisation grow at pace with an inflow of newcomers, under the right conditions, they could generate sufficient economic opportunities to help absorb the shock of displacement.

Some researchers have proposed to conceptualise internal displacement as part of a wider trend of migration to cities highlighting the need to support local governments in planning for migratory inflows and internal displacement and capture the labour, social networks, knowledge, entrepreneurship abilities, etc. brought in by IDPs as opportunities for economic growth and increased local government revenues while addressing their urban challenges<sup>30</sup>. The International Labour Organisation's (ILO) guiding principles on the access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to the labour market<sup>31</sup> suggest how to create conditions for accommodating all types of displacement<sup>32</sup>.

Planned spatial interventions supporting urban economies of agglomeration, e.g. by proposing land to localise affordable housing, infrastructure and economic activities in connected places could then serve as key development objectives in a displacement setting, particularly as displacement to urban settings can accentuate already severe deficits in housing supply for the urban poor leading to escalating rental costs and increased informality. In expanding economies, such as China in the last twenty years, urban development has been a key driver of development - as well as poverty and vulnerability reduction - particularly when it resulted in managed land use

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<sup>27</sup> Cities offer specific opportunities for refugee economic inclusion. The following UNHCR concept note uses a UNESCO definition of economic inclusion which explicitly refers to the role of cities: UNHCR (2019) *Refugee Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion 2019-2023: Global Strategy Concept Note*. Geneva: UNHCR.

<sup>28</sup> See for example: DFID (2015) *Business Case Summary Sheet: Infrastructure and Cities for Economic Development (ICED)*. London: DFID. And: FCO (2015). *Prosperity Fund Business Case: Global Future Cities Programme*. London: FCO.

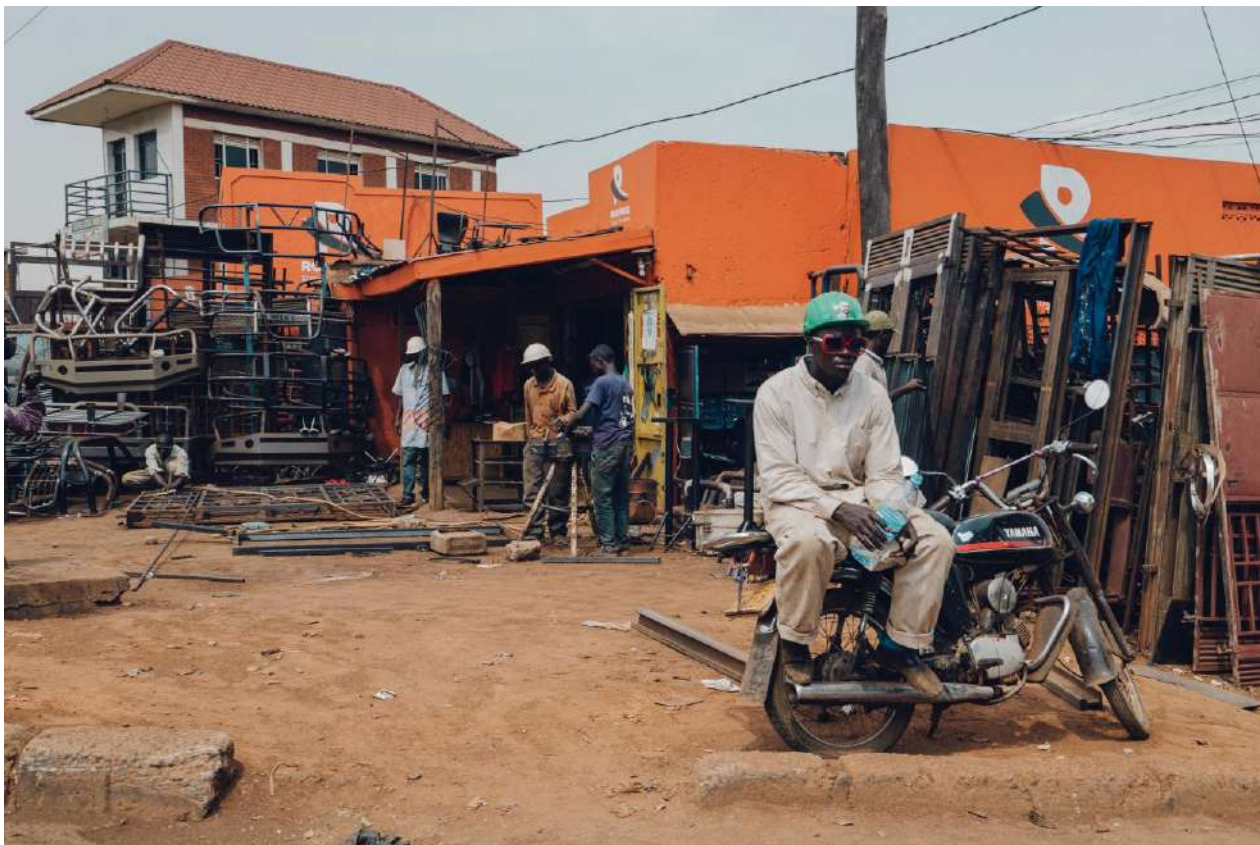
<sup>29</sup> Bryan G. et al. (2019) *Cities: Evidence paper – draft*. London: International Growth Centre.

<sup>30</sup> Earle L. et al. (2020) *When Internal Displacement Meets Urbanisation: Making Cities Work for Internally Displaced People*. Refugee Survey Quarterly. Vol. 30, n. 4. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>31</sup> ILO (2016) *Guiding principles on the access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to the labour market*. Geneva: ILO.

<sup>32</sup> ILO (2020), *Employment and decent work in refugee and other forced displacement contexts: Compendium of ILO's lessons learned, emerging good practices and policy guidance*. Geneva: ILO.

changes from rural to urban<sup>33</sup>. Applied to the nexus, such processes might support in mobilising new resources for improving humanitarian outcomes but would also require specific attention to the effective inclusivity and sustainability of urban interventions. Planning as a series of spatial interventions to manage or steer land use changes and land development, address and manage informality, coordinate spatial interventions and support in regulating or creating land and housing markets is faced with specific and rapidly changing challenges in a humanitarian context. These challenges are both technical and ethical.



Street scene in Kampala: Photo credit [Random Institute](#) on Unsplash

Researchers have proposed that response to displacement itself can “cogovern and co-shape socio-spatial relations” in the surrounding communities and areas influencing local development trajectories, in a process they called “humanitarian spill-over”<sup>34</sup>. There have also been explicit calls to capture any land value uplifts resulting from humanitarian spatial interventions – e.g. improvements of road infrastructure – to serve local development objectives<sup>35</sup>. Fragmentary and anecdotal evidence from a variety of contexts suggests that urbanisation processes in a

<sup>33</sup> Jin W. et al. (2018) *Impact of Land Input on Economic Growth at Different Stages of Development in Chinese Cities and Regions*. Sustainability. Vol. 10 n. 2847.

<sup>34</sup> Jansen B. J. and de Bruijne M. (2020) *Humanitarian spill-over: the expansion of hybrid humanitarian governance from camps to refugee hosting societies in East Africa*. Journal of Eastern African Studies. Vol. 14, n. 4 pp. 669-688.

<sup>35</sup> See for example: Murillo F. (2017). *Migrants and Rapid Urbanization: a new agenda for humanitarian and development urban planning?* Proceedings of United Nations' Expert group Meeting on Sustainable Cities, Human Mobility and International Migration; Beehner L. (2015). *Are Syria's Do-It-Yourself Refugees Outliers or Examples of a New Norm?* Journal of International Affairs. Vol. 68, n. 2, pp. 157-175.

displacement setting are indeed influenced by humanitarian response, with spatial decisions taken during the response - including in its early phases – potentially locking in spatial inequalities and unsustainable paths of development, favouring certain patterns of urban growth as well as influencing land values. Humanitarian responders and researchers have observed an expansion of non-agricultural land uses around emergency shelter operations in peri-urban areas of Lebanon<sup>36</sup>; heightened building activity around refugee camps in Jordan<sup>37</sup>; increases in land values around returnee shelters in Somalia<sup>38</sup>; increased rents and makeshift residential unit subdivisions and illegal commercial-to-residential conversions in Beirut in response to Syrian refugee inflows<sup>39</sup>.

Shifts in economic activities from farming to non-farming have been observed around large humanitarian operations in rural areas too<sup>40</sup> resulting in intensified temporary non-agricultural land uses around them<sup>41</sup>. These shifts have been estimated to significantly contribute to the local economy around the Kakuma refugee camp<sup>42</sup> and the Dadaab refugee complex in Kenya<sup>43</sup>, and their analysis within the Ugandan refugee settlement of Nakivale has led University of Oxford researchers to suggest supporting “non-agricultural income-generating activities” as an avenue to increase the self-reliance of displaced people<sup>44</sup>.

Using urban planning approaches to ensure not just that response to displacement is sustainable, but that any land value uplifts are fairly distributed and channelled towards better humanitarian outcomes and local sustainable development requires identifying the nature of the urban dynamics at play in a displacement setting, the types of planning approaches being used by different actors as well as their limitations, ways of working and remits. The next two sections address issues in those two areas.

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<sup>36</sup> Dorai K. (2010) *From Camp Dwellers to Urban Refugees? urbanization and marginalization of refugee camps in Lebanon*. In M. A. Khalidi (Ed.) (2010) *Manifestations of Identity: the lived reality of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon*. Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies and Institute Francais du Proche-Orient.

<sup>37</sup> World Bank (2017) *Cities of Refuge in the Middle East: bringing an urban lens to the forced displacement challenge*. Washington D.C.: World Bank Group.

<sup>38</sup> Kaplan E. and S. Saliba (2018) *A Move Away from Refugee Camps Requires a Collaborative Solution for Housing*. Airbel Impact Lab and International Rescue Committee.

<sup>39</sup> Fawaz M. (2019) *Planning and the Refugee Crisis: informality as a framework of analysis and reflection*. Planning Theory. Vol. 16, n.1, pp. 99-115.

<sup>40</sup> Perouse M.- A. de Montclos and Kagwanja P. M. (2000) *Refugee Camps or Cities? the socio-economic dynamics of the Dadaab and Kakuma Camps in Northern Kenya*. Journal of Refugee Studies, Vol. 13, n. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Alix-Garcia J. et al. (2013) *The Landscape of Conflict: IDPs, aid and land-use change in Darfur*. Journal of Economic Geography Advance Access. Vol. 3, n. 4, pp. 589-617.

<sup>42</sup> Sanghi, A. et. al. (2016) *Yes in my backyard? The economics of refugees and their social dynamics in Kakuma, Kenya*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

<sup>43</sup> The Guardian (2012). *Kenya can turn the Dadaab Refugee Camps into an Asset*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/37gRCoU> on 01-03-2021.

<sup>44</sup> Bjorkhaug I. (2020) *Revisiting the Refugee-Host Relationship in Nakivale Refugee Settlement: a dialogue with the Oxford Refugee Studies Centre*. Journal on Migration and Human Security, vol 8., n. 3.

## 2. Urbanisation in displacement settings

### Aligning response with sustainable urban development

Coupling humanitarian support with actions to foster local development in urbanising areas can improve displacement outcomes. It does this by leveraging local urbanisation processes and regional and national development plans to support the identification of the appropriate focus, scale and locations for nexus interventions. Of the top 5 countries hosting a displaced population in 2019, Turkey and Uganda had annual rates of increase in their urban population of above 2% estimated for the period 2015 to 2020 (with Uganda showing the highest rate globally at 5.7%)<sup>45</sup> and were aligning parts of their responses to displacement with efforts to address urbanisation.

For example, of the 3.6m ca. Syrian refugees registered in 2020 in Turkey, about half a million were officially registered in Istanbul while the national government was trying to actively relocate unregistered ones from the city<sup>46</sup>. Many were either unregistered and/or resided outside of Istanbul. In several Turkish towns, hosting Syrian refugees was taken up by local governments<sup>47</sup> as a challenge as well as an opportunity to deliver local infrastructure and services across host and displaced communities aligned to local plans for urban growth<sup>48</sup>.

In Uganda, the town of Arua has been identified as a regional development centre in the national strategy Uganda Vision 2040 and is projected to grow from the current 70,000 people ca. to over 300,000 by 2040, with foreseen investments in infrastructure, services, and housing<sup>49</sup>. Arua's currently rural hinterland covers an area in north-western Uganda where over 900,000 refugees are registered across six local administrative districts<sup>50</sup> covered by a government funded project promoting a development response to displacement<sup>51</sup>. A UN-Habitat report suggests that large-scale regional planning across Arua and the neighbouring municipalities of Koboko and Nebbi could provide opportunities to manage sustainable urban development in ways that are inclusive of the local refugee population<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> UNCHR (2019) *Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2018*; Central Intelligence Agency (2020) *The World Factbook 2020, Urbanization*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/2TUtHsr> on 03-04-2021.

<sup>46</sup> Deutsche Welle (2020), *Turkey: Nearly 100,000 unregistered Syrians removed from Istanbul*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/37ijU2a> on 12-07-2021.

<sup>47</sup> Betts, A. et al. (2021) *What Difference do Mayors Make? The Role of Municipal Authorities in Turkey and Lebanon's Response to Syrian Refugees*. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. Vol. 34, n. 1, pp. 491–519.

<sup>48</sup> UN-Habitat, SKL and RESLOG (2020) *Urban Profiling in Humanitarian and Development Contexts: a guide for Turkish municipalities impacted by migration and the Syrian refugee crisis*. Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

<sup>49</sup> Arup and Cities Alliance (2016) *Future Proofing Cities: Secondary Cities Uganda*. London: Arup.

<sup>50</sup> UNHCR (2021) *Uganda Comprehensive Refugee Data Portal*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/3A7KqQR> on 27-07-2021.

<sup>51</sup> Department of Refugees, Office of the Prime Minister (2018) *Uganda Development Response to Displacement Project (DRDIP). Additional Financing: Updated Environmental and Social Management Framework*. Kampala: Government of Uganda.

<sup>52</sup> UN-Habitat (2019) *Combined Report – West Nile Region, Uganda: integrated multi-scalar planning in*

When planning capacity is low, opportunities for such alignments might be identified by international actors. In Niger, a country with one of the most neglected humanitarian crises in 2019 according to the Norwegian Refugee Council<sup>53</sup> and with an annual urbanisation rate over the 2015-2020 period of 4.27%<sup>54</sup>, displacement is influencing urban growth in regions such as Tahaoua and Tillabery<sup>55</sup>. A World Bank report suggests inclusive provision of housing across host and displaced communities in border towns to support sustainable development in a fragile and drought-prone region<sup>56</sup>.

## Urbanisation and displacement outcomes

However, when assessing the potential for urbanisation to support recovery, it should not be assumed that an increase in the urban population necessarily fosters economic growth and can support recovery if other conditions for development are lacking or are not supported. While development is generally achieved through an increased rate of urbanisation of the overall population<sup>57</sup>, crises and responses can influence urban dynamics and a given area can expand its urban population without an increase in local economic output. In some regions, an expansion of urbanised areas can be significantly driven by consumption, for example linked to growing extractive economic systems based on mining and deforestation, rather than by a reorganisation of production<sup>58</sup> and some currently urbanising regions in Africa and Latin America increase their urban population and expand their built-up areas without gains in productivity<sup>59</sup>.

This poses specific challenges for planning as there is limited evidence on urban economies of agglomeration and land value creation in displacement settings, and how these could help with the specific challenges displaced people face in cities or urbanising areas. For instance, a recent review of the evidence from African cities indicates that spatial fragmentation and disconnectedness are key factors hampering local economies of agglomeration<sup>60</sup> and evidence from some of them suggests that these might particularly affect displaced people as vulnerable migrants struggling to compete with local urban communities for jobs and accommodation in connected and affordable locations<sup>61</sup>.

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*Koboko, Arua, Nebbi.* Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

<sup>53</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council (2020) *The World's Most Neglected Crises in 2019*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/3xnP03c> on 10-03-2021.

<sup>54</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (2020) *The World Factbook 2020, Urbanization*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/2TUthSr> on 03-04-2021.

<sup>55</sup> UNHCR Niger (2020) *Update Tahoua and Tillabery Regions*. Geneva: UNHCR.

<sup>56</sup> World Bank (2021) *Niger Urbanization Review: Supporting Niger's Modern Oases*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.

<sup>57</sup> World Bank (2020) *Urban Development - Overview*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/3xsAh6V> on 17-03-2021.

<sup>58</sup> Bryceson B. et al. (2012) *Eureka and Beyond: mining's impact on African urbanisation*. Journal of Contemporary African Studies, Vol. 30, n. 4.

<sup>59</sup> OECD/European Commission (2020) *Cities in the World: A New Perspective on Urbanisation*. OECD Urban Studies. Paris: OECD Publishing.

<sup>60</sup> Lall S. V. et al. (2017). *Africa's Cities: Opening Doors to the World*. Washington D.C.: World Bank Group.

<sup>61</sup> World Bank (2017) *Cities of Refuge in the Middle East: Bringing and Urban Lens to the Forced*

In general, there is still a gap in knowledge in the urban displacement literature on the role of urban and regional economies in supporting urban refugees and IDPs<sup>62</sup>, linked to a limited availability of longitudinal or comparative studies on how displaced people find livelihoods and accommodation in urban areas<sup>63</sup>. While the economic and social dynamics around some refugee camps have been a focus of quantitative research which indicated positive economic impacts for surrounding communities within a 10 km radius<sup>64</sup>, urbanisation processes around camps and settlements have not been systematically investigated<sup>65</sup>.

Understanding what contextual factors support capturing the value created by urban growth to improve displacement outcomes covers a broad research agenda. When researchers have found evidence of regional or urban economic growth supporting recovery and benefitting displaced and host communities, it was supported by targeted development investments, such as infrastructure improvements around refugee settlements in western Tanzania<sup>66</sup>, or by private investments in capital-intensive activities, such as construction in the Eastleigh area of Nairobi funded with the contribution of remittances from the broader Somali diaspora<sup>67</sup>. Blended humanitarian-development practice can envisage a role for planning expertise as early as possible - during, in the final part, or soon after a crisis - to enable processes such as the ones mentioned above.

An improved and early spatial coordination of response efforts is emerging as an avenue for the inclusion of the displaced, namely by ensuring that the locations for hosting them are not only safe and fit-for-purpose but connected, within reach of employment opportunities and aligned or compatible with prevalent local settlement patterns<sup>68</sup>. This requires complex data and information to be made promptly available to responders and other stakeholders. However, in 2017, a World Bank report described data on global displacement as “no better than educated guesses” and suggested that their poor quality was a significant obstacle for materialising the nexus<sup>69</sup>. This adds

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*Displacement Challenge*. Washington D.C.: World Bank Group.

<sup>62</sup> te Lintelo D. et al. (2018) *Wellbeing and Protracted Urban Displacement: refugees and hosts in Jordan and Lebanon*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies; Dodman D. (2016) *Revealing the Hidden Refugees in African Cities*. Blog for IIED. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/3C7v4oK> on 01-08-2021.

<sup>63</sup> An exception to this is: ICRC (N/A) *Displaced in Cities: experiencing and responding to urban internal displacement outside camps*. Studies focusing on single cities are more common, see: Muindi K. and Mberu B. (2019) *Urban refugees in Nairobi: tackling barriers to accessing housing, services and infrastructure - Working Paper*. London: IIED; papers in the ODI's series *Sanctuary in the City?* e.g. Pavanello S. and Haysom S. (2012) *Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Amman*. HPG Working Paper. London: Overseas Development Institute; Aysa-Lastra, M. (2011) *Integration of Internally Displaced Persons in Urban Labour Markets: a case study of the IDP population in Soacha, Colombia*. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. Vol. 24, n. 2, pp. 277–303.

<sup>64</sup> Taylor J. E. et al. (2016) *Economic Impact of Refugees. Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*. July 5, 2016. Vol. 113, n. 27, p. 7449-7453. Washington D.C.: National Academy of Science.

<sup>65</sup> Porter, L. (Ed.) (2019) *Borders and Refuge: Citizenship, Mobility and Planning in a Volatile World*. Interface, Planning Theory and Practice, Vol. 20.

<sup>66</sup> Ongpin P. A. (2009) *Refugees: Asset or Burden to Tanzania?* *Forced Migration Review*. Vol.33.

<sup>67</sup> Carrier N. (2016) *Little Mogadishu: Eastleigh, Nairobi's global Somali hub*. London: Hurst & Company.

<sup>68</sup> UN-Habitat (2020) *Urban Planning Responses in Post-crisis Contexts*. Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

<sup>69</sup> World Bank (2017) *Forcibly Displaced: toward a development approach supporting refugees, the internally displaced, and their hosts*. Washington D.C. : World Bank Group.

to a structural lack of reliable data on urbanisation and cities in the global south, namely in Sub Saharan Africa<sup>70</sup>, where national authorities use a wide range of different parameters to define cities, such as administrative units or statistical areas, and often overlook informal urban areas. For example, in Cameroon where over one million people are now internally displaced and over 400,000 refugees from Nigeria and the Central African Republic hosted<sup>71</sup>, settlements of a few thousand inhabitants are defined as urban<sup>72</sup>. This can distort the analysis of urbanisation rates nationally and its comparability across neighbouring countries.



The UNRWA camp of Talbieh, Jordan: Photo credit [Omar Chatriwala](#) Flickr Creative Commons

As a result of these gaps and discrepancies, the 2016 UNHCR statistical yearbook, published in 2017, did not report on the urban or rural nature of displacement locations for about 27m people of concern, or 39.7% of the total in that year. Of the 1031 locations surveyed – mostly by national authorities -, 140 were classified as “unknown/varied”, and over half were rural<sup>73</sup>. The classification of some well-known displacement locations can be contradictory across data sources. For

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70 D. Satterthwaite (2021) *Invisibilising African Cities and their Populations*. Blog for African Cities Research Consortium accessed at <https://bit.ly/3iiOgrL> on 27-07-2021.

71 IDMC (2021) *Out of Sight: Cameroon's downward spiral of violence and displacement*. News story accessed at <https://bit.ly/3lqhC9H> on 27-07-2021.

72 Potts D.H. (2012) *Whatever happened to Africa's Rapid Urbanisation?* London: Africa Research institute - King's College.

73 UNHCR (2017) *UNCHR Statistical Yearbook 2016*. Geneva: UNHCR.

example, the Jordanian authorities classify the Za'atari refugee camp's location as rural<sup>74</sup> even though in the last decades, significant sprawling urbanisation has been recorded in the area<sup>75</sup> and the World Bank has described it as an urbanising camp<sup>76</sup>. Such discrepancies can hamper the identification of urbanisation processes in displacement settings and lead to missed opportunities for nexus interventions conceived for urban contexts.

Humanitarian action is increasingly supported by open and free geographical and spatial datasets, satellite imagery and collaborative tools, such as the EU Global Human Settlements Layer, the United Nations' Satellite Centre Unosat or the Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Initiative<sup>77</sup>. Opportunities to strengthen data quality and consistency in this area are also offered by ambitious initiatives such as the approach developed jointly by the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to universally define cities and towns and consistently measure global urbanisation<sup>78</sup>. Organisations such as the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), and UN agencies, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), also support and coordinate better data collection in volatile and rapid displacement situations increasingly with urbanisation in mind<sup>79</sup> by making data open and more accessible and developing tracking tools<sup>80</sup>. The Global Alliance for Urban Crises has also advocated for a better accessibility of local data on urban systems to identify the gaps between the services a city provides and the increase in demand produced by displacement<sup>81</sup>. Key innovations have happened at a local level too with strengthened and participatory data collection methods, namely through the profiling of urban areas and settlements for the planning of durable solutions for displaced people. These initiatives have been developed and supported by the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS), an interagency service that brings together humanitarian, development and government actors together to jointly collect information and support local ownership of the results. These exercises tend to bring together spatial environmental, social and economic data relevant to the analysis of the local urban economy, such as the location, type and level of employment of the displaced<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ababsa M. (2013) *Atlas of Jordan: changes in the regional distribution of the population*. Beirut: Institut Francais du Proche-Orient.

<sup>76</sup> World Bank (2017) *Cities of Refuge in the Middle East: bringing an urban lens to the forced displacement challenge*. Washington D.C.: World Bank Group.

<sup>77</sup> For more information on these see relevant websites: UNITAR (2021) United Nations Satellite Centre UNOSAT. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/3CpySIA> on 12-07-2021; European Commission (2021) Global Human Settlement Layer – GHSL. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/2Vk3nZe> on 12-07-2021; Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (2021), What We Do. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/3ioSj68> on 21-07-2021.

<sup>78</sup> OECD and European Commission (2020) *Cities in the World: A New Perspective on Urbanisation*. OECD Urban Studies. Paris: OECD Publishing.

<sup>79</sup> IDMC (2020) *Internal Displacement Index 2020 Report*. Geneva: IDMC.

<sup>80</sup> IOM (2021) *Displacement Tracking Matrix*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/3yC6Lxj> on 12-07-2021; IOM GMDAC (2021) *Global Migration Data Portal*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/2VvGrWC> on 12-07-2021.

<sup>81</sup> Global Alliance for Urban Crises (2019) *Urban Profiling for Better Responses to Humanitarian Crises*. Geneva: JIPS and UN-Habitat.

<sup>82</sup> See for example the JIPS coordinated analysis of the Abu Shouk and El Salam camps in Al Fashir's urban area in North Darfur. JIPS (2019) *Progress Towards Durable Solutions in Abu Shouk and El Salam IDP*



Consistent and reliable geographical information on the level of urbanisation, settlement patterns and prevalent land use classes in an area affected by displacement could help to rapidly explore opportunities to lever urbanisation processes in a response and support other stakeholders in assessing the value that displaced people can contribute to the economic and social development of an urbanising region. Yet, as of 2021, the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs' Space Based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response's report on The State of Open Humanitarian Data states that still just above half of humanitarian operations monitored by the initiative have complete and consistent data sets, including geographical information<sup>83</sup>.

## 3. Urban planning expertise in displacement settings

### Planning in a humanitarian context

In a displacement setting, different actors can understand planning in different ways and use planning expertise for different objectives. Humanitarian actors can use planning expertise to ensure the fulfilment of displaced people's housing, land and property rights and more generally to guarantee that essential conditions for their protection are met, for example by enforcing spatial standards in emergency shelter provision, and increasingly to ensure that the displaced have access to livelihood opportunities. The local and national government entities that have jurisdiction over land, housing and infrastructure in a displacement setting can think of planning as a set of strategies, policies and legal instruments for achieving balanced local development. These sets of policies and instruments may or may not have dedicated provisions to facilitate the absorption of an influx of displaced people in a locale, or to manage displacement within an area.

In normal circumstances, the source of planning's legitimacy is derived from national and local legislation and policy, which can be suspended or integrated by emergency measures in a crisis. However, in many displacement settings – for example in some conflict areas - a suspension or weakness of regulatory frameworks for key planning functions can determine situations where the legitimacy or spatial decisions is derived from other sources, such as territorial agreements between conflicting parties<sup>84</sup>.

In general, the planning role of development actors in connection with displacement can be that of either supporting planning functions as part of preparedness efforts to prevent a crisis or supporting communities and the critical work of local governments during the recovery from a crisis – e.g. post-disaster reconstruction, resolution of land disputes, housing support to returnees, etc. However, there is a gap in understanding what the role and legitimacy of planning expertise can be

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*camps, North Darfur, Sudan. Durable solutions analysis 2019.* Karthoum: Sudanese Government's Joint Mechanism for Durable Solutions.

<sup>84</sup> See for example Okumu, J. (2018) *South Sudan: migration dialogues to prevent conflict between host communities and pastoralists*. In UN-Habitat, Global Land Tool Network and International Institute for Rural Reconstruction (2018) *Land and Conflict: lessons learned from the field on conflict sensitive land governance and peacebuilding*, pp. 88–94. Nairobi: UNON.

in the critical phase when, in the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus paradigm, humanitarian action should be conceived to facilitate a transition into a localised engagement promoting development.

Development and humanitarian practice operate within different timeframes, which are reflected in their understanding and approach to planning issues. Humanitarian interventions can be delivered as part of funding cycles of 6 to 18 months, while development initiatives addressing urban issues and the built environment tend to operate through funding cycles of 3 to 5 years or longer, which can affect how planning approaches across humanitarian and development practice are conceived.

A lack of capacity and funding for coordinating across the two sectors is a key barrier. However, key challenges derive from the different principles and ways of working which inform humanitarian and development practices. In a development context, planning is used to negotiate long-term spatial decisions that - ideally in an accountable and democratic manner – foster sustainable development by balancing competing interests over land, redistribute land value uplifts and make new services available etc. While aiming at advancing the public interest, planning can locally favour some stakeholders over others.

On the other hand, humanitarian actors' spatial interventions are aimed at the protection of the displaced and guided by the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality<sup>85</sup>. Places that might offer favourable conditions for recovery and long-term development might be unsafe during a crisis or expose humanitarians operating in them to the risk of being perceived as non-neutral. For these reasons, while the role of planning is recognised as critical in bridging humanitarian and development practice to respond to displacement, its deployment in an emergency setting makes the contradictions of intervening on land stand out as a specific aspect of the broader challenge of maintaining humanitarian principles while working at the nexus<sup>86</sup>. In places that are urbanising on the back of humanitarian interventions, such as some places in northern Uganda<sup>87</sup>, tensions between humanitarian and development practices can be particularly felt around land<sup>88</sup>.

Attempting to harmonise spatial decisions made during the response phase of a crisis so that they are legitimate, mitigate impacts and lead to outcomes that support recovery and local development, requires disentangling the different planning approaches used in a humanitarian context, their origin and evolution.

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<sup>85</sup> UN General Assembly (1991) *A/Resolution 46/182*. New York: United Nations; and UN General Assembly (2005), *A/Resolution 58/114*, New York: United Nations.

<sup>86</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of nexus-related challenges for humanitarian work see: Oxfam (2019) *The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: what does it mean for multi-mandated organizations? Discussion Paper*. London: Oxfam.

<sup>87</sup> Reynolds Whyte S. (2014) Urbanisation by Subtraction: the afterlife of camps in northern Uganda. *Journal of Modern African Studies*. Issue 4, December 2014, pp. 597 – 662.

<sup>88</sup> Lie J. H. S. (2020) The Humanitarian Development Nexus: humanitarian principles, practice and pragmatics. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, vol. 5, n. 18.

## Evolution of the planning expertise used in the response to displacement

Urban planning expertise is thought to have had a considerable influence on current humanitarian procedures<sup>89</sup> at least since the publication of the first UNHCR Emergency Handbook<sup>90</sup>. However, such expertise was originally formalised in the seventies and eighties to respond to large-scale displacement crises - typically through camps – at a time when the global level of urbanisation was lower than 45%<sup>91</sup>. A planner's job in a displacement setting has been defined at that time as a clear sequence of narrowly defined actions within a rural site aimed at enabling the protection of people of concern through the enforcement of spatial standards in shelter provision<sup>92</sup>.

Its scope gradually expanded, and research conducted between the nineties and noughties confirms that planning during a crisis should manage and mitigate the environmental and social impacts of response operations<sup>93</sup>. However, humanitarian urban planning expertise at that time maintained a key focus on the design of settlement layouts and on response to displacement as a part of the “conventional package of material aid and relief”<sup>94</sup>. Such a focus has been linked to an evolution of humanitarian spatial guidelines from the adaptation of modernist urban design principles to tropical climates<sup>95</sup> and to the logistics of aid distribution<sup>96</sup> characterised by a spatial segregation of different functions and between infrastructure and shelters. In Chad in 2006, a focus on rigid design standards is thought to have hampered an adaptation of the response to the context and needs of host and displaced communities leading to significant failures in response

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<sup>89</sup> Rysaback-Smith H. (2015) *History and Principles of Humanitarian Action*; Armstrong A. (1990) *Evolving Approaches to Planning and Management of Refugee Settlements*. Ekistics, vol. 57, n. 342/343; INTERTECT (1977), *Manual for an Emergency Shelter-to-Housing Program*. INTERTECT.

<sup>90</sup> Kennedy J. (2005) *Challenging Camp Design Guidelines*. Forced Migration Review. Issue 23, May 2005. University of Oxford – Refugee Studies Centre.

<sup>91</sup> Ritchie H. and Roser M. (2019) *Urbanization, Our World in Data*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/3C8FLYI> on 12-06-2021.

<sup>92</sup> Goethert R. and Hamdi N. (1988) *Refugee Camps: a primer for rapid site planning – land, shelter, infrastructure and services*. Geneva: UNHCR; Goethert R. and Hamdi N. (1988) *Making Micro-Plans: a community-based process in programming and development*. London: Practical Action.

<sup>93</sup> For example see: Zetter R. (1995) *Shelter Provision and Settlement Policies for Refugees: a state of the art review*. *Studies on Emergencies and Disaster Relief*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet; Kibreab G. (1994) *The Myth of Dependency among Camp Refugees in Somalia*. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. Vol. 6, n. 4, pp. 321-349; Jacobsen K. (1997) *Refugees' Environmental Impact: the effect of patterns of settlement*. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. Vol. 10, n. 1, pp. 19-36; Jacobsen K. (2001) *The Forgotten Solution: local integration for refugees in developing countries*. Working Paper No. 45. Geneva: UNCHR.

<sup>94</sup> Zetter R. (1995) *Shelter Provision and Settlement Policies for Refugees: a state of the art review*. *Studies on Emergencies and Disaster Relief*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

<sup>95</sup> Siddiqi A. I. (2017) *Architecture, Culture, Humanitarian Expertise: from the tropics to shelter, 1953-1993*. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. Vol. 76, n.3: 367-384; cf. O. Koenigsberger (1952) *New Towns in India*. *The Town Planning Review*. Vol. 23, n. 2, pp. 94-132.

<sup>96</sup> Jahre M. (2018) *Approaches to the Design of Refugee Camps. an empirical study in Kenya, Ethiopia, Greece, and Turkey*. *Journal of Humanitarian Logistics and Supply Chain Management*. Vol. 8 n. 3, pp. 323-345; Cf. INTERTECT Project (1977) *Manual for an Emergency Shelter-to-Housing Program*. INTERTECT.

operations<sup>97</sup>.



Za'atari refugee camp: Photo credit [Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#) Flickr Creative Commons

Official UNHCR guidance recommends considering national or regional development plans when identifying sites and areas for responding to displacement, aiming at aligning infrastructure improvements to local development priorities<sup>98</sup>. However, because of the politically delicate nature of displacement as well as time and resource constraints of humanitarian response, urban planning expertise is often used to negotiate short-term reversible land management measures to support aid delivery, underpinned by an expectation of a prompt return for displaced communities<sup>99</sup> even though displacement is increasingly protracted<sup>100</sup> and interventions are difficult to reverse.

Thus conceived, operations do not necessarily require consideration of the local socio-spatial drivers of urbanisation, urban policies and development plans or the likelihood of positive

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<sup>97</sup> Herz M. (2007) *Refugee Camps in Chad: planning strategies and the architect's involvement in the humanitarian dilemma*. UNHCR Research Paper n. 147. Geneva: UNHCR; Herz M. (2008) *Refugee Camps or Ideal Cities in Dust and Dirt*. Urban Transformation. Vol. 276-289.

<sup>98</sup> UNHCR (2021) *Emergency Handbook – Site Planning for Camps*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/3jnPxxa> on 12-08-2021.

<sup>99</sup> Jahre M. (2018) *Approaches to the Design of Refugee Camps: an empirical study in Kenya, Ethiopia, Greece, and Turkey*. Journal of Humanitarian Logistics and Supply Chain Management. Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 323-345.

<sup>100</sup> World Bank (2021) *Forced Displacement – Refugees, Internally Displaced and Host Communities*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/3Cepu3U> on 12-07-2021.

development outcomes in the key phase when humanitarian needs are assessed, and response plans agreed<sup>101</sup>. Exceptionally, guidance can encourage an economic, social and environmental understanding of a displacement context and stress the importance of negotiation skills, knowledge of local land regulatory frameworks and development opportunities and challenges in a crisis context on the part of responders<sup>102</sup>. However, while the location of a displacement setting, such as a refugee camp, is recognised as a key determinant of risk and vulnerability<sup>103</sup> with dedicated standards (e.g. distance from a border), it is not commonly addressed as a determinant of recovery or potential development outcomes<sup>104</sup>.

## Planning in urban crises

The opportunity to address responses to displacement in ways that involve local communities in spatial decisions and address opportunities for recovery and development in a wider geographical context - with the support of planning expertise at a strategic level - has been brought to the fore by crises happening in settings that are generally acknowledged to be already urban.

Since the Asian Tsunami struck in 2004, various humanitarian responders and analysts have highlighted some of the challenges that arise from purely humanitarian-oriented crisis response and their consequences on recovery and development outcomes. This has led to a comprehensive rethinking of humanitarian coordination as well as to embedding better preparedness in the pathways towards recovery. These approaches have addressed planning as a key expertise to bridge response efforts with development from the early phases of the recovery, and the critical role of local governments and planning stakeholders in this, for example in Banda Aceh, Indonesia<sup>105</sup>. In 2009, the Royal Town Planning Institute and other professional institutes produced a guide to illustrate to humanitarian agencies the role of built environment expertise across disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response<sup>106</sup>.

In the following years, the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti and 2013 Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines exposed how unplanned urban development can not only amplify risks and compound the impacts of crises but also hamper emergency response. Researchers have stressed a renewed and stronger concern with participation specifically in spatial decisions<sup>107</sup> as part of their

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<sup>101</sup> UNHCR (2021) *Emergency Handbook – Site Planning for Camps*. Accessed at on <https://bit.ly/2VIP06Q> 12-08-2021.

<sup>102</sup> Corsellis T. and Vitale A. (2005) *Transitional Settlement, Displaced Populations*. University of Cambridge, Shelter Project and Oxfam.

<sup>103</sup> Camarena K. R. (2019) *Location Matters: the politics of refugee camps placement*. Working paper. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/37hrsCD> on 03-04-2021.

<sup>104</sup> Moore B. (2017) *Refugee Settlements and Sustainable Planning*. Forced Migration Review. Vol. 55 June 2017.

<sup>105</sup> Olshansky R. and Chang S. (2009) *Planning for Disaster Recovery: emerging research needs and challenges*. Progress in Planning. Vol. 72, pp. 200-209; Yoseph-Paulus R. et al. (2017) *Urban Planning in Banda Aceh: supporting local actors after the tsunami*. Working paper. London: IIED; Maynard V. et al. (2017) *Urban Planning Following Humanitarian Crises: supporting urban communities and local governments to take the lead*. Environment and Urbanization. Vol. 30 n. 1.

<sup>106</sup> Max Lock Centre - University of Westminster (2009) *The Built Environment Professions in Disaster Risk Reduction and Response: a guide for humanitarian agencies*. London: RICS, ICE, RIBA, RTPI.

<sup>107</sup> Paidakaki A. et al. (2021) *How Can Community Architects Build Socially Resilient Refugee Camps?*

compliance with humanitarian community engagement and accountability standards such as the Sphere and Core Humanitarian Standards<sup>108</sup>. This prompted a reflection in the humanitarian sector on the skills and knowledge needed to conduct emergency operations in cities - even though urban areas are not clearly defined in humanitarian policy<sup>109</sup> - and cooperate with local government, communities and urban stakeholders in order to improve their effectiveness and leave a positive legacy that can support development<sup>110</sup>.

Urban crises would then require specific competencies<sup>111</sup> as well as an understanding of local economic, social and environmental conditions of a displacement context and of the operations of local governments and other stakeholders around housing, infrastructure, urban service provision. This crucially includes how local government planners take into account preparedness and are geared up to work with humanitarians and how humanitarians include planning approaches in their own operations (e.g. localisation of certain functions, interventions on infrastructure) while maintaining their neutrality.

However, the degree of awareness of the challenges and opportunities that urbanisation presents for recovery and development in displacement settings in practical terms varies. Opportunities linked to local urbanisation processes are addressed in some guidance for recovery, such as the Early Recovery Road Map guidelines by the MSB (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agencies) which refers to planning as a key avenue to link relief to disaster with recovery and development<sup>112</sup>, as a key consideration in the resilience and early action approaches promoted by the British Red Cross in cities<sup>113</sup> or as part of high-level considerations about a setting in the UNHCR guiding principles for a masterplan approach to settlements<sup>114</sup>.

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*Lessons from the Office of Displaced Designers in Lesbos, Greece.* International Journal of Architectural Research, forthcoming.

<sup>108</sup> For more information on these humanitarian standards see relevant websites and resources: Sphere Standards (2018) *The Sphere Handbook*. Geneva: Sphere; Core Humanitarian Standard (2021) *Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/3CbYCB1> on 12-06-2021.

<sup>109</sup> For example, while the World Bank report *Cities of Refuge* addresses camps situated in urbanising contexts as part of cities, UNHCR's policy on alternatives to camps excludes all camps from the category of urban settings. See World Bank (2017) *Cities of Refuge in the Middle East: bringing an urban lens to the forced displacement challenge*. Washington D.C.: World Bank; Cf. UNHCR (2014) *UNHCR Policy on Alternatives to Camps*. Geneva: UNHCR.

<sup>110</sup> Earle L. (2016) *Addressing Urban Crises: bridging the humanitarian–development divide*. International Review of the Red Cross. Vol. 98, n. 1, pp. 215–224.

<sup>111</sup> Together with humanitarian and development partners in the Global Alliance for Urban Crises, the Royal Town Planning Institute has contributed to the development of: RedR (2019) *Urban Competency Framework*. London: RedR.

<sup>112</sup> Myndigheten för Samhällsskydd och Beredskap (2013) *Early Recovery Road Map Linking Relief to Recovery and Development*. Publ. n. MSB 846. Karlstad: MSB.

<sup>113</sup> See resources at Global Disaster Preparedness Centre (2021) *Urban Action Kit*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/3inLBxa> on 10-07-2021.

<sup>114</sup> UNHCR (2019) *Master Plan Approach to Settlement Planning Guiding Principles*. Geneva: UNHCR.

## Planning and emerging nexus approaches

In places that are vulnerable and lack capacity and funding at local government level, hybrid humanitarian-development interventions might shape the future of many settlements, towns and cities. A nexus approach that leverages urban dynamics is not entirely new: there are historical examples of humanitarian operations being aligned and significantly supporting planned urban growth both in internal displacement crises following a disaster, such as the response to the Skopje earthquake of 1963<sup>115</sup>, and in refugee crises, such as the Indian new towns and town extensions built in the aftermath of the India-Pakistan Partition in the 1950s<sup>116</sup>. The continuity between emergency response, shelter provision, long-term recovery and sustainable urbanisation have been addressed in humanitarian guidance as far back as 1982<sup>117</sup>.

Since the formalisation of the nexus in 2016, efforts to generalise the lessons learned in urban crises led to the emergence of settlement or area-based approaches as a concept to remodel humanitarian action so that it can be “socially based, geographically bound, inclusive and multi-sectoral”<sup>118</sup>, target together host and displaced communities, enhance protection by helping to develop community cohesion and overcome marginalisation, and provide better, integrated responses to crises while paving the way for recovery. Even though area-based approaches explicitly build on “experiences of urban and regional planners working on community renewal through ‘area-based initiatives’ in poor and vulnerable locations since the 1960s and 1970s” and translate some their original lessons for a humanitarian context - such as the identification of a boundary within which to focus interventions catering for all rather than for benefits recipients only<sup>119</sup> - a specification of the role and scope of the planning expertise and policy approaches within them is not made explicit<sup>120</sup>.

Emerging approaches have however incentivised local communities to host refugees through de facto planning policy that subsidises or supports urban development on the condition that shares of the resulting land value uplifts would be transferred to refugees. For example, during the 2016 Lebanon response, this happened by “providing funding to landlords to complete [...] unfinished houses in exchange for hosting refugees for a period of time (6 months to a year) either rent free or for reduced rent” or by improving sanitation infrastructure shared across host and displaced communities – an approach used also in Turkish towns hosting Syrian refugees<sup>121</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> Davis I. (1975) *Skopje Rebuilt: reconstruction following the 1963 Earthquake*. Architectural Design. Vol.11, pp. 660-663; United Nations (1970) *Skopje Resurgent*. New York: United Nations Publications.

<sup>116</sup> Koenigsberger O. (1952) *New Towns in India*. The Town Planning Review. Vol. 23, n. 2, pp. 94-132.

<sup>117</sup> UNDRP (1982) *Shelter After Disaster*; updated and republished as IFRC and UNOCHA (2015) *Shelter After Disaster*. New York: UNOCHA.

<sup>118</sup> Urban Settlements Working Group and Shelter Centre (2018) *The Settlements Approach and Urban Response: notes of the 18th meeting of 6th July 2018 Geneva*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/3ypEVUM> on 10-07-2021.

<sup>119</sup> Lankelly Chase and Institute for Voluntary Action Research (2017) *Historical Review of Place-Based Approaches*. London: Lankelly Chase.

<sup>120</sup> Shelter Cluster and Urban Settlements Working Group (2020). *Settlements Approach Guidance Note*. Geneva: Shelter Cluster.

<sup>121</sup> Sanyal R. (2019) *Planning for Refugees in Cities*. Planning Theory and Practice. Interface, Vol. 20.

Nevertheless, the legitimacy of spatial decisions and interventions across the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis phases remains a tricky problem which is being addressed in different ways in different contexts. A UN-system wide review of land-related work in violent conflict settings<sup>122</sup>, shows that land administration interventions have been undertaken where land regulatory frameworks were nearly absent and were embedded in some form of larger UN peace-building programme, with their legitimacy rooted in the need to fulfil human rights<sup>123</sup>.

Where planning frameworks are weakened by a crisis, but local and national governments have legitimate powers over land decisions, UN-Habitat identifies a number of avenues to ensure the legitimacy and appropriateness of land administration decisions taken as part of, or following, the initial humanitarian response with the objective of improving its effectiveness and fostering better conditions for recovery and development. These include: the participatory engagement of displaced and host communities in decision-making around localisation of functions and infrastructure improvements, as well as building local institutional capacity for coordinating and integrating humanitarian interventions with local spatial development objectives<sup>124</sup>.

Emerging innovative practices in this area include:

- The Joint UN Programme for Turkana County, Kenya, where UN agencies are working with the national and county governments to achieve far reaching development objectives while extending the Kakuma refugee camp with a new settlement planned by actively engaging host and displaced communities<sup>125</sup> and allowing a mix of land uses to encourage different economic activities and localise services open to the host community within the settlement<sup>126</sup>;
- The Nigerian State of Borno establishing the Borno State Agency for Coordination of Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Response (BACSDAHR) in 2019, a dedicated body meant to “coordinate government and humanitarian/development partners’ activities and programming to align with the recovery, stabilization and development plans of the state”, including in the city of Maiduguri<sup>127</sup>;
- National governments of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon establishing the Lake Chad Basin Governors’ Forum for Regional Cooperation on Stabilisation, Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development: a platform for regional development policy coordination in the

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<sup>122</sup> Decorte F. et al. (2016) *Scoping and Status Study on Land and Conflict: towards UN system-wide engagement at scale*. UN-Habitat/Global Land Tool Network Working Paper May 2016, Report 5, pp. 1 – 49. Nairobi: UNON.

<sup>123</sup> Augustinus C. and Tempra O. (2021) *Fit-for-Purpose Land Administration in Violent Conflict Settings*. Land. Vol. 10, n. 2, pp. 1-18.

<sup>124</sup> UN-Habitat (2020). *Urban Planning Responses in Post-crisis Contexts*. Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Turkana County Government and UN-Habitat (2021) *Kalobeyei Settlement Advisory Development Plan*. Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

<sup>127</sup> Find more information on the Agency on their website. Borno State Agency for Coordination of sustainable Development and Humanitarian Response (BACSDAHR) (2019). *About Us*. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/2TW0Fso> on 11-07-2021.



vulnerable regions across their borders<sup>128</sup>.

- The Plan for Recovery and Consolidation of Peace in Central Africa (RCPCA) negotiated in 2016 during the conflict between the Central African Republic national government and several armed groups, being used from 2019 to coordinate the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF+) under the coordination of a secretariat sitting under the national Ministry of Planning<sup>129</sup>.
- UN-Habitat staff joining the Municipal Planning and Development team in the municipality of Guiuan following the landfall of typhoon Haiyan in 2013 to provide mapping expertise and supporting the municipality in establishing the Guiuan Recovery and Sustainable Development Group: a municipal task force coordinating relief and reconstruction across its planning, engineering, social welfare and other teams<sup>130</sup>.

## Conclusion

Blending humanitarian response and development practices should reduce the severity and impacts of crises while decreasing vulnerabilities and risks and paving the way for recovery and sustainable development. Urbanisation processes provide both challenges and opportunities for linking these agendas. However, using planning to advance them together requires unpacking how growth accompanying urbanisation can support better recovery outcomes, how urbanisation processes and humanitarian response to displacement influence one another and how building a stronger shared understanding of their interplay across relevant actors and stakeholders can improve the coordination of complementary activities in general. Part 1 has given an overview of some of the issues to be considered when endeavouring to build such shared understanding.

Even though in some displacement-affected regions aligning response to the efforts to sustainably manage urbanisation can offer opportunities for nexus interventions, there are still gaps in the evidence about how urbanisation processes support displaced people's recovery. Also, sparse or hard-to-access data on urbanisation and displacement can make the identification of appropriate nexus interventions difficult. Namely, spatial and urban data is not systematically made available to responders in the early phases of a crisis and the urban character of displacement locations is not assessed consistently. Part 2 has given an overview of some of the issues to be considered when considering urban dynamics from the perspective of identifying opportunities for the nexus.

Transitions from agricultural to non-agricultural economic activities, with their connected changes in land uses, can be key levers of development and help decrease vulnerabilities such as tenure

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<sup>128</sup> UNDP (2018) *Report of the Inaugural Meeting of the Lake Chad Basin's Governors' Forum for Regional Cooperation on Stabilization, Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development in the Region Affected by Boko Haram*. Maiduguri: State Government of Borno and the United Nations through the United Nations Development Programme.

<sup>129</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council (2019) *Central African Republic Country Study: humanitarian financing task team output IV*. Financing the nexus gaps and opportunities from a field perspective' series. Oslo: Norwegian Refugee Council.

<sup>130</sup> Dy P. and Stephens T. (2016) *The Typhoon Haiyan Response: strengthening coordination among Philippine government, civil society and international actors*. Programme on Crisis Leadership - Discussion Paper Series. Cambridge: Harvard Kennedy School.

insecurity and poverty. However, poor planning as well as unchecked urban growth is also linked to environmental degradation and increased risks in crises. Measures to avoid unfavourable locational and spatial decisions in the response to displacement might be hindered by time pressure, lack of access to information, low capacity, political opposition, etc.

Calls to build on some of the spatial interventions made by humanitarian response might result in pressure on an already under-resourced humanitarian system to consider the development potential of the spatial outcomes of its operations. It can also result in humanitarian operations inadvertently serving political agendas underpinning recovery efforts, which poses particular risks where planning and land administration systems have a record of violating housing, land and property rights<sup>131</sup>. Even where the planning system is democratic and accountable, the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality can be at odds with planning's objectives of balancing different economic and political interests over land development and redistribute land value uplifts to advance the public interest. Land issues can both be at the origin of conflict and forced displacement and one of the most complex and contentious issues for humanitarian action, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings<sup>132</sup>. A blended humanitarian-development practice engaging with urban growth dynamics raises ethical questions for both humanitarians and urban planners.

Enhancing the flexibility to scale up or down funding and extend or contract timeframes for programming in response to evolving situations is emerging as an avenue to work at the nexus<sup>133</sup> - and seems to be valued more than creating new finance mechanisms with pooled funds across the development and humanitarian sectors<sup>134</sup>. However, keeping funding mechanisms separated can also maintain existing silos in place and prevent the more effective synergies the nexus is meant to foster in the first place, including in terms of early spatial coordination of interventions.

Even though many built environment and spatial challenges are regarded as largely similar across different types of crises and displacement settings<sup>135</sup>, planners and development actors might lack displacement expertise to adapt their established practices. Frameworks to coherently utilise planning approaches across the preparedness, response and recovery phases of a crisis, - in different settings and by different stakeholders - have not yet emerged. Part 3 has given an overview of the evolution and partial disconnect between different types of planning knowledge and approaches used in displacement settings and of the issues to be considered in attempting to further harmonise them.

In order to leverage urbanisation processes to advance the nexus in ways that are fair, inclusive and sustainable, three areas for further research emerge from this review:

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<sup>131</sup> Baumann H. (Ed.) (2019) *Reclaiming Home: the struggle for socially just housing land and property rights in Syria, Iraq and Lybia*. Bonn: Friederich Ebert Stiftung.

<sup>132</sup> Pantuliano, S. (Ed.) (2009) *Uncharted Territory: land, conflict and humanitarian action*. London: Practical Action.

<sup>133</sup> Development Initiatives (2019) *Key Questions and Considerations for Donors at the Triple Nexus: lessons from UK and Sweden*. Bristol: Development Initiatives.

<sup>134</sup> Redvers L. and Parket B. (2019) *Searching for the Nexus: it's all about the money*. The New Humanitarian. Special Report. Accessed at <https://bit.ly/3lyi4CK> on 02-06-2021.

<sup>135</sup> UN-Habitat (2020). *Urban Planning Responses in Post-crisis Contexts*. Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

- **Building a shared and evidence-based understanding of the interplay between urbanisation, displacement and response**, and researching the ability of urbanisation to improve recovery outcomes and foster inclusive development. This should be complemented by further research on institutional capacity and the appropriate planning instruments, regulatory frameworks, action planning tools to be used in displacement settings. It should also consider the implications of urban growth for risk and vulnerability and help identify - and build consensus to deliver - nexus interventions at the appropriate scale and in the right locations.
- **Developing easy-to-use approaches for assessing the urban character and urbanisation processes in a displacement setting** to support humanitarian assessments and plans in a timely manner. This should build on existing partnerships across development and humanitarian actors, continue to strengthen the engagement with national and local actors responsible for development plans and urban policy as well as displaced and host communities. It should also enhance the interoperability and integration across different data sources – such as satellite imagery, national statistical data and data collected with affected communities.
- **Mapping existing urban-planning-related standards, competencies and skills across the humanitarian and development sectors** to integrate planning approaches used across them and more systematically leverage urbanisation processes through nexus interventions. This should support urban planners in developing the skills they need to address displacement challenges. It should also consider the different ethical challenges faced across the two sectors and the tensions between planning objectives and humanitarian principles and explore their resolution guided by both humanitarian standards and planners’ professional code of conduct.

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