



# Humanitarian response to urban crises

a review of  
area-based approaches

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**Urban**

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Urban crises, humanitarian response,  
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The Human Settlements Group works to reduce poverty and improve health and housing conditions in the urban centres of Africa, Asia and Latin America. It seeks to combine this with promoting good governance and more ecologically sustainable patterns of urban development and rural-urban linkages.

## Urban Crises

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), on behalf of the Department for International Development (DFID), has commissioned this paper as part of their 'Urban Crises Learning Fund'. The purpose of this paper is to provide an initial review of literature as a foundation for informing practice and policy decisions of humanitarian actors, as well as identifying gaps in documentation and knowledge for further research.

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In recent years there has been increasing interest in area-based approaches among humanitarian actors responding to urban crises. Through analysis of case studies, as well as available policy literature, this paper proposes that, in an urban context, area-based approaches have three defining characteristics: they are geographically targeted, and adopt a multi-sectoral, participatory approach.

Area-based approaches are neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’; their positive and negative effects depending entirely on the context in which they are conceived, their programme design, the manner of their delivery and the appropriateness of adopting such a strategy. Further research is required to better understand the implications of wide-scale adoption of area-based approaches by the humanitarian community.

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## 1

# Introduction

## Background

By 2030, 4 billion people, almost fifty percent of the world's population, are predicted to live in the towns and cities of low- and middle-income countries (UNDESA 2014). Within these urban environments, almost half of the population are likely to live in informal settlements (Box 1). Whilst presenting their inhabitants with an array of opportunities, informal settlements are often located in hazardous areas, lacking access to basic services, and highly vulnerable to a range of risks (Dodman *et al.* 2013). Increasingly these populations also include refugees or those who are displaced by conflict, natural disasters and other drivers (IDMC *et al.* 2015).

This urbanisation of disaster risk presents a significant challenge for the humanitarian community both in the complexity of responding to urban disasters (Barcelo *et al.* 2011; IASC 2010) and because the 'experience, approaches, tools and skill sets of humanitarian agencies are still mostly grounded in rural or camp settings' (IRC 2015, p.5). As a result there are concerns that there are knowledge and expertise gaps in the sector<sup>1</sup> and recent humanitarian emergencies in urban areas – Hurricane Katrina in the USA (2005), Kenya's election-related violence (2007/8), Typhoon Ketsana in the Philippines (2009), earthquake in Haiti (2010), the Syrian conflict (2012+) – are causing the humanitarian community to adapt its approaches to urban areas (Sanderson *et al.* 2012).

Based on emerging practice, there are calls for the humanitarian community to adopt area-based approaches in urban environments as a way of tackling the challenges of working in cities (Pavanello 2012; DFID & NRC 2014; IDMC *et al.* 2015; BRC 2012). While the interest in finding alternative ways to better tailor programming to the urban context is encouraging, the term 'area-based programming' is currently being interpreted in a number of different ways, for example a 'settlement approach'(SKAT & IFRC 2012), an 'integrated approach' or a 'district, neighbourhood or community-based approach'(Global CCCM Cluster 2014). However, as a result, on-going humanitarian policy and operational discussions are not informed by a shared understanding of what 'area-based programming' means in practice, why, when or how to adopt the approach, nor the institutional implications, such as funding and administrative mechanisms.

## Research questions

The aim of this paper is to provide a review of current literature as a foundation for informing practice and policy of humanitarian actors. Given the emerging nature of this topic, there is also a focus on identifying gaps in documentation and sector knowledge for further research.

<sup>1</sup> For example Barcelo *et al.* (2011: iv) notes that 'the [2010] earthquake in Port au Prince and Hurricane Ketsana in the Philippines highlighted two substantial gaps in the approaches adopted by UN Humanitarian Coordination leadership and the cluster system: limited understanding and knowledge of the urban context; and insufficient specialised urban expertise to prepare a strategic vision for post-disaster recovery and to coordinate urban stakeholders during emergency relief and recovery.'

## BOX 1: WHAT ARE URBAN ENVIRONMENTS?

Urban environments are characterised by high numbers of very different people living and working in close proximity to one another (Global CCCM Cluster 2014; CALP 2011). In contrast to rural areas, urban inhabitants are more mobile (Brown *et al.* 2015; Shelter Centre & NRC 2010) and largely dependent on technical or economic systems in order to meet their basic needs (SKAT & IFRC 2012; UNHCR 2009; Sanderson *et al.* 2012). The social, political and institutional environment is also more complex (SKAT & IFRC 2012; USAID 2008; CALP 2011).

Towns and cities will both be affected by and recover from crises differently depending on factors such as: whether they are directly or indirectly affected by the crisis; their size, linkages and importance in relation to other cities; whether they are centres of governance, culture, manufacturing or trade; and their level of administrative dependence or autonomy. Within cities the urban environment is also highly diverse – ranging from high rise commercial centres, through to densely populated historic areas and commuter suburbs, to informal settlements within the city or on the outskirts.

The research questions this paper seeks to address are:

1. What are area-based approaches to urban humanitarian crises?
2. Why are area-based approaches being adopted?
3. What are the positive and negative consequences of adopting area-based approaches?
4. How can area-based approaches be improved?

Each of these questions is answered in Chapter 2 of this paper while Chapter 3 details the conclusions and areas for future research.

## Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to provide an initial, rapid review of literature of the available literature. The analysis draws on a range of existing literature spanning humanitarian and developmental contexts, including both peer reviewed publications as well as a variety of 'grey literature' (eg policy documents and programmatic evaluations). The desk-based review was supplemented by interviews with experts who have been involved in implementing urban programmes in recent crises, including a facilitated workshop session at the UK Shelter Forum (April 2015). The interviews focused on identifying relevant documents, discussing key themes, and verifying the findings.

Given the various interpretations and alternative terminologies, a two-pronged methodology was taken to identify the literature documenting area-based programmes. Firstly, a broad scoping literature search ran key search terms through a variety of databases including online academic databases, humanitarian publications, online practitioner libraries and working

papers produced by academic institutions. Secondly, practitioners and agencies were directly contacted – for example through the Urban Response Community of Practice<sup>2</sup> – with a request to identify and share details of their area-based programmes.

Through this two-pronged approach a range of literature was identified, however significant gaps were noted in the following geographies: Latin America, New Zealand, Japan, and Africa. This presents a limitation for this paper, as although the terminology is not used, the approach may be. Furthermore, there were a number of case studies<sup>3</sup> identified that could not be included in this review as the timeframe and scope were limited to information being available in English.

There are critical issues and questions related to area-based programming that are touched on in this paper that would benefit from further focused research. For example underlying humanitarian systems, funding mechanisms and the use of urban development tools (eg urban profiling) when adopting area-based approaches. Additional detail can be seen in Chapter 3 under 'Areas for Further Research'.

Finally, with the available resources, and within the time frame of the review, this paper relied primarily on publicly available literature. The case studies detailed in Chapter 2, Section 2.1 were selected because they were documented and represented a range of different agencies working in a number of different contexts. The authors recognise that the majority of 'good practice' or 'lessons learned' with regard to area-based programming rests within the experiences of practitioners. Thus further case study/interview-based analysis is also recommended as a suggestion for further research.

<sup>2</sup> For further information see: <https://partnerplatform.org/alnap/urban-response>

<sup>3</sup> For example, humanitarian activities following the Bam earthquake (2003), the Kobe earthquake (1995), also a number of additional examples following the Haiti earthquake (2010).

## 2

## Findings

## 2.1 What are area-based approaches to urban humanitarian crises?

This section sets out how area-based approaches are being defined in current humanitarian policy and practice, followed by analysis and discussion to draw out the common features that characterise such programmes.

## How are area-based approaches being defined in current humanitarian policy?

In 2010 the Inter-Agency Standing Committee<sup>4</sup> (IASC) called for a 'paradigm shift in humanitarian assistance in urban areas based on a district or community-based [approach], rather than, an individual beneficiary approach so as to forge partnerships for assistance delivery and recovery with actors on the ground' (IASC 2010, p.2). According to IASC, this focus on a defined geographical area or community, rather than on an 'individual beneficiary approach' provided greater opportunity to 'forge partnerships for assistance delivery and recovery with actors on the ground in these communities' (IASC 2010, p.2). It noted that this approach was supported by 'findings from the recent Haiti [earthquake in 2010, which] indicate that putting communities at the core of an integrated response yields higher impacts' (IASC 2010, p.5).

Since 2011 the US Agency for International Development – Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA), has advocated for a 'neighbourhood approach' – which it describes as 'an area-based means of responding to multi-sector needs that is informed by a community based decision-making process reflective of the social, economic, and physical features of the defined area' (USAID 2011). USAID/OFDA have identified the 'neighbourhood approach' as an 'effective operational means of guiding the recovery of disaster-affected communities'(USAID/OFDA 2012, p.1) that 'enhance[s] clarity and understanding of how best to coherently provide multi-sectoral assistance amidst the multi-faceted conditions of urban areas'(USAID 2011).

As an input into the World Humanitarian Summit (culminating in 2016) the International Rescue Committee (IRC) recommends that 'humanitarian responders should adopt "area-based approaches" to coordination and delivery of services in urban areas [in order] to ensure coordination mechanisms complement existing governance systems and accommodate the multi-sector and multi-stakeholder approach that cities require' (IRC 2015, p.11). According to the IRC 'this approach defines an area, rather than a sector or target group, as the main entry point. All stakeholders, services and needs are mapped and assessed and relevant actors mobilised and coordinated with' (IRC 2015, p.5).

Area-based, 'neighbourhood' or 'settlement' approaches have received particular attention in the shelter sector. In 2013, ECHO's 'Evaluation of the

<sup>4</sup> The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance. Established in June 1992, the IASC is a unique forum involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. For further details see: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/>

European Commission's Humanitarian Action in the Shelter Sector' recommended that 'shelters should be closely associated with settlements' (2013:51) and that 'despite the lack of "settlement" component in [its funding streams],<sup>5</sup> ECHO supports this approach where it seems effective' (*ibid.* 26). ECHO notes that a settlement approach is a way of recognising that 'shelters cannot only be considered as an individual or household issues, as lessons from the field captured by key stakeholders ... clearly indicate that the displaced tend to maintain or create communities (eg for reasons of origin and/or for mutual protection)' (Vanbruaene *et al.* 2013, p.40).

In 2013, the Global Shelter Cluster (GSC) called for a 'wider acceptance of a settlements approach in humanitarian response strategies' in its 2013–2017 strategy and ran a session called: 'Towards a settlement approach: discussion on integrated programming of humanitarian responses and the role of the GSC' in its annual meeting the following year. In 2014, the Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster also noted that 'in urban areas a district, neighbourhood or community-based approach is vital' (Global CCCM Cluster 2014, p.51). The organisation emphasised the importance of targeting whole communities, rather than individuals or households, and 'developing effective partnerships and capacity development with a larger range of actors at both strategic and operational levels' (Global CCCM Cluster 2014) – adopting approaches more commonly used by development actors.

## How are area-based approaches being implemented in current humanitarian practice?

The majority of the literature identified focused on area-based approaches following the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013, and post-conflict reconstruction in Afghanistan since 2006 – highlighting the emerging popularity of the approach. This section introduces five case studies from these three recent responses in order to illustrate how area-based approaches are being implemented in practice. As described previously, these case studies were identified either through a literature search, or by the implementing agencies themselves. The intention is not necessarily to present them as 'best-practice', but rather to provide concrete examples of how area-based programmes have been implemented by different agencies in a range of contexts.

## CARE International, Kabul Area Shelter and Settlement (KASS) programme, Afghanistan

CARE International launched the KASS programme in May 2006 in partnership with local NGOs ADA (Afghan Development Association) and SDO (Sanayee Development Organisation), and funding from USAID/OFDA. The 18-month reconstruction programme worked in seven planned and unplanned districts of Kabul City delivering more than 3,700 shelters, 2,800 latrines, 60 shallow wells and hand pumps, repair and improvement of 640 family wells, as well as drainage and road upgrades (CARE 2007). At a total cost of US\$ 4.4m it is estimated that a total of 6,625 shelter and non-shelter households benefited directly from the project; with a further 8,225 household indirectly benefiting from receiving training on hazard mitigation and health education, as well as improvements in communal services such as road gravelling, side ditches and community wells (CARE 2007).

## British Red Cross (BRC), Integrated Neighbourhood Approach, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

The BRC, with funding from the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) and their own appeal, initiated a recovery programme in April 2010. Initially this programme ran both in camps for people who had been internally displaced and in an urban neighbourhood known as Delmas 19. However, as pressure to close the camps increased and the BRC found that many communities in need of assistance were moving away from the camps, the programme shifted to be almost entirely focused on Delmas 19. Delmas 19 became a pilot for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' (IFRC) integrated neighbourhood approach. In April 2012, following significant community mobilisation, the programme reoriented to become an urban regeneration and reconstruction project. It was estimated that 4,000 households would benefit from different packages of shelter solutions, and improved security and public health (BRC 2012, p.48).

<sup>5</sup> such as the eSF [eSingle Form] and FPA [Framework Partnership Agreement].



## Global Communities and Project Concern International (PCI), Katye Neighbourhood Improvement programme, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Global Communities and PCI, with funding from USAID/OFDA, implemented the Katye Neighbourhood Improvement programme from November 2010 to April 2012. The programme sought to 'combine humanitarian assistance with a longer-term development approach that emphasised recovery and settlement upgrade' (IDMC *et al.* 2015, p.44). At a cost of approximately US\$ 9.5m, the project directly benefited 574 families living in the target area of Ravine Pintade with construction and infrastructure upgrades (such as retaining walls, drainage, paths, septic tanks, clinic and shelters); as well as a further 1,400 families indirectly through their access to the improved or new facilities (for example the clinic) (USAID/OFDA n.d.).

## Norwegian Refugee Council, Community Mobilisation and Service Coordination (CMSC) programme and the Durable Solutions programme, Baghdad, Iraq

The Norwegian Refugee Council and UN-Habitat formed a partnership in 2011 through which they implemented the Community Mobilisation and Service Coordination (CMSC) programme (mainly UNHCR-funded) and the Durable Solutions programme (mainly UN-Habitat-funded). The CMSC programme ran from October 2010 to December 2013 and targeted 25 informal settlements in six districts where 8,500 families (or 46,000 individuals) were living, 30 per cent of whom were registered internally-displaced persons (IDPs). Activities included non-food item (NFI) distribution, capacity building activities for government officials and residents, advocacy, consultations and wide-scale awareness raising activities. The Durable Solutions programme ran in parallel and implemented three pilot projects at neighbourhood scale that tested different options for durable housing solutions – upgrading, land sharing and relocation (DFID & NRC 2014).

## Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Urban Shelter and Settlement Recovery programme, Tacloban, The Philippines

CRS, with funding from USAID/OFDA, is currently implementing an 'integrated approach in its urban shelter and settlements recovery programme, which has placed neighbourhoods at the centre of the project'. CRS is targeting 3,000 affected households in 17 of the 31 high-risk coastal *barangays* or 'districts' in Tacloban City. Approximately 1,230 of the households are located in the 'Dwell Zone' and they have been offered on-site assistance to repair or rebuild their houses (including cash payments and materials to construct transitional shelters and latrines; oversight from engineers and foremen). Approximately 1,770 of the households are located in the 'No Dwell Zone'. They were offered financial support to either a) purchase land, and build a transitional shelter and latrine; b) rent land, and build a transitional shelter and latrine; c) rent a property; or d) live with a host family (Catholic Relief Services 2015).

## Discussion

Analysis of the policy and practice literature indicates that in an urban context, area-based approaches typically share three common characteristics; they are geographically targeted, and adopt a multi-sectoral, participatory approach (Figure 1).

### a) Geographically targeted

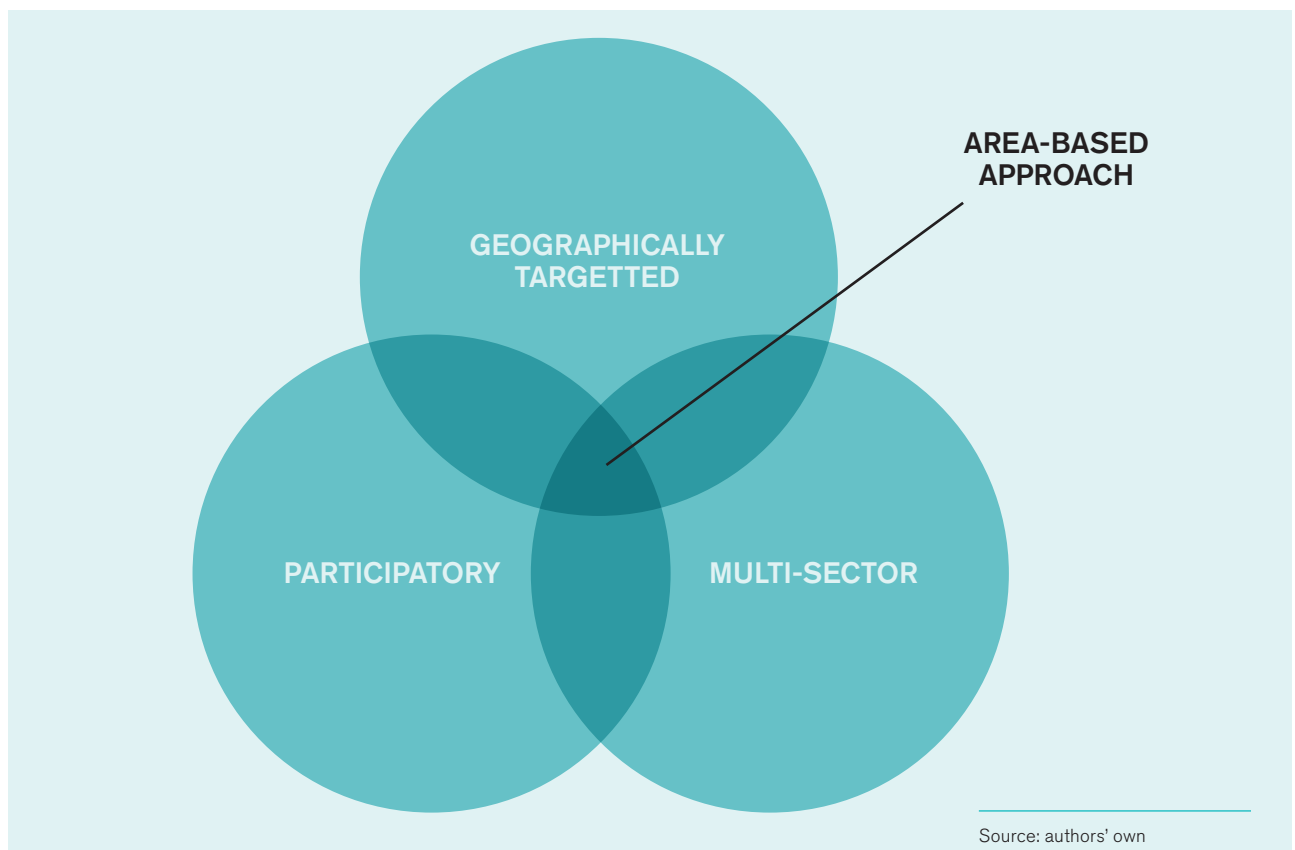
Across the policy literature, the single most defining characteristic was that an area-based approach 'defines an area, rather than a sector or target group,<sup>6</sup> as the main entry point' (IRC 2015, p.5). As such, area-based approaches have a strong 'focus on communities in defined spatial contexts'(USAID 2011) and the programme seeks to address the problems associated with that defined area (USAID/OFDA n.d.; IRC 2015; Urbensky 2009; Global CCCM Cluster 2014).

Whilst the practice literature supports this finding, the case studies potentially illustrate a more nuanced definition. The BRC Integrated Neighbourhood programme and the Katye Neighbourhood Improvement programme in Ravine Pintade both had clearly defined boundaries where their programme was focused, as did

<sup>6</sup>For further information on targeting approaches in urban crises see Box 3.



Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of the characteristics of an area-based approach



the NRC/UN-Habitat programme in Baghdad which targeted the 'geographically-bounded areas of informal settlements... rather than population groups' (DFID & NRC 2014, p.62). However the available literature on both the KASS programme in Kabul and CRS's work in Tacloban notes that in both cases they worked within certain *barangays* or 'districts'; but also that individual households were targeted,<sup>7</sup> and that these individual households went on to form larger 'groups' or 'clusters'.<sup>8</sup> The implementing agencies do not note if they consider the projects area-based because of the geographical-boundary of the *barangays* / 'districts' or as a result of the household groupings.

Importantly, a geographically-targeted approach can be an inclusive approach; engaging and providing assistance to the whole population living in the target area – 'a particularly important factor in conflict settings' (Vrbensky 2009, p.78). For example the NRC/UN-Habitat programme in Baghdad recognised that whilst 'IDPs were in a vulnerable situation because

multiple legal and administrative barriers limit[ed] their access to services, rights and entitlements such as education, healthcare and food rations. These barriers and associated vulnerabilities were not unique to the displaced population [and] other people in the city were facing similar challenges' (DFID & NRC 2014, p.29). This 'inclusive approach', and programmatic 'support for all the residents in the settlements reduced tensions and increased acceptance of NRC's approach' (DFID & NRC 2014, p.84).

The case studies presented two different strategies for defining the area for the programme and drawing the 'boundary' line. For example:

- **Administrative:** Defining the location of a programme through an existing government administrative area; for example as described in the KASS project in Kabul or the CRS project, which worked in specific *barangays*. Taking an administrative boundary approach is likely to be the preferred

<sup>7</sup>In Tacloban, CRS identified individual households as beneficiaries, based on the level of damage to their homes (Catholic Relief Services 2015). The KASS programme in Kabul identified beneficiaries through an individual household selection process based on their vulnerability (CARE 2007, p.22).

<sup>8</sup>CRS note that 'in some instances individual households have formed larger groups or "units" that focus their attention on a defined area. For example, 38 households living in an evacuation centre identified a plot of land to move to and develop' (Catholic Relief Services 2015). The KASS programme, in order to 'maximise impact of the project on the wider community, KASS adopted a clustering approach. This worked by identifying, through consultation and through ... Community Councils, groups of vulnerable families, which formed a geographical cluster. In this cluster area, adjacent side ditches, community wells and road gravelling were also rehabilitated and upgraded. Through this approach, clusters of families benefited, rather than single families' (CARE 2007, p.26).

option as it presents the greatest opportunity for partnering or working in a complementary way to local government, strengthening links between communities and government, early development of exit plans and on-going maintenance and management of any assets (IRC 2015; Lippman & Malik 2004).

- **Physical:** Defining the location of a programme by the physical features of the urban environment that act as a natural barrier, for example main roads, rivers or topography (eg very steep inclines). In some instances, the physical features will also foster a sense of social or community identity, and the mutually supporting physical and social boundaries make a stronger case for planning an intervention at this scale. For example the Katye Neighbourhood Improvement programme in Ravine Pintade was bounded by three main roads, and sloped very steeply towards the ravine (USAID/OFDA n.d., p.2).

Furthermore, defining the geography for an area-based approach typically has to combine administrative or physical boundaries with social analysis and delineation in order to support participatory processes.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, when defining the geographical area, the question of scale is also key. For example Vrbensky argues that ‘area is not considered “neighbourhood”, but rather the geographical area is defined by the problem that is being targeted’ (Vrbensky 2009, p.78); suggesting that the range could fluctuate from a small number of households to a city-wide intervention, depending on the ‘problem’ that is being addressed. However the literature reviewed, including the case studies, typically describe programmes at a ‘neighbourhood’ level, often in informal areas with estimates of around 1,400–6000+ households impacted by the project. Whilst area-based approaches at such a scale and with a ‘neighbourhood’ as their entry point seems to be the most common, there are many alternatives (eg market, conservation, fragile environment and regeneration areas)<sup>10</sup> at a range of scales (eg city-wide) that may present more suitable entry points; this is noted as an area for further research.

## b) Participatory

Area-based approaches place a strong emphasis on community and wider stakeholder engagement in recognition that the solution and the process leading to it require not only formal inclusion, but also the active participation of all relevant stakeholders in the area (IRC 2015; Brown *et al.* 2015; Groupe URD 2011b).

Within the literature there is a strong focus on local residents, for example Lippman and Malik (2004) argue

that the process should be ‘community-driven’ while USAID/OFDA state that ‘success is dependent on the active involvement of community stakeholders in a highly consultative planning process’ (2011). This was reflected in findings from the case studies; for example the BRC Integrated Neighbourhood programme in Port-au-Prince adopted PASSA (Participatory Approach for Safe Shelter Awareness) – a planning tool that takes communities through an in-depth participatory process to identify, prioritise, and plan for their local hazards and vulnerabilities (BRC 2012).

Communities vary widely, many are already structured and are driving their own development or crisis coping processes;<sup>11</sup> area-based approaches present an opportunity to support local initiatives and for organisations to achieve their goals.<sup>12</sup> The KASS programme in Kabul, for example, supported existing Community Councils, and where needed, established new Community Councils through election processes which aimed to build a solid foundation for good governance (CARE 2007).

The active involvement of other local stakeholders, especially local authorities, is also critical, with ‘support [from humanitarian actors] surged to local municipalities, local partners and civil society, complementing existing governance systems’ (IRC 2015, p.5). For example in Haiti, the BRC programme established a partnership with Unitransfer, a private company, in order to facilitate distribution of cash grants using mobile phones, or vouchers for those without phones (BRC 2012).

## c) Multi-sectoral

Area-based approaches are a way of ‘responding to multi-sector needs’ (USAID 2011) that exist within cities. Turok (2004:1) notes that ‘depending on the character of local problems and opportunities available, [an area-based approach] typically embraces a range of social, economic and physical development objectives cutting across ... fields such as education, housing, transport and economic development’. In terms of sectors, an urban multi-sector response may include shelter and related services, disaster risk reduction, livelihoods, social connections, and the health and security of the disaster-affected population (USAID 2011).

Each of the case studies was initially conceived, or later adopted, as a multi-sectoral approach. For example the CRS programme in Tacloban provided assistance across a range of sectors, including shelter, WASH and cash support (Catholic Relief Services 2015). In Baghdad, the NRC/UN-Habitat programme integrated support for education, food security, ICLA (information, counselling and legal assistance), shelter, water,

<sup>9</sup> Darren Gill (30.04.2015) personal communication and Inge Leuwerink (01.05.2015) personal communication.

<sup>10</sup> Maggie Stephenson (06.06.15) personal communication.

<sup>11</sup> Maggie Stephenson (06.06.15) personal communication.

<sup>12</sup> Further research is recommended, please also see Chapter 2, Section 2.4.

sanitation and hygiene 'into a holistic structure based on multi-sector or multi-competency, area-based teams with ad hoc support from sector-specific specialists at various points during the project' (DFID & NRC 2014, p.70).

Further multi-sector support identified across the case studies included disaster risk reduction, rubble removal, health, livelihoods, drainage, roads and support of local governance activities (BRC 2012; CARE 2007; USAID/OFDA n.d.; SKAT & IFRC 2012). Selection from a variety of types of assistance means the affected population can make the best use of their coping strategies for improving their lives after a disaster (SKAT & IFRC 2012).

## 2.2 Why are area-based approaches being adopted?

This section reflects on humanitarian and development literature to understand the historical context of area-based approaches across a range of geographies, as well as why there is currently growing interest in adopting the approach amongst humanitarian agencies.

### How and where have area-based approaches been previously applied?

Area-based approaches have a long history in the UK dating back to the 1970s (Donaldson *et al.* 2013; Lawless 2007). In a UK context, area-based approaches have been defined as targeting 'geographical areas of deprivation and commonly compris[ing] investment in key socio-economic determinants of health, for example employment, housing, education, income and welfare' (Thomson 2008, p.932). This is echoed by Lawless (2007:1) who notes that area-based approaches are 'designed to address problems impacting on defined urban localities', and Cleworth (1977:25) who emphasises the need for a multi-sectoral approach as 'poor people in poor areas have desperate and unusual needs, and to meet them an inter-related group of policies is required.'

Area-based approaches have also long been adopted in international urban development programmes – certainly since the 1990s (Donaldson *et al.* 2013). However 'area-based approach' is not a commonly found term in the developmental literature, and there are a multitude of ways to describe programmes that take a participatory, geographically targeted, multi-sector approach: for

### BOX 2: HOW ARE AREA-BASED APPROACHES DIFFERENT FROM NEIGHBOURHOOD, SETTLEMENT, INTEGRATED OR MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACHES?

The authors suggest that a variety of terms appear to be used interchangeably when discussing area-based approaches. The most common in the humanitarian literature are neighbourhood, settlement, integrated, holistic, and multi-sectoral approaches.

Neighbourhood and settlement approaches:

- Programmes described as having taken a 'neighbourhood' or 'settlement' approach typically identified a geographical area and adopted a participatory, multi-sectoral approach. Using the definition outlined above, the authors suggest that they can thus be described as area-based.
- These terms are typically used to describe an area-based approach at a certain scale (eg the neighbourhood is the 'unit' of intervention).

Integrated, holistic or multi-sectoral:

- These terms are typically used interchangeably to describe programmes that require input from, and coordination across, multiple sectors (eg health, education, shelter etc.).
- Multi-sector or integrated programmes are not always participatory, nor are they necessarily

geographically targeted (for example, they are located somewhere, but their entry point or targeting strategy would not include the whole population living in the area in which they are working).

- Some of the literature also discussed 'holistic' approaches. The authors understood this term to be used to describe multi-sectoral programmes, but from the perspective of the community. For example, whilst a humanitarian agency may need to describe a programme as multi-sectoral for operational purposes, from the perspective of the community those sectoral categories are not a way of describing their lives. 'Holistic', which is defined as 'characterised by the belief that the parts of something are intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole', more accurately reflects the needs of the affected population.
- The authors also found that in some instances the term 'integrated' takes on a second meaning, and is used to describe programmes that span across, or accommodate, transition from relief, to recovery, to reconstruction.

example 'urban renewal' (Donaldson *et al.* 2013), 'slum upgrades' (UN-Habitat 2003) and an 'integrated approach to urban upgrading' (Baker 2006).

'Integrated zonal development approaches' to supporting both refugees and host populations began to be discussed by UNHCR, international organisations and governments in Africa working in post-conflict situations as early as the mid-1960s (Crisp 2001). Although not specifically urban focused, this approach was proposed as way of linking 'refugee and returnee assistance programmes with longer-term development efforts in low-income countries' (Crisp 2001, p.1); that sought to ensure that refugee needs were addressed alongside the developmental needs of the area where they settled (Gorman, 1987). However, at the time, few efforts were made to 'implement this approach, and those which were undertaken did not meet with great success' (Crisp 2001, p.169).

From 2002 onwards, UNHCR, in partnership with multiple organisations,<sup>13</sup> launched the 4Rs approach (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction), it built upon earlier approaches to integrating short-term and long-term needs of displaced and returning populations. The 4Rs approach was 'area-based and incorporate[d] a community driven approach and conflict prevention lens. It ... [sought] to strengthen the linkages between communities and government and provides capacity building for local government administrations responsible for meeting the immediate and longer-term needs of receiving communities' (Lippman & Malik 2004, p.9).

## Why is there currently growing interest in area-based approaches to urban humanitarian crises?

Recently there has been increased interest in area-based approaches amongst humanitarian agencies working in urban crises as a way of addressing the following challenges associated with working in cities:

- **Urban crises make beneficiary identification and need analysis problematic:** Identifying beneficiaries and analysing need for humanitarian assistance in urban areas is problematic (IASC 2010), and is linked to the challenges of establishing an appropriate entry point. The mandates of humanitarian actors often requires them to 'focus on the individual – in particular, "vulnerable" individuals' (Crawford & Killing 2012, p.2) but in an urban context the 'vulnerabilities of the needy might be associated with infrastructures/services that are shared across a wide area' (*ibid.*, 14). Furthermore, urban communities are not homogenous and 'conventional methods of needs assessment do not adequately distinguish between the on-going chronic needs of poor urban households and the more acute vulnerability provoked by a disaster' (IASC 2010, p.3). This is particularly critical for displaced urban communities, where past humanitarian assistance has often excluded host populations; leading to 'increasing social tensions and undermining the 'do no harm' principle of a humanitarian intervention' (IRC 2015, p.5).
- **Urban crises require different entry points:** As Groupe URD (2011b: 7) argue, cities are 'complex systems where many different factors interconnect in a relatively limited but densely-populated space' – identifying a sensible and feasible entry point, especially in response to a crisis is not straightforward. However there are calls for a 'paradigm shift' in humanitarian practice, moving away from an individual household or beneficiary identification and selection process to one that intervenes at a larger scale and recognises the services, infrastructure and other system inter-dependencies that affect urban inhabitants (IASC, 2010; Shelter Cluster Strategy; IRC, 2015; ECHO, 2013).
- **Urban crises require humanitarian agencies to adopt an *engaging, advocating and supporting approach rather than a service delivery approach:*** Coordination with a wide range of humanitarian and non-humanitarian agencies is critical for any appropriate response in an urban environment that will contribute to sustainable development (IDMC *et al.* 2015; Groupe URD 2011a). The IRC advance this, and note: 'humanitarian effectiveness in urban areas requires much less direct service delivery [products] and far more engaging with existing services, advocating for access and supporting local governments and private sector partners to scale up and ensure quality of services' (IRC 2015, p.6).
- **Urban crises highlight gaps in coordination between humanitarian organisations:** Since 2005 the Cluster Approach has aimed to strengthen the coordination and response capacity of the international community by mobilising clusters of humanitarian agencies.<sup>14</sup> Each of the eleven sectoral coordination groups or 'clusters' has a clearly designated and accountable lead. In most contexts, the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is responsible for providing the

<sup>13</sup> Including UNICEF, WFP, WHO, International Labour Organisation (ILO), UNFPA, UN-HABITAT, OCHA.

<sup>14</sup> For further information see: [www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/about-clusters/what-is-the-cluster-approach](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/about-clusters/what-is-the-cluster-approach)



framework for inter-cluster coordination. However, as Humphries notes, 'OCHA is more successful at information sharing, but much weaker in identifying multidisciplinary issues, strengthening coordination between clusters, and following-up on identified issues for improvement' (Humphries 2013). Particularly, in an urban context inter-sectoral coordination is not always effective (IASC 2010; IRC 2015).

- **Urban crises require greater partnership with non-humanitarian actors:** The IASC note that 'compared to rural settings [the complexity of cities], demands a deeper knowledge of the spatial and social structure and the potential for stronger partnerships with municipal and national governments, civil society and communities' (2010:2), and the private sector (Carpenter 2013). Groupe URD (2011b:10) argue this is because 'humanitarian aid and service delivery are intertwined locally' and that 'understanding and engaging with urban infrastructure systems requires a coordinated, multi-sector approach' (Brown *et al.*, p16).

The literature indicates that area-based approaches offer opportunities to address each of these challenges. For example, an area-based approach provides a method of assisting vulnerable populations alongside those affected by the crises. Through taking an inclusive, geographically targeted approach, area-based approaches present the opportunity to 'contribute to improving social cohesion' (IDMC *et al.* 2015, p.19). Area-based approaches also represent a coordination mechanism for humanitarian and other stakeholders, and that perhaps in 'urban contexts this kind of multi-sector geographical coordination could replace the "compartmentalised" cluster system' (Groupe URD 2011b, p.10).

Area-based approaches represent one strategy for addressing these emerging challenges as they allow humanitarian actors to engage at a defined, and manageable level. However it is important to note that area-based approaches are not the only strategy and they need to be reviewed alongside other approaches (such as systems, market or institution-based approaches- see Box 3) to ascertain their potential benefits or otherwise, in any given context.

## BOX 3: TARGETING APPROACHES IN URBAN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Approaches to targeting humanitarian assistance in urban areas include:

- **Area-based approaches** targeting specific locations with a high concentration of needs, as discussed in detail in this paper.
- **Market-based approaches** supporting the recovery of 'foundation markets' through the re-establishment or improvement of supply, distribution and market mechanisms while providing assistance through cash or voucher programmes (Sanderson *et al.* 2012; DFID 2014).
- **Systems-based approaches** supporting the rehabilitation of critical infrastructure – such as water, sanitation, electricity, roads, transport, communications, healthcare and education – and increasing their accessibility to vulnerable groups (SKAT & IFRC 2012; UNHCR 2009).
- **Institution-based approaches** targeting individuals based on affiliation with a specific institution – such as a school, health clinic or

workplace (USAID 2008; DFID 2014) or supporting local authorities to recover.<sup>15</sup>

- **Individual or household approaches** seek to identify the most needy individuals, households or families. There are various ways in which beneficiaries are classified for example means testing (eg where selection is based on income or assets), proxy targeting (eg where selection is based on an observational characteristic, age, condition of house etc.) or self-targeting (eg where beneficiaries decide independently to participate) (USAID 2008; Crawford & Killing 2012).

Deciding which targeting approach is most appropriate 'usually depends on the proportion of the population that needs assistance, the type of programme contemplated, trade-offs between targeting cost and targeting accuracy, and the feasibility of targeting options' (USAID 2008, pp.5–6). While 'several targeting approaches can be applied simultaneously depending on the programmes envisaged' (Groupe URD 2011b, p.23).

<sup>15</sup> Maggie Stephenson (06.06.15) personal communication.

## 2.3 What are the consequences of adopting area-based approaches?

This section identifies the potential positive and negative consequences of adopting an area-based approach. These findings draw on development and humanitarian literature to present a discussion that highlights the advantages, as well as the risks associated with adopting area-based approaches.<sup>16</sup>

### What are the positive consequences of adopting area-based approaches?

The literature reviewed identified the following advantages of adopting area-based approaches. These related to one of three themes, relationships and equality within the project area; efficiency of resources; and economic opportunities:

#### Relationships and equality within the project area

- **Act as a catalyst for local change:** Through a participatory process the population create a local development perspective and strategy, creates legitimacy for decisions and increases community confidence and capacity to engage in governance (Smith 1999; Turok 2004; Küsel 2009). Many of the case studies highlighted the importance of the programme acting as a catalyst to strengthen links between the community and the government, and the long-term benefits to both parties (BRC, Port-au-Prince; KASS, Kabul; Katye, Port-au-Prince, NRC/UN-Habitat, Baghdad). In the majority of cases this was achieved through mobilising the community and either working with existing groups or forming, and formally recognising committees. For example in Baghdad the NRC/UN-Habitat acted 'as a facilitator to bring inhabitants of the informal settlements and district councils together, which was facilitated through establishing District Council Coordination Meetings (DCCMs) as a platform for this dialogue. This allowed relationships to be established that would continue even after NRC's programme had finished' (DFID & NRC 2014, p.65).

- **Prevent the creation or reinforcement of tensions and inequalities within the defined area:** 'In conflict/displacement situations, an area-based approach is proposed as one way of reducing inequality between the displaced and local population, especially where host populations are very poor, international standards can mean that the displaced population have a "better quality of life"' (Crisp 2001, p.164; Lippman & Malik 2004; Urbensky 2009; Global CCCM Cluster 2014). For example the NRC/UN-Habitat programme in Baghdad reported that an 'inclusive approach' that addressed the needs of all the residents, not just IDPS 'reduced tensions and increased acceptance of NRC's approach' (DFID & NRC 2014, p.84).

#### Efficiency of resources

- **Prevent 'consultation fatigue':** An area-based approach, presents the opportunity for humanitarian actors to coordinate more efficiently with communities, preventing 'consultation fatigue' and associated challenges – as the focus is on the needs of the community. This is in contrast to an approach that is only multi-sectoral where each sector may consult with communities separately 'which can take up a considerable amount of time particularly for community leaders and perhaps fuel cynicism about relief agencies and their ways of working' (World Vision International 2014, p.19).
- **Focus resources effectively:** If problems are concentrated, a greater number of people are assisted if resources are geographically targeted than if they are spread more evenly (Smith 1999).
- **Prevent over-stretching mainstream programmes and services:** There are identifiable geographical areas that suffer disproportionately from problems. This places mainstream programmes under pressure so that they operate less effectively than in other, more affluent areas and something 'extra' is therefore needed (Smith 1999).
- **Increase impact:** Focusing activity on small areas within tight boundaries can, potentially, make more of an impact than if resources are dissipated (Smith 1999). There can also be greater efficiencies, for example in a more defined area it is easier for humanitarian actors to share resources (office space, storage, logistics) and avoid duplication (from hygiene kits to training sessions) through formal and casual

<sup>16</sup>As discussed earlier, the literature reviewed largely represents area-based approaches that were applied at a 'cluster of households', 'neighbourhood' or 'district' scale and the positive and negative consequences detailed in this section reflect adoption at these scales. If an area-based approach was adopted at a different scale (eg city-wide), additional positive and negative consequences are likely to emerge and further research would be recommended.



observation/interaction.<sup>17</sup> As Sanderson *et al.* note, neighbourhood approaches that focus on relatively small areas 'can lead to better programmes and offer the possibility to (re)build communities' (2012:12).

### Economic opportunities

- **Attract investment:** Area-based approaches can help to develop entrepreneurial capabilities, boost the image of deprived areas and attract inward investment and employment (Turok 2004, p.9).

### What are the potential negative consequences of adopting area-based approaches?

Several authors also identified a number of critiques of area-based approaches. These related to one of three themes, the relationship between the project area and other neighbourhoods; connections between local, city and regional or national strategies and governance; and project processes.

### Relationship between project area and other neighbourhoods

- **Create inequalities outside the defined area:** Area-based approaches can be considered unfair or inequitable by populations living outside the targeted area as they are not included, despite in some instances having similar needs. There can be significant challenges and pressure associated with targeting some areas and not others. Depending on the context and the transparency of the decision-making leading up to the selection of the area, focusing the funding and efforts on one area can cause significant social and political tension (Smith 1999). For example the Katy Neighbourhood Improvement programme in Ravine Pintade reported 'tension with surrounding neighbourhoods not included in the project' (IDMC *et al.* 2015, p.44).
- **Negatively affect surrounding areas:** Area-based approaches can have a negative effect on surrounding areas, which may also require assistance. They may cause resources to be directed away from equally affected areas or displace 'problems' to other locations (Smith 1999; Turok 2004). There may also be a 'bandwagon effect' as it's easier for new agencies to join an existing initiative rather than pioneering work in another location,<sup>18</sup> which further compounds the problem.

### Connections between local, city and regional or national strategies and governance

- **Lead to a disconnect between local plans and wider city or regional plans:** Area-based approaches work within clearly defined boundaries, and do not necessarily link to mainstream programmes and policies (Coaffee 2004). This can lead to a significant disconnect between strategic plans and programmatic activities at different spatial scales (for example between district, sub-district and city-wide); reducing the efficiency and long-term sustainability of each (Smith 1999).
- **Create a distraction from underlying problems:** Area-based approaches have been criticised as high profile palliatives for the visible manifestations of deep-rooted problems, giving the impression that something is being done but deflecting attention from more fundamental economic, social and institutional changes (Oatley, 2000; Pantazis and Gordon, 2000; Townsend, 1979) quoted in (Turok 2004, p.1). Smith (2009) argues that area targeting is only really 'appropriate when deprivation and disadvantage can be addressed, in part, within the boundaries of a target area. It is acknowledged that problems will not be totally resolved at this level and that some issues can only be addressed at the national level or indeed, the international level.' Area-based programmes, through focusing efforts on a small scale, may detract from the need to do more at a national or regional level, for example through broader programmes or policy change.
- **Shift responsibility onto the wrong stakeholder:** Area-based approaches focus on problems at local level – engaging communities, local government and other organisations working or located in the vicinity. The responsibility to address the problems linked to their area shifts to the local actors. However, in many instances 'the problems of localised poverty and unemployment are often caused by wider economic and social processes that have relatively little to do with the characteristics of the areas themselves' (Turok 2004, p.9). Thus local actors may have responsibility, but little control and limited influence.

<sup>17</sup> Darren Gill (30.04.2015) personal communication.

<sup>18</sup> Darren Gill (30.04.2015) personal communication.

## Project processes

- **Be costly to implement:** Some authors argue that 'area-based responses tend to be more expensive' (IDMC *et al.* 2015, p.19), for example when compared to a programme that only target populations affected by crises. In Haiti, following the earthquake 'the scale of investment required [to connect area-based approaches to wider city systems effectively] was beyond NGO budgets' (Crawford & Killing 2012, p.22), however this is very much context dependant. Cost comparisons needs to be made carefully as urban programmes will generally require more time, skills and funding than rural programmes due to the complexity of the operational environment.<sup>19</sup> Urbensky (2009) also notes that 'the costs of integration rise with the scale and complexity of the intervention'- meaning the greater number of sectors involved, and the larger the target area, the higher the management costs associated with the implementation of an area-based approach.
- **Take a long time, 5+ years:** Due to the highly participatory nature of area-based interventions, and the need to work with multiple-stakeholders and build trust, programme durations can be long as 'neighbourhoods are often differentiated and divided... securing agreement and compromise can be extremely difficult and slow.' (Turok 2004, p.7). The BRC experienced this in Port-au-Prince with their Integrated Neighbourhood programme, where 'more time was needed to explain that participatory tools only informed planning, and expectations for concrete results needed to be managed' (UN-HABITAT *et al.* 2014, p.40) In the developmental literature it was not uncommon to find programmes that were designed to be five or more years. However humanitarian programmes typically have a limited funding window, and as CARE note (2007:42) 'short timelines mean that not all relevant issues can be dealt with', which requires prioritisation, and a focus on creating a platform for future development<sup>20</sup> (eg capacity building, advocacy, self-organised community etc.).
- **Be difficult to monitor and evaluate:** The developmental literature highlights the challenges associated with measuring the outcomes, or impact of area-based approaches (Stewart 2001; Thomson 2008). As Thomson (2008) notes 'impacts are likely to occur in conjunction with other changes which may or may not be associated with the intervention',

disaggregating what positive or negative effect was caused by the area-based approach, and what was an external factor, poses significant difficulties. Furthermore, urban populations are often characterised by high levels of mobility – people move frequently for employment, education and social reasons (Muscat 2010). This can make it difficult to capture programme outcomes because the benefits are effectively displaced elsewhere (UN-Habitat 2003). During a humanitarian response, this is likely to be all the more challenging as the population re-establish their lives. The BRC's Integrated Neighbourhood programme in Port-au-Prince reports experiencing challenges associated with high levels of urban mobility as in the Haiti context: 'the implications of the very high proportion of renters in the neighbourhood, as well as their propensity to move from different parts of the city due to work, labour and family connections, complicated the British Red Cross' response' (BRC 2012, p.49). Challenges associated with monitoring and evaluation area-based approaches to demonstrate evidence of positive change leave it open to much criticism. However, this challenge of monitoring and evaluation area-based approaches sits within a broader discussion of the challenges of monitoring and evaluating humanitarian interventions.

## 2.4 How can area-based approaches be improved?

The previous section highlighted the benefits and the critiques associated with an area-based approach. This section builds upon the previous one by seeking to identify good practice and lessons learnt that allows the benefits to be designed **into** an area-based approach, whilst, where possible, designing **out** the negative effects. Area-based approaches do not happen in isolation and need to be based within the broader context of crisis response and recovery programming<sup>21</sup> – the following lessons learnt and good practice need to be grounded in an a strong understanding of the wider context (Box 4).

These emerging lessons learnt and good practice – which have been synthesised from development and humanitarian literature – are interwoven, with each one building on the next.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Darren Gill (30.04.2015) Personal communication.

<sup>20</sup> Inge Leuverink (01.05.2015) Personal communication.

<sup>21</sup> Maggie Stephenson (06.06.15) personal communication.

<sup>22</sup> As discussed earlier, the literature reviewed largely represents area-based approaches that were applied at a 'cluster of households', 'neighbourhood' or 'district' scale and the good practice and lessons learnt detailed in this section reflect adoption at these scales. If an area-based approach was adopted at a different scale (eg city-wide), additional further research would be recommended to detail the lessons learnt.

## BOX 4: AREA-BASED APPROACHES AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION

Whilst area-based approaches are established in the development sector, this research indicates there are limited well-documented cases in the humanitarian sector. Given this restricted evidence base, further research into the effectiveness and impact of area-based approaches in different contexts -when compared and contrasted with other strategies (eg market or system based – see Box 3) is required, and recommended later in this paper.

This analysis would need to be partnered with research that reviewed the current limitations and opportunities of operating within the existing humanitarian coordination and funding frameworks. For example, seeking to identify situations when area-based approaches would have been appropriate but were not possible (eg when funding was not available for multi-sector programming or when

an implementing agency did not feel they had the necessary skills 'in-house'); as well as the overlap between and requirements of alternative approaches (eg market/system etc.).

Research of this nature would have implications for humanitarian coordination, leadership and funding mechanisms, and for the design and implementation of area-based approaches. For example this paper indicates that the majority of case-studies are implemented at a 'neighbourhood' or 'district' scale, rather than for example a city scale- is this a reflection of the current humanitarian coordination systems? Would other scales be more appropriate in other contexts and lead to more effective outcomes? What would need to change to enable the adoption of city-wide area-based approaches?

### a. Adopt an area-based approach selectively

Area-based approaches are not a 'quick fix solution to difficult places with deep-rooted social and economic problems' (Turok 2004, p.9), they are 'not a panacea and cannot hope to solve everything' (Smith 1999). However when appropriately applied they can be valuable catalysts for local change, presenting mechanisms for effectively focusing resources and mobilising a 'bottom-up' response. The advantages and disadvantages associated with an area-based approach should be compared with other methods of intervention (such as systems, market or institution-based approaches) and the capacity of the implementing organisation(s) so that an informed decision can be made about the most effective method of intervention.

### b. Clearly define and test the scope, outcomes and intended impacts of an area-based approach

Turok (2004:1) argues that one of the reasons why doubts have emerged about the principles of area-based approaches, and why 'practical initiatives have sometimes proved ineffective, is confusion about the basic purpose and unrealistic expectations' of what can be achieved. It is critical that 'responses in urban environments ... [are] based upon agreeing a clear intended outcome or humanitarian objective' (Crawford *et al.* 2010) and this equally applies when adopting an area-based approach. As Sanderson *et al.* (2012:3) note, 'the size of urban populations and the scale of needs in urban disasters limit the contribution that any single actor can make...agencies should be clear about

the sectoral and geographic scope of their interventions' (Sanderson *et al.* 2012, p.3).

The programme scope needs to be clearly defined and tested in order for it to deliver the intended outcomes. This definition and testing process should recognise the limitations identified earlier; for example recognising that an area-based approach will only be able to address problems that can be solved within the boundaries of the target area and within the time available. Clear communication to stakeholders of project scope, outcomes and intended impact is critical to manage expectations and to build trust.

### c. Ensure the timeline matches the scope of the programme

The literature did not indicate a minimum programme duration required for the successful implementation of an area-based approach. However it is telling that many of the case studies identified through the humanitarian literature had a duration of 18 months (often driven by humanitarian funding cycles), whereas the developmental programmes were typically five or more years.

As noted earlier, due to its highly participatory nature, an area-based approach requires a sufficiently long duration to establish trust and to bring together multiple stakeholders: 'it is important that time is taken to build relationships with government departments/ ministries/ NGOs/ other stakeholders so that activities are consolidated and build on each other' (CARE 2007, p.42). The experience of the NRC/UN-Habitat

programme in Baghdad supports this as they undertook a 12-month training and capacity building phase to cultivate trust and build relationships, and highlight that 'allowing enough time for this to happen was incredibly important' (DFID & NRC 2014, p.81).

Humanitarian actors need to carefully define their scope (bullet 'b'), so that it is feasible within the timeframe available and sits within the mandate of their agency, in order that stakeholder expectations can be managed. For example the KASS programme in Kabul ran for 17 months. As part of the programme KASS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Kabul municipality that detailed 'explicit permission from the government of Afghanistan for individuals residing in un-planned areas to build and occupy the structures on the land they own [for a minimum of five years]' (CARE 2007, p.30). In this instance, CARE (2007:42) note that 'some of the key issues such as land tenure and other reform issues cannot be tackled in a short term project', but that the MoU was an important first step.

#### d. Link area-based approach planning to wider city or regional plans and policies

In a developmental context, the evidence suggests that there should be clear and transparent links between area-based approaches and national (or city) level programmes, given the time-limited nature of the former and its ability to meet the needs of only a small percentage of the population (Smith 1999; Baker 2006). In an humanitarian context it is also important that area-based approaches are 'integrated into broader urban planning and growth strategies' (IDMC *et al.* 2015, p.9) and that before the settlement plan for the neighbourhood is developed, it is good practice to check against 'the overall master plan of the area or city, if any, to ensure compliance with its requirements' (SKAT & IFRC 2012).

It was not clear from the literature how the case studies discussed in this paper linked with a broader city or national strategy, nor the efforts to link them, and indeed the lessons learnt from this experience. However, Crawford and Killing (2012: 22) note that their experiences in Haiti suggest that the 'solution' posed by area-based approaches, 'where agencies address a broad palette of needs in one area, seemed to be isolated and disconnected from any relationship to the larger city.' Vertical integration of plans or strategies at different levels can be a costly and lengthy process (Vrbensky 2009) and further research is required to determine the practicalities, challenges and opportunities. For example, some of the humanitarian literature identified challenges around working in urban crises where no existing wider city or regional plans and policies are available.

The strategy taken by NRC/UN-Habitat in Baghdad presents an interesting example of how area-based approaches can link to wider policies, whilst both are being driven by non-government agencies. The NRC/UN-Habitat programme combined an area-based approach that aimed to 'improve the living conditions of IDPs in the immediate term' with a broader package of works that sought to 'promote a change in national policy in the longer term' (DFID & NRC 2014, p.56). In order to do this, they worked at a variety of scales, with neighbourhoods, district councils, provincial councils, service providers and national ministries (DFID & NRC 2014, p.56). NRC and UN-Habitat each took on 'different responsibilities within this programme, with UN-Habitat working at the policy and national government level, while NRC focused on working at the community and local government level' (DFID & NRC 2014, p.58). Through the NRC and UN-Habitat partnership, and the complementary activities undertaken by each, the two agencies were able to tackle the same problem at different scales; using the success of pilot projects at neighbourhood level to influence provincial and national policy, which in turn could drive change in an increasing number of areas (DFID & NRC 2014, pp.58–59).

#### e. Early and on-going engagement with local governments, civil society groups and other stakeholders

The humanitarian and development literature strongly emphasised the importance of early and maintained engagement with local government, civil society groups and other key stakeholders (Baker 2006; CARE 2007; IRC 2015; IDMC *et al.* 2015; Lippman & Malik 2004). An area-based approach 'require[s] developing effective partnerships and capacity development with a larger range of actors at both strategic and operational levels such as mayors, municipalities, police forces and residents' (Global CCCM Cluster 2014). In this instance, the primary role of the humanitarian agency is as 'facilitator' seeking to foster relations and cooperation between local stakeholders and set the groundwork for future developmental activities.

For example, the KASS project in Kabul identified that 'the success of the project rested on bringing in key stakeholders such as the Kabul municipality and community members into all aspects of the project, from beneficiary selection, choice of project sites and also regular project discussions' (CARE 2007, p.5). Early and on-going coordination is required to build trust throughout the programme duration, supporting programme sustainability by putting into place mechanisms to maintain or scale up, and supporting early development of an exit strategy (see Box 5).



## BOX 5: HOW CAN ADOPTING AREA-BASED APPROACHES HELP TO BRIDGE THE HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT DIVIDE?

The literature indicates that area-based approaches represent a significant opportunity to bridge the humanitarian and development divide. In large part this is due to the multi-sectoral and participatory nature of an area-based approach discussed earlier, which draws significantly on developmental practices (tools, skill sets etc.). Further, in urban areas, such engagement with local government, residents and other stakeholders can become the common ground that is shared with early recovery/development agencies 'that have emphasised the importance of local ownership and building self-resilience' (Global CCCM Cluster 2014). Area-based approaches provide a platform for stakeholders to come together

to identify, prioritise and address their short, medium and long-term ambitions.

However there can be challenges associated with humanitarian agencies adopting an area-based approach. Reflecting on their experiences in Haiti, the BRC notes that such an approach 'is not without problems, such as knowing where a humanitarian mandate ends and that of development and government agencies begins, and what to do if state and development partners fail to meet the basic needs of vulnerable people' (BRC 2012, p.10). Further research is required, and this is discussed in Chapter 3.

### f. Early and on-going engagement with residents

As CARE notes, 'the process matters. How projects are designed and implemented, and who is involved in project design and implementation, contributes directly to project outcomes' (2007:42). There is general agreement from the literature that communities should be central to an area-based approach – their early and on-going involvement, whether it be participating in assessments, implementation and/or monitoring and evaluation, is essential to a successful programme. (BRC 2012; CARE 2007; Lippman & Malik 2004; Baker 2006; Coaffee 2004).

However, whilst the case studies present a range of different types of participatory processes – from mechanisms to keep residents informed, to planning and strategy development sessions that engage multiple stakeholders in collective decision-making – it is typically the case that local residents contribute to the processes established by humanitarian agencies, rather than humanitarian agencies supporting local residents to drive their own process. This could benefit from further research to better understand the challenges and opportunities in a range of different contexts, as well as tapping into lessons learnt and 'good practice' from similar community-driven processes.<sup>23</sup>

Further examples of different ways residents were engaged in programmes included employment and capacity building. For example, in Kabul, as part of

the KASS project, local unskilled labourers were employed, as well as contracts being given to local suppliers for the construction materials (CARE 2007). In Baghdad, the NRC/UN-Habitat programme established committees in each settlement and undertook a range of activities 'to build the knowledge and capacity of the settlement representatives enabl[ing] them to be able to engage professionally with district council members and advocate for their needs to represented authorities and service providers' (DFID & NRC 2014, p.87).

### g. Design programmes to be flexible

Area-based approaches require flexibility in programme design, management and funding:

*'in complex and multi-sectoral projects the most important management decision may be to allow for flexibility in institutional responsibilities. Rigid procedures will not allow for the complex challenges in implementing multi-sectoral projects. It is also important to allow for flexibility and adjustments in programme management practices as the project develops. As practices evolve, changes can enhance performance' (Baker 2006, p.15).*

This is especially true for humanitarians responding to a natural disaster or post-conflict as situations can change very rapidly and 'agencies and donors must

<sup>23</sup> For example Community-Driven Reconstruction (CDR). CDR has its origins in Community Driven Development (CDD), an approach pioneered by the World Bank and others for use in developmental settings. It is premised on the belief that populations have the right, and are best placed, to drive their own development. For additional information see [www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-39/community-driven-reconstruction-a-new-strategy-for-recovery](http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-39/community-driven-reconstruction-a-new-strategy-for-recovery)

remain adaptable and adjust programmes, staff levels and funding as required' (Lippman & Malik 2004, p.11).

For example the Katye Neighbourhood Improvement programme in Ravine Pintade notes 'the importance of flexibility' as a key lesson learnt:

*'In view of the difficulty of re-planning and rehabilitating heavily-damaged communities in the presence of existing residents and substantial rubble, final plans were left flexible. This enabled Katye technical staff, contractors and community leaders to make appropriate modifications as the removal of rubble and the start of construction exposed previously hidden features and issues. OFDA as a donor remained flexible with the changing landscape as information became more available, and responded accordingly. This flexibility allowed for significant room for responsiveness to the reality on the ground' (USAID/OFDA n.d., p.7).*

The need for flexibility is also highlighted in the NRC/ UN-Habitat programme in Baghdad as:

*'the need to work across multiple scales was recognised only as the programme evolved and the context analysis developed. For example, NRC initially assumed that the pathway for changing the conditions in informal settlements would start through building relationships with district councils. Once the programme was underway, it became clear that the district councils had limited decision-making power: despite district councils willingness to address the problem, they were prohibited by law to extend services to informal settlements. This meant trying a new entry point and shifting programme resources to advocacy and capacity building at the provincial and national*

*levels' (DFID & NRC 2014, p.56).*

#### h. Demonstrate results early to mobilise, motivate and build the trust of residents

Participatory, community-planning processes can take considerable time (see above). Early delivery of small-scale intervention projects present an opportunity to mobilise and motivate residents, as well as to ensure the programme maintained momentum (Rule 2014; DFID & NRC 2014; USAID/OFDA n.d.). Further benefits include bringing the residents together around a common goal, reducing tensions and building rapport and trust between the residents and the implementing agencies. As NRC/UN-Habitat note from their experiences in Baghdad, 'in programmes that rely on sustained community engagement and dialogue, it is useful to be able to respond when progress appears slow, ... it may be necessary to use a variety of short term interventions to maintain momentum and acceptance at with communities'(DFID & NRC 2014, p.83).

In the Katye programme in Ravine Pintade, the project began in one of the most damaged sub-zones, which 'enabled the programme to gain the confidence of community and continue to attract and engage residents' participation in subsequent planning activities by demonstrating that they would lead to real, on-the-ground results' (USAID/OFDA n.d., p.6). The BRC Integrated Neighbourhood initiated 'a number of small interventions and projects ... including drainage improvements, improved circulation, paved public space and the installation of solar street lighting;' this illustrated 'what was possible through smaller quick impact projects discovering their own potential for working together in community-led construction' (Rule 2014, p.27).



# 3

## Conclusions and recommendations

### 3.1 Conclusions from this study

#### What are area-based approaches to urban humanitarian crises?

Over the last five years, there has been increasing awareness amongst policy makers and practitioners that effective humanitarian responses may need to intervene at a scale that is larger than a household or individual shelter provision when working in urban environments. Area-based, settlement or neighbourhood approaches have been presented as examples of alternative intervention strategies in urban areas that address this question of scale. However, whilst there is much discussion, few examples of evidence-based recommendations were identified in this review.

Nonetheless a number of humanitarian agencies identified their urban programmes as examples of area-based approaches; implemented following both natural disasters and conflicts, across a range of geographies. Through analysis of case-studies based in Kabul, Port-au-Prince, Baghdad, and Tacloban, as well as available policy literature, this paper proposes that area-based approaches in an urban context have three defining characteristics: they are geographically targeted and adopt a multi-sectoral, participatory approach. What makes an area-based approach distinct is that all three characteristics are integral to its delivery (see Figure 1).

For example, a programme can be multi-sectoral, but not area-based (if it does not take a participatory or geographically targeted approach).

#### Why are area-based approaches being adopted?

Urban area-based approaches have a long history, for example they have been adopted in the UK since the 1970s, and in international development programmes for more than 20 years. In a humanitarian context, UNHCR have sought to address the challenges of supporting both refugee and host populations, whilst addressing longer-term development needs, through programmes that have the same characteristics as an area-based approach, since the mid-1960s. However 'area-based approach' is not a commonly found term in the developmental literature, and has only recently been adopted by some humanitarian agencies, while others continue to use settlement or neighbourhood approach. There are a multitude of ways to describe programmes that take a participatory, geographically targeted, multi-sector approach: for example 'urban renewal', 'slum upgrades' and an 'integrated approach to urban upgrading'.

More recently, there has been increasing interest in area-based approaches amongst humanitarian agencies working in urban crises. This is underpinned by increased recognition of the challenges associated with working in cities. For example, when compared to rural areas urban crises make beneficiary identification

problematic, require different entry points, highlight gaps in humanitarian coordination, and require higher levels of partnership with non-humanitarian actors. Area-based approaches represent one strategy for addressing these emerging challenges as they allow humanitarian actors to engage at a defined, and manageable level; however they are not the only strategy and they need to be reviewed alongside other approaches (such as systems, market or institution-based approaches) to ascertain their potential benefits or otherwise, in any given context.

## What are the positive and negative consequences of adopting area-based approaches?

Area-based approaches are neither 'good' nor 'bad'; their positive and negative effects depending entirely on the context in which they are conceived, their programme design, the manner of their delivery, and the appropriateness of adopting such a strategy. Area-based approaches can present opportunities to prevent the creation or reinforcement of tensions and inequalities within an area; act as a valuable catalyst for local change; present mechanisms for effectively focusing resources; prevent consultation fatigue for disaster-stricken populations; mobilise a 'bottom-up' approach; attract much needed investment; and prevent the over-stretching of mainstream programmes and services.

Likewise, when poorly conceived, badly designed, undertaken by under-resourced staff, or adopted inappropriately within a city, they can have a number of negative effects. For example they can enhance inequalities between the target area and surrounding ones; create an unnecessary distraction from the underlying problem; shift responsibility onto the wrong stakeholder and prevent action; be costly to implement and be an ineffective use of resources; take a long time; lead to a disconnect between local plans and wider city or regional plans which has long-term implications; and be difficult to monitor and evaluate, and thus demonstrate results.

## How can area-based approaches be improved?

Emerging lessons learnt from area-based approaches include:

- Adopt an area-based approach selectively; compare the advantages and disadvantages with other methods of intervention before proceeding.

- Clearly define and test the scope, outcomes and intended impacts of an area-based approach; communicate these to all stakeholders to manage expectations and to build trust.
- Ensure the timeline matches the scope of the programme; do not underestimate the time required to build trust and bring together multiple stakeholders.
- Link area-based approach planning to wider city or regional plans and policies; vertical integration of plans or strategies at different levels can be a costly and lengthy process – allow sufficient time and resources.
- Early and on-going engagement with local governments, civil society groups and other stakeholders.
- Early and on-going engagement with residents.
- Design programmes to be flexible; programmes that can adapt and adjust schedules, programme management practices, staff levels and funding allow for agencies to best respond to rapidly changing post-crises contexts.
- Demonstrate results early to mobilise, motivate and build the trust of residents.

## 3.2 Areas for further research

Based on the research, and discussion with practitioners, the authors suggest that investigation of the following topics would be beneficial in developing an evidence base for informing future humanitarian policy and practice.

### 1) What other approaches are available?

Area-based approaches are one strategy for humanitarian actors working in urban contexts. Further research to better understand and compare area-based approaches with complementary strategies (such as systems, market or institution-based approaches – see Box 3) would provide a broader context and a critical foundation for investigation of question 2) below. This would benefit from including a detailed analysis on the effectiveness/impact of each approach and a discussion on the barriers and implications to their adoption, such as an analysis of the institutional and financial humanitarian framework.

## 2) When to adopt an area-based approach?

This is a key question that humanitarian actors will need to engage with and address if area-based approaches are to be adopted on a wider scale. This research would likely require primary research (eg interviews, workshops etc.) to collect data on the early 'decision-making'/programme design process/ crises context, as this is rarely well documented. For example post-2010 earthquake in Haiti, whilst there is a plethora of reports/evaluations about the response of individual agencies, there is very little around the broader decision-making organisational structures, spending and strategies, which would be required.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, within the literature there is a notable lack of a community or local government perspective, which is critical in addressing this question; this would also require focused primary research. Research of this nature would present the opportunity for a number of useful outputs – specifically related to area-based approaches, a proposed output would be a set of criteria that humanitarian agencies

could apply to assess the appropriateness of an area-based approach.

## 3) How to adopt an area-based approach?

This paper identifies a list of emerging lessons learnt and good practice as discussed in the literature. However, the majority of 'best practice' or 'lessons learned' with regard to area-based programming rests within the experiences of practitioners (see Box 6). Further case study/interview-based research and comparative analysis<sup>25</sup> of several case studies would provide a broader and more in-depth base for these to become recommendations for future programme implementation. Research specifically focused on the perspective of the residents, government and other local stakeholders would be valuable. A proposed, useful output of this would be a toolkit or 'how-to' guide that humanitarian actors could use to inform future programme design.

### BOX 6: WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF HUMANITARIAN PRACTITIONER EXPERIENCES THAT HAVE NOT BEEN CAPTURED IN THE LITERATURE?

When adopting an area-based approach, to reduce the risk of creating inequalities, tension and/or conflict outside the programme boundaries humanitarian practitioners have identified that the following approaches may be beneficial. Further research is required to test and document:

- 'blur' the line by extending some projects into neighbouring areas.
- focus larger interventions/investments, such as health care centres or other community facilities, along the border to encourage cross-usage.

Participatory planning processes cover a much wider range of issues than humanitarians will be able to address. As such, outputs of area-based approaches planning and prioritisation exercises need to be made publically available to facilitate work to continue, after the humanitarian programme has finished. Further research is required to document how this can best be achieved.

The participatory, multi-sector nature of area-based approaches may require a skill set that may differ from traditional 'delivery' focused humanitarian assistance; this requires further investigation.

<sup>24</sup> This would likely include analysis of the institutional and financial framework of the humanitarian sector, assessment and discussion with donors and agencies to determine practical barriers or limitations (eg funding restrictions).

<sup>25</sup> This would likely include comparative analysis of project inputs (including funding), activities, outputs, defined and achieved outcomes. This would enable identification of a common process and evidence of 'good practice' to be used as the basis of recommendations. Specific questions practitioners noted as useful at the UK Shelter Forum (April 2015): Who coordinates? Do we have the capacity? How much does it cost? How long does it take? How to define the area? How are urban development tools integrated into an area-based approach (eg urban profiling, GIS etc.)?

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# Acronyms

BRC	British Red Cross
CMSC	Community Mobilisation and Service Coordination
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
DFID	Department for International Development
DRAN	Displacement Research and Action Network
ECHO	European Commission's Humanitarian aid and Civil Protection department
GSC	Global Shelter Cluster
IASC	Inter-agency Standing Committee
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KASS	Kabul Area Shelter and Settlement
NFI	Non-food item
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
OCHA	Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PASSA	Participatory Approach for Safe Shelter Awareness
SKAT	Swiss Resource Centre and Consultancies for Development
USAID/OFDA	US Agency for International Development – Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance
URD	Groupe URD (Urgence – Réhabilitation -Développement)
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene

In recent years there has been increasing interest in area-based approaches among humanitarian actors responding to urban crises. Through analysis of case studies, as well as available policy literature, this paper proposes that, in an urban context, area-based approaches have three defining characteristics: they are geographically targeted, and adopt a multi-sectoral, participatory approach.

Area-based approaches are neither 'good' nor 'bad'; their positive and negative effects depending entirely on the context in which they are conceived, their programme design, the manner of their delivery and the appropriateness of adopting such a strategy. Further research is required to better understand the implications of wide-scale adoption of area-based approaches by the humanitarian community.

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