

URBAN PLANNING RESPONSES IN POST-CRISIS CONTEXTS



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FOREWORD

I am delighted to present this publication on the work of UN-Habitat's Urban Planning and Design Lab on urban planning responses in post-crisis contexts.

With crises becoming increasingly urban, and with the displacement of people increasingly protracted, our responses must be equally long-term, as well as innovative and grounded in urban expertise.

The United Nations is working in a new way to break down the silos between humanitarian, peacebuilding, and development work. This holistic approach ensures a more efficient and sustainable use of resources.

In our own way, UN-Habitat's Urban Planning and Design Lab ('the Lab') is contributing to this holistic approach by applying its spatial expertise to bring long-term, sustainable strategies into post-crisis contexts. We work in close collaboration with other teams in the Agency, as well as other Agencies, Funds, and Programmes within the UN system.

Planning is an essential development tool. It is a contextually tailored process that requires broad participation, local leadership and ownership. It is most effective with the supporting policies, frameworks, commitments, and technical expertise to ensure sustainable development.

It is also a development tool which facilitates shared knowledge and understanding, strategic and legal agreements, and the definition of specific urban investments. 'Urban Planning Responses in Post-Crisis Contexts' contains some of the strategies and lessons that the Lab has gleaned from its work during UN-Habitat's 2014-2019 Strategic Plan period.

This publication outlines the different facets of a planning approach in these contexts, as well as the way a spatial approach can bridge the humanitarian and development divide. Equally important as the plan itself, the participatory planning approach engages communities, building social cohesion and social integration, which in turn contribute to more stable, peaceful, and prosperous societies that are less likely to experience, and will be more resilient to, crises in the future. The decisions that are made and the investments that are identified through this participatory approach have the potential to increase the long-term benefits of humanitarian aid and to set communities on a path of sustainability.

The Lab has focused its approach on implementation – not on creating perfect plans to sit on shelves, and never presuming that a situation is too challenging or too urgent to apply a spatial lens and to introduce planning processes. In fact, complex post-crisis situations are where urban planning is needed from the earliest stage of the response.

At the time of publication, the world is in the midst of an unprecedented crisis: the COVID-19 pandemic, which is exacerbating existing challenges in post-crisis settings.

This global crisis has laid bare the challenges that urban planning and spatial approaches address and mitigate at their root causes: spatial inequality, social exclusion, overcrowded and inadequate housing, lack of access to safe water and sanitation, and limited access to public spaces, to sustainable livelihoods, and to equitable infrastructure. The pandemic has highlighted and compounded the disadvantages experienced by marginalised communities such as refugees, IDPs, and other crisis-affected persons located in camps and informal settlements. Many people living in humanitarian contexts also experience poor access to health care and basic services, including an already insufficient health workforce, higher disease prevalence, and food insecurity. These issues, coupled with overstretched capacities of local governments and host services and the tensions associated with this strain, can all lead to increasingly difficult situations for those already affected by crises. Furthermore, the socioeconomic impact of the crisis is affecting those who are already the most vulnerable.

The state of affairs during the pandemic highlights many of the vulnerabilities that UN-Habitat urban planning work addresses in post-crisis contexts. Similarly, the expanding and ever-increasing effects of the climate crisis have already compounded existing crises and exacerbated displacement dynamics, and continue to do so. In both instances, we see a heightened awareness of the crucial role that urban planning plays in mitigating and responding to crises, underscoring the importance of understanding and disseminating the strategies discussed in this publication, and of integrating them into urgent responses.

I would like to express my gratitude to UN-Habitat colleagues in offices and programmes around the world, to the colleagues throughout other UN agencies and international organisations, and of course to the dedicated team of the Lab for their commitment to experimenting and searching outside the box for innovative, effective solutions to some of the most pressing challenges we face today.

A sustainable development-oriented response to post-crisis contexts is necessary to achieve the targets of the 2030 Agenda and the transformative commitments of the New Urban Agenda. I hope this publication will support practitioners in this vital work, which is needed more urgently now than ever.



MAIMUNAH MOHD SHARIF

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Residents walking in Kalobeyei Settlement, Turkana County, Kenya © UN-Habitat

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