



Habitat III

Humanitarian crises and the city

Engagement of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement



1. The urban sphere is part of the fabric of humanitarian crises

War rages in Syria. The earth heaves in Ecuador. Ebola spreads in West Africa. As we try to make sense of these events and struggle with how to address them, how many of us consider urban planning and policies as part of the solution? The humanitarian impacts of disasters, both natural and man-made, are increasingly concentrated in cities. They include not only massive loss of life and injuries but also damage to critical infrastructure, such as hospitals and water and electricity supply networks. Given the deeply interconnected nature of cities, the impact can also multiply much faster than in less populated areas. The striking reality is that Ebola became a world-threatening epidemic only when it reached the urban space. In armed conflicts or situations of urban violence, city dwellers lack access to key services, such as health, education, or water, and this is a

major cause of humanitarian suffering and displacement. Waste management, land and housing regulations, urban services and community organization are all tools that are critical for crisis management, yet they are frequently overlooked by both urban authorities and humanitarian organizations.

2. Risks and the city

In cities, demographic, social and economic trends are often conducive to extremely rapid urban growth, and while this is historically associated with economic development, it can be an enormous challenge in places where there are limited resources and capacity to plan for and manage it adequately. People who live in informal settlements are most at risk from natural disasters and crises, so addressing their needs is particularly urgent. Meanwhile, tens of millions of the world's most vulnerable people endure increasingly unsafe and impoverished conditions because armed conflict or violence dominates the urban spaces in which they

live. Their exposure to the consequences of crises and emergencies is exacerbated by the combination of lack of access to functional infrastructure and services and the

absence of proper disaster-preparedness or resilience measures. In conflict situations, a further important contributing factor is failure by the parties involved to respect international humanitarian law and to protect and spare essential services.

Taken together, these factors mean urban dwellers are increasingly exposed to both the immediate and longer-term consequences of shocks and violence. In the context of natural disasters, all too often the burden falls disproportionately on the urban poor, leaving entire communities and generations extremely vulnerable.



Mexico. Young volunteers from the Mexican Red Cross supporting first-aid training for AEH students.

Photo: Ricardo Castro/ICRC

Creating humanitarian spaces: Mexico

The Creating Humanitarian Spaces programme (known by the initials AEH in Spanish) was launched in Ciudad Juarez in 2012 in partnership with the Chihuahua State Secretariat of Education and the Mexican Red Cross, with the aim of helping communities affected by armed violence.

As well as having to cope with the dire humanitarian consequences of this violence, these communities have been marginalized, reducing their access to basic public services, such as health, employment and education.

The programme seeks to raise awareness among teachers and students of the importance of respecting, protecting and treating with dignity people in situations of armed violence. It comprises five elements: peer-to-peer education, first-aid training, psychological and psychosocial support, community development and formal education.

The AEH programme includes ICRC educational textbooks and training for elementary and middle-school teachers on humanitar-

ian values, empathy and peaceful conflict resolution, among other subjects. Red Cross youth volunteers engage students through recreational activities, reinforcing what is learned in the classroom.

Similarly, volunteer psychologists are trained to provide basic psychological attention to students and teachers affected by armed violence. They also train teachers to understand and be able to detect the psychological needs of students in order to refer them to professionals.

In the five years since its implementation, the programme has reduced school drop-out rates, improved relationships among students and between students and teachers, and has had a positive impact on students' behaviour within their families and the surrounding community. Furthermore, it has provided them with tools to enable them to strive for a better future. The programme has also generated spaces for coexistence and strengthened community ties.

3. How the New Urban Agenda can contribute

There is an urgency to build strong partnerships and alliances across sectors, regions and levels of governance. Greater investment is needed in local authorities, communities and organizations – including youth organizations – to improve their capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from crises. There is also a need to ensure more resilient urban services in general, including during armed conflicts and other situations of violence, and to reaffirm the need for full respect for international humanitarian law. But without political will, enabling legislative and policy frameworks, or the active involvement of all sectors of society in implementing the agenda, we risk going back to fighting new and emerging risks with obsolete tools. Our landscape is evolving, and we must all change with it.

As the largest humanitarian network in the world, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has, throughout the Habitat III process, encouraged States to



IFRC

An Integrated Neighbourhood Approach: Haiti

On 12 January 2010, an earthquake measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale and lasting 35 seconds struck Haiti. The epicentre was located about 17km south-west of Port-au-Prince. The country was already in a vulnerable state and the earthquake exacerbated this, causing significant damage to infrastructure in urban communities. In 2011, the French Red Cross (FRC) and the IFRC, as part of their emergency response, decided to implement an ‘Integrated Neighbourhood Approach’ (INA) in order to introduce a development-oriented, multi-sectorial angle.

The INA programme involved experts from the FRC, IFRC and external partners (INGOs, NGOs and the private sector). They were drawn from various disciplines in order to ensure a range of complementary skills, which were needed to respond to the diversity of needs identified in the neighbourhoods, such as habitat, public infrastructure rehabilitation, livelihood support with socio-economic integration into the existing labour market, water and sanitation, disaster risk reduction and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence.

In coordination with the authorities, the FRC created a “community platform” designed to be representative of the neighbourhood and act as the entry point for dealing with the authorities and programme partners. Once the community platform was up and running, the priority was to develop an urban plan of the targeted area, using a participatory approach. Based on that plan, which was validated in several ways, including via ‘transect walks’ and GIS mapping, infrastructure support activities, such as the establishment of public spaces and habitat, and access to water and sanitation services, were initiated, as were efforts to reduce further disaster risks, provide psychosocial support and promote livelihoods.

The INA programme was seen as a success – not only by the FRC, ICRC and their donors but also by those living in the communities it helped. This was because it went beyond relief and recovery to improve the social cohesion and well-being of all residents of the neighbourhoods.

ensure that the New Urban Agenda reflects these realities. Therefore, we welcome the adoption of this document as an important step in the right direction. As the final text makes clear, much more needs to be done to anticipate, prevent and mitigate the consequences of disasters, and to ensure respect for international humanitarian law. While crises cannot always be averted, the resilience of urban communities in the face of these occurrences can and must be addressed as a matter of priority.

4. Moving forward together

The success of the New Urban Agenda will be measured by concrete actions. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and National

Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies stand ready to play their part in supporting responses to these evolving urban challenges.



Reducing suffering in war: Syria

For more than four years, intense fighting and the heavy use of explosive weapons in Aleppo by all parties to the conflict have caused huge damage, as well as loss of life and displacement. Many essential services, including hospitals and health centres, water and electricity networks, have been severely damaged, or forced to shut down, while those still functioning are overwhelmed. Escalations in the fighting can leave up to two million people without safe access to essential services. To help communities with their most urgent needs, the ICRC and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) carry out regular distributions of aid – including food, drinking water, shelter and hygiene materials – to displaced or host communities. They also support hospitals with medicines, materials to treat wounds, and equipment. The organizations work in parallel on a more systemic level, helping to improve resilience, or restore key services, such as water and electrical networks, and to make sure emergency alternatives are available if

these systems can no longer function. For example, working closely with local water boards, the ICRC and SARC have rehabilitated 90 existing boreholes and installed 37 new ones since 2014. These help cover more than 57% of the entire city's water needs in case of continuous water cuts. While accessing all parts of the city remains a constant challenge, the ICRC and SARC continue to engage with parties on both sides of the front line, to try to ensure better protection for civilians and the interconnected services essential to their survival in a city environment.

Aleppo. A child drinking water from a borehole rehabilitated by the ICRC. If the main water networks are temporarily cut off, these provide communities with a reliable source of clean drinking water

Photo: Pawel Krzysiek/ICRC

Building on the strength of 17 million volunteers, we work with urban authorities and city dwellers to build resilient communities,

support populations affected by urban conflict and violence, address health emergencies in urban settings and scale up disaster-preparedness efforts.



Solving the problem of property rights in the wake of disaster: Ecuador

When a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck northern Ecuador in April 2016, leaving displacement and destruction in its wake, the IFRC deployed the Shelter Cluster to coordinate the humanitarian response and support the Government's recovery and reconstruction plans for the 29,673 homes affected in both urban and rural areas. One of the biggest challenges was to overcome regulatory barriers in an environment with complicated tenure and land issues (only 30% of the affected population owned the legal title to their land), rebuilding regulations and recovery politics.

To address this, the shelter and protection clusters created a joint working group on Housing, Land and Property (HLP), coordinated by an advisor from the Ecuadorean Red Cross. Working with community members and municipalities to understand existing complexities in tenure arrangements, land conflicts and insecurity, this group success-

fully advocated for the inclusion of informal tenants, instead of just owners, as beneficiaries of the Government's financial assistance for housing repair and reconstruction. It also helped avoid prolonged displacement, land grabbing and forced evictions, and helped clarify the regulatory norms for the construction of temporary shelters.

Just as importantly, the HLP working group has, through technical assistance and training, increased the capacity of stakeholders to recognize the impact of HLP rights on their programmes and to ensure that we, as a response community, facilitate the recovery of communities and cause no harm by our efforts.

The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Route de Pré-Bois, 1 | 1214 Vernier | Geneva | Switzerland
T +41 22 730 42 22 E-mail: secretariat@ifrc.org www.ifrc.org

International Committee of the Red Cross

19, avenue de la Paix
1202 Geneva, Switzerland
T +41 22 734 60 01 F +41 22 733 20 57
Email: shop@icrc.org www.icrc.org
