



# Urban area-based approaches in post-disaster contexts

## Guidance Note for Humanitarian Practitioners

Stronger Cities Consortium

## Preface

The *Stronger Cities Initiative* is a consortium of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and World Vision International (WVI), with technical advice provided by David Sanderson, University of New South Wales (UNSW) Sydney, Australia. The purpose of the Initiative is to produce practical field-tested guidance for humanitarian organisations working in urban conflict, displacement, and natural-hazard settings.

This guidance note presents ten principles for enacting area-based approaches in urban areas following a rapid-onset naturally triggered disaster. The principles are organised according to the project management cycle (assessment and design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation) and are intended for use by humanitarian aid agencies.

The guidance note was developed by World Vision. World Vision is a global Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.

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## IIED's Human Settlements Group

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.

This paper is part of a series of research pieces produced under the 'Urban Crises Learning Fund' managed by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). Funded by the Department for International Development (DFID), the Urban Crises Learning Fund aims to build an in-depth understanding of how the humanitarian sector can most effectively operate in urban contexts.

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Cover photo: Neighbourhood meeting at Bang Bua Canal, Bangkok

Photo credit: David Sanderson

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Area-based approaches (ABAs) have gained traction in recent years among humanitarian aid agencies seeking to provide better responses in urban areas following a naturally-triggered disaster. This is in response to existing approaches that have struggled with the complexity of urban programming.

This guidance note presents ten principles for enacting post-disaster urban ABAs. The principles are organised according to the project management cycle (assessment and design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation) and are intended for use by humanitarian aid agencies. They are drawn from humanitarian action, and also good practice from developmental approaches that address chronic urban poverty.

The principles are:

1. Multi-agency, multi-sector participatory assessments
2. Focus on location
3. Realistic timeframes
4. People-centred actions – whose reality counts?
5. Work with existing structures
6. Collaborating sectors and programmes
7. Flexible programming: adaptive management
8. Nimble internal systems
9. Plan for scaling-up, and
10. Measure contribution not attribution.

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# Abbreviations and acronyms

ABA	Area-based approach
ACAPS	Assessment capacities project
ADAPT	Analysis Driven Agile Programming Techniques
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
CODI	Community Organisations Development Institute
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DFID	Department for International Development
HR	Human resources
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IRC	International Rescue Committee
MHCUA	Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas
MIRA	Multi Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UMVAT	Urban Vulnerability Analysis Tool
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDC	Village Development Committee
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

# Introduction

Area-based approaches (ABAs) have gained traction in recent years among humanitarian aid agencies seeking to provide better responses in urban areas following a disaster. This is in response to existing approaches that have struggled with the complexity of urban programming, such as complex governance systems, a multiplicity of stakeholders, density, infrastructure, variations between wealth and poverty, and the dominance of markets.

ABAs have been characterised as being geographically based in a specific area, engaged in participatory project management methods, and multi-sectoral in nature (Parker and Maynard, 2015). This guidance note adds to the understanding that ABAs have a requirement to plan for scale-up. ABAs therefore focus on communities in defined spatial contexts, or, as one key informant for this study summed up, an ABA means “looking at reality; the way people live; looking at what your goal is, how we look at the past, where we want to get to in this community”. While this sounds like common sense, the current aid system is not organised in this way. An attraction of ABAs therefore is that they aim to address the “problem of silo-mentality ... (because) ...the lives of citizens are not broken down into these separate silos, nor therefore should the public agencies serving them be” (Alcock, 2004: 89).

ABAs therefore require doing business differently, and an opportunity to do that rests with learning from the decades of experience of developmental approaches enacted by agencies and others. A big attraction of using ABAs in urban environments is that they emerge from an urban background (unlike many other approaches in humanitarian action). Urban planners working on renewal have used ‘area-based initiatives’ as an approach to enacting improvements in poorer areas since the 1960s and 1970s in urban programmes and community development projects (Alcock, 2004; Muscat, 2010). ABAs in developmental programmes have been known broadly by a number of different names, which includes integrated development programmes, slum upgrading, sites and services projects (Hamdi, 1991), neighbourhood and settlement approaches and multi-sector planning (USAID, 2011; Mountfield, 2016). The United States Agency for International Development’s Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID, 2011) in particular has promoted the idea of neighbourhood approaches, arguing that it is necessary to consider the wider spatial needs of ‘settlement-based assistance’.

A number of organisations have reaffirmed the value of ABAs, such as the IFRC following 2013’s Typhoon Haiyan (Stodart, 2016), UN-HABITAT in response to the 2010 Haiti earthquake and USAID’s ‘neighbourhood’s approach’ (2011), discussed below. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s (IASC) *Reference Group Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas Revised Workplan for 2015-17* (IASC, 2017: 2) discusses adopting ABAs, stating that “higher impacts are possible if activities are designed and coordinated through geographical/spatial, community-city-based and inter-sectoral approaches, which better link where people live and work, markets, basic services and availability of social safety nets”. The Global Alliance for Urban Crises’ (GAUC)<sup>1</sup> submission to HABITAT III in October 2016 advocated the need to “adopt area-based approaches to programming and coordination” in relation to recognising the scale, nature, and complexity of urban crisis (GAUC, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> The GAUC is a coalition of more than 65 organisations– from local authorities, humanitarian, development, and urban actors – to prevent, prepare for, and respond to urban crises.

# Research methods

These comprised:

- A literature review of peer-reviewed journal articles, publications and 'grey literature', including evaluations and reports produced by operational aid agencies. A search was undertaken for key terms, such as area-based approaches, area-based initiatives, integrated development, slum upgrading, integrated slum upgrading, neighbourhood or community approach, sites and services, settlements approach, multi-sectoral programming, humanitarian, urban and crises.
- Key informant interviews of senior and experienced aid personnel, whose experience ranges from 5-30 years each. Eleven men and women were interviewed. Key informants were drawn from international NGOs, think tanks, universities, and a national information management service.
- One focus group discussion held with six practitioners experienced in implementing ABAs. Questions asked related to practical implementation, including challenges of using programme tools and operational challenges, both within and between organisations. Implementation questions were tied to the project management cycle (assessment and design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation).

A draft of the findings was shared with a smaller group of key informants who provided comments and feedback. A full draft version of this guidance note was peer reviewed, with comments and suggestions taken on board.

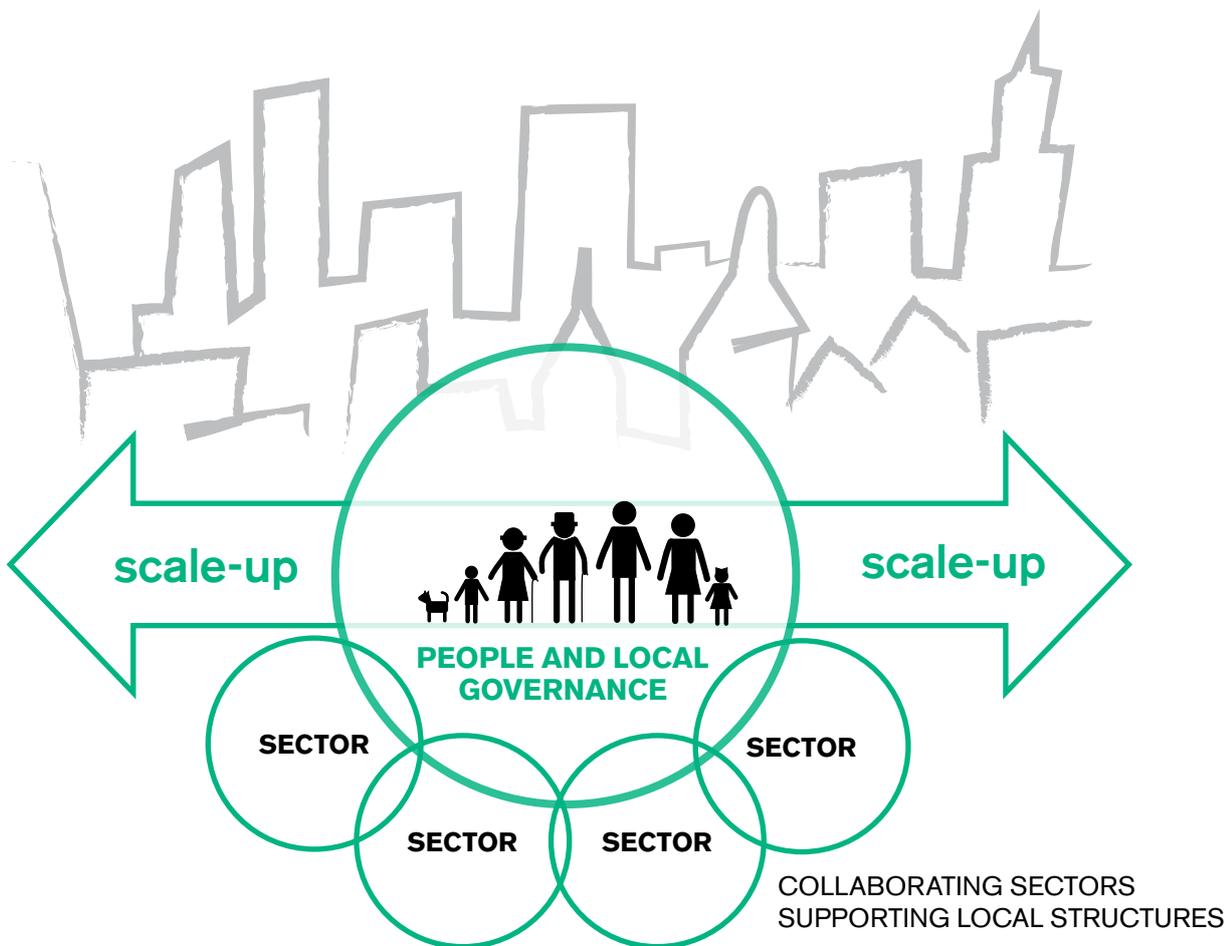
# A definition of an area-based approach (ABA)

An area-based approach supports people after a disaster in a specific location to transition effectively from relief to recovery; it works with existing structures and can be scaled up.

Five key elements of ABAs are that they:

1. Are people-centred, as meaningful engagement with affected populations is essential
2. Focus on a defined area, such as a neighbourhood
3. Take time, spanning relief to recovery
4. Can be scaled-up to other areas, which emphasises the need for local ownership, and
5. Rely on strong collaboration between sectors and key actors.

Figure 1: Collaborating sectors supporting local structures



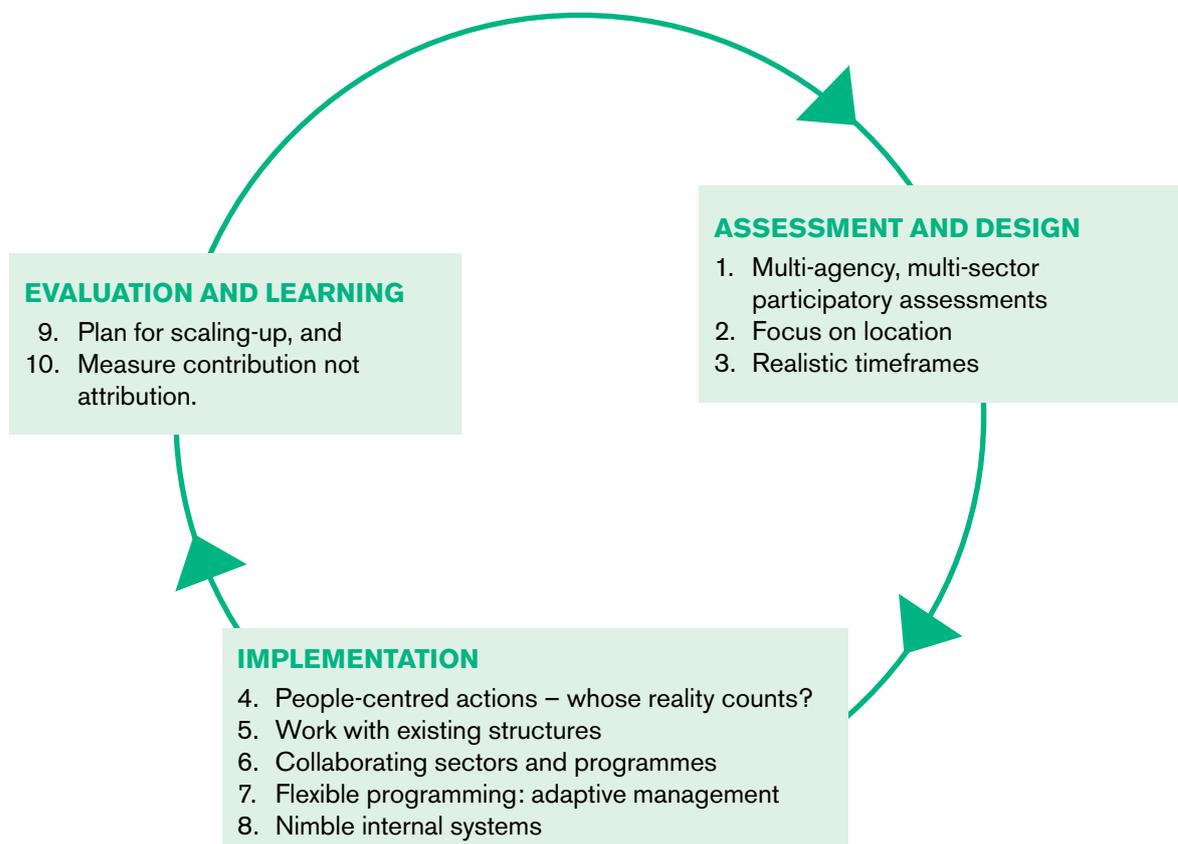
# Ten core principles for enacting urban ABAs

This guidance note is organised around ten core principles for enacting good ABAs. These principles aim to provide practical guidance to implementing agencies following rapid-onset, naturally-triggered disasters in urban areas, such as earthquakes, floods, and tsunamis. To help achieve this, the principles have been aligned to the project management cycle.

The principles are:

1. Multi-agency, multi-sector participatory assessments
2. Focus on location
3. Realistic timeframes
4. People-centred actions – whose reality counts?
5. Work with existing structures
6. Collaborating sectors and programmes
7. Flexible programming: adaptive management
8. Nimble internal systems
9. Plan for scaling-up, and
10. Measure contribution not attribution.

Figure 2: Core principles according to the project management cycle



# Core Principle 1: Multi-agency, multi-sectoral participatory assessments

Assessments that focus only on a single sector do not reflect the reality of complex lives, because “what’s happening on the ground is not a sector conversation”.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, assessments undertaken by one agency alone reduce efficiency and effectiveness, pass up opportunities for collaboration, and contribute to needlessly bothering affected people trying to rebuild their lives. Assessments should also be as participatory as possible, so that affected communities can also learn about the challenges and opportunities they face in recovery.

## Multi-sectoral, multi-agency assessments

Patel *et al.*'s systematic review of urban targeting approaches **recommends taking a multi-sectoral approach** (2017: 31): “sector-based vulnerability analyses and targeting approaches are ill-suited to complex urban crises, where needs are interrelated. A population’s needs for shelter, WASH, health, food security, and livelihoods do not exist in isolation from one another. Rather, needs interact to shape vulnerability, and must thus be met with a multi-sectoral approach to guide targeting”.

The best known multi-sectoral/multi-agency assessment approach is probably the IASC’s Multi Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA), which is intended to be undertaken within the first two weeks of a disaster, with the aim of enabling humanitarian actors to “develop a joint strategic plan, mobilise resources and monitor the situation and the response” (IASC, 2012: 3). There are five stages to the MIRA process: (1) initiation; (2) secondary data analysis; (3) community level assessments; (4) analysis; and (5) dissemination.

Concerning community data collection, the MIRA advises two main methods: direct observation and key informant interviews. To achieve this well is something of an art. Good post-disaster assessments make a series of trade-offs, which include ease of tools usage by assessors, time taken for assessments to take place, access to people, assemblage and synthesis of data. ACAPS’ *Rapid Humanitarian Assessments in Urban Settings* Technical Brief (ACAP, 2015: 17) makes the point that an urban assessment team may provide access to a good skills pool: “the concentration of resources and diversity of residents in urban areas may see more and better-qualified personnel who can join an assessment team”. Simple and clear guidance on conducting people-centred impact assessments are provided in the Emergency Capacity Building’s *Good Enough Guide to Impact Assessment* (ECB, 2007) – see the Resources section below. Another is the Norwegian Refugee Council’s *Urban Multi-Sectoral Vulnerability Analysis Tool* (UMVAT) (NRC, 2017) which focuses on displacement needs analysis and includes multi-sector, legal, and governance perspectives. The data collection is both qualitative and quantitative and can be adapted for hard-to-access urban contexts.

**An essential aspect in assessments is to listen.** When this does not happen, aid efforts can be set back. A study by the Inter-Agency Common Feedback Project (2015), carried out three months after the (first of the) two Nepal earthquakes of 2015 on how well agencies were engaging with communities makes for sobering reading. The report found that “almost half of respondents feel they are not heard at all”, also that “when women were asked if their particular problems were being addressed, nearly three quarters (73 per cent) said ‘very little’ or ‘not at all’”.

**Concerning multi-agency coordination,** the current cluster approach, widely in practice in the humanitarian system, also needs to adapt to the urban challenge. The IASC affirms the need to “shift from sectorial to multi-sectorial area planning ... with strong coordination and synergies between sectors/clusters” (IASC, 2016: 6). Within such approaches, agencies need to coordinate better between clusters, and also be aware of the nature of the urban environment in which they are operating. In this regard, ACAPS’ technical brief (ACAP, 2015) uses an urban language that is helpful, describing the city, for example, in terms of density, diversity, fluidity, mobility, complexity and industry – key characteristics of urban space.

<sup>2</sup> As stated by a senior NGO employee during research for this guidance note.

Enacting multi-sectoral activities in dense urban areas, however, is complicated. CRS' programme manager for the Typhoon Haiyan Recovery Programme, Holly Fuller, describes the following challenges in Tacloban: “we’re working in 17 neighbourhoods that are very close together, (the challenge is) how to schedule all of the different activities that we need to complete without overlapping, or without causing neighbourhood official fatigue, or beneficiary fatigue. Because we’re working with shelter, WASH, disaster risk reduction, and protection, there are many trainings and many different activities that the neighbourhood officials and other leaders, as well as the community members need to attend, so we have tried to combine activities to kill two birds with one stone” (ALNAP, 2015: 5).

## Participatory assessments

Patel *et al.*'s systematic review (2017: ii) found that **community engagement works**: “evidence reveals some success in identifying the most vulnerable through community-based targeting, which leverages local knowledge and contextual understanding”, which is “critical to urban response”. To achieve this, however, time was needed: “the evidence also shows that, to avoid bias, a nuanced understanding of the community, motivating factors for participation and local power dynamics is required”. The study concludes that “community participation can range in format, and integrating community insights – even for complex vulnerability assessments – is critical” (Patel *et al.*, 2017:31). It should however be noted that understandings of community vary widely; it could be those displaced by a disaster and forced to live in another location, for example in temporary camps, which may last for years, as in the example of the Haiti earthquake. To these ends, units of community may need to be relatively small, to capture the divergent views and represent the needs of vulnerable groups (MacAuslan, 2012).

The case for better people-oriented assessment approaches in disaster response is also made in the 2016 IFRC World Disasters Report. In the chapter concerning ‘measurement and evidence’, the argument is made that a top-down, technocratic ‘quest for quantification’ diminishes hearing the true needs of people, which takes time and involves using techniques and tools such as those listed above (Gaillard and Jigyasu, 2016).



Neighbourhood PRA exercise, Philippines, after Typhoon Haiyan. Credit: David Sanderson.

Effective participatory assessments therefore involve affected populations co-learning about needs and capacities alongside agencies. For example, following damage caused by Typhoon Haiyan, the NGO ActionAid undertook PRA exercises to enable communities to self-identify their needs in order to present these to NGOs, to allow them to remain in the 'driving seat' of what they thought was most required (Sanderson and Delica Willison, 2014). While participatory assessments are sometimes thought to take too much time, an essential element of ABAs is supporting affected groups in their own self-recovery, rather than assuming that an outside organisation can 'fix the problem'. Principle 4 concerning people-centred actions discusses further the tools that can be adapted for participatory assessment.

## KEY ACTIONS

1. Assessments should always be multi-sectoral; the evidence points to this providing the most effective approach.
2. Participatory assessments need to factor in time to be effective. They also need to prioritise effective engagement with affected communities.
3. For multi-agency assessments, agencies need to commit to the process, often with resources and people (see Principle 9 on scaling-up for further discussion on resourcing).

## Resources

ACAPS (2015) *Rapid Humanitarian Assessments in Urban Settings*. Technical Brief, January 2015. Available at: [www.alnap.org/resource/20125](http://www.alnap.org/resource/20125)

ECB (Emergency Capacity Building Project) (2007) *The Good Enough Guide: Impact Measurement and Accountability in Emergencies*. Available at: [www.alnap.org/resource/8406](http://www.alnap.org/resource/8406)

Mohiddin, L and Smith, G (2016) *A Review of Needs Assessment Tools, Response Analysis Frameworks, and Targeting Guidance for Urban Humanitarian response*. Working Paper, November 2016. IIED, London. Available at: <http://pubs.iied.org/10796IIED>

Mohiddin, L, Smith, G Phelps, L (2017) *Urban Multi-Sectoral Vulnerability Analysis Tool (UMVAT)*. Guidance note for Humanitarian Practitioners. IIED, London. Available at: <http://pubs.iied.org/10823IIED>.

## Core Principle 2: Focus on location

An essential element of an ABA concerns prioritising a geographic location, such as a neighbourhood, market, or series of streets, as the starting point for interventions. While this might sound obvious, too often the context of people's lives is missed out in recovery operations (Clermont *et al.*, 2011). Identifying the right location in which to work is therefore critical, and ought to be undertaken in close consultation with other actors, and especially government authorities (indeed, governments may allocate areas where agencies are to work), based on the outcomes of multi-agency/multi-sector assessments to identify levels of need. **Consultation within and between clusters is also essential.** Where identifying locations to work in, key factors include:

- Previous engagement in an area, to link post-disaster recovery with pre-disaster neighbourhood engagement.
- Links with partner organisations, who may have worked previously in an area.
- Playing to respective strengths as an organisation, for example providing a shelter focus where there is a strong shelter need, and from which other sectors can be combined (see the example below from Kabul).
- Possibilities for long-term engagement, building relationships and aiming to strengthen local governance, for example Oxfam's approach in Carrefour Feuilles following the Haiti earthquake (see Principle 3 on realistic timeframes).

Considering location also reinforces a strong 'urban approach' to city recovery. The Project for Public Space's *8 reasons place should matter to humanitarians* (Saliba, 2017) emphasises that place relates to (community) identity, which can be at risk of being ignored in post-disaster recovery. A focus on location is also important for the following reasons:

- To recognise the totality of people's lives that goes beyond immediate post-disaster needs.
- To be able to enact realistic and achievable actions in dense areas.
- Because towns and cities are often already organised by geographical areas such as riverbeds and hillsides, as well as administrative areas such as municipal boundaries (such organisation can of course be a help, but also a hindrance: a disaster is no respecter of municipal boundaries – adding to the complexity of local decision making in a recovery situation; also, low-income settlements are often to be found along riverbeds for example, which may in themselves cross administrative boundaries).
- To build partnerships with representative local actors (IASC, 2010).
- To base actions on a greater chance of achieving local ownership, given that people often associate themselves with location. This is echoed in USAID's 'neighbourhood approach' which aims to build actions 'informed by a community based decision-making process reflective of the social, economic, and physical features of the defined area' (USAID, 2011).

Following Typhoon Haiyan that struck the Philippines in 2013, Stodart (2016) records that a benefit of focusing on location is that it "involves the consideration of other aspects of community life beyond shelter and how these aspects all fit together physically and functionally". In a similar vein, following the 2010 Haitian earthquake that caused widespread devastation to Port-au-Prince (as well as other places), UN-Habitat advocated that urban recovery should take a place-based approach, in that wherever possible, and if safe to do so, communities should rebuild in the locations where they were originally based (Clermont *et al.*, 2011).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted, however, that in the case of Haiti, a range of responses was undertaken, not least the investments by people themselves in building what are rapidly becoming extensions to the capital city, for example in Canaan, discussed in Principle 9.

A further example of the benefits of prioritising a location-based approach is provided by the response to the 2011 Bangkok floods of the Bang Bua Canal network, a community-driven initiative set up with support from the public organisation the Community Organisations Development Institute (CODI). Sitko (2016:114) describes how the network self-organised a response: “The Bang Bua Canal Network quickly set up its own help centre, which collected and distributed donations for the 12 neighbourhoods in the network. The help centre, located in a two-storey community building, shared information updates, sought in-kind donations, and harnessed existing relationships within the network to ease the impact of the flood. For example, the help centre recorded information regarding the needs of different neighbourhoods and the path of the flood. Individuals in the network devised innovative ways to harness new potential from pre-existing relationships with various external stakeholders: local politicians donated food and money; the nearby military base assisted with transportation, food donations and information sharing; the police donated small rafts; and universities sent students with specialised skills, such as medical practitioners and engineers, to advise on ways to prevent illness and electrocution”.

## KEY ACTIONS

1. Liaise with city authorities to understand any local strategy that may be in place, and to seek any permissions necessary.
2. Identify areas for working in. If undertaking a wider multi-agency assessment, this should have occurred as part of the assessment and design process (see Principle 1), often involving a negotiation between city authorities and organisations on where best to work, based for example on municipal priorities, best strategic fit for a particular organisation. This may take place in cluster meetings. If an organisation has before a disaster worked in a particular area, then continuation of their involvement there, building on existing relationships, is important (See also Principle 9 on scaling-up).
3. Meet and form relationships with representative structures in the area(s) intended for working in, and seek any permissions (formal and informal) necessary. This is often associated with the lowest level of government, and may include other bodies, such as local religious centres, local leadership.
4. Ensure coordination if more than one agency is intending to work in an area, or if areas overlap.

## Resources

IASC (2010) *Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas*. Available at: [www.alnap.org/resource/7501](http://www.alnap.org/resource/7501)

IRC (2017) *Urban Context Analysis Toolkit*. Guidance note for Humanitarian Practitioners. IIED, London. Available at: <http://pubs.iied.org/10819IIED>

Meaux, A and Osofisan, W (2016) *A Review of Context Analysis Tools for Urban Humanitarian Response*. IIED Working Paper. IIED, London. Available at: <http://pubs.iied.org/10797IIED>

USAID (2011) *The 'Neighborhood Approach', a Means of Improving the Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance in Urban Areas*. Washington D.C. USAID. Available at: [www.alnap.org/resource/22783.aspx](http://www.alnap.org/resource/22783.aspx)

# Core Principle 3:

## Realistic timeframes

Beyond immediate life-saving actions following a disaster, such as search and rescue, emergency medicine and the meeting of basic needs (ie food, water and shelter), **the belief that aid needs to be hurried is largely a myth.** A study by Anderson *et al.* (2012) of the experiences of some 6,000 people to humanitarian relief and recovery operations in a number of disasters found that what people needed was less speed, and more consideration. The study found that “many feel that ‘too much’ is given ‘too fast’”. The study also found that “very few people call for more aid: virtually everyone says they want ‘smarter aid’” (Anderson *et al.*, 2012: 2).

Similarly, IMPACT and United Cities and Local Governments (IMPACT and UCLG, 2016: 10) note: “The current humanitarian architecture is built around sector-specific planning and short-term funding and programme cycles. This is not appropriate in the highly complex and dynamic environments witnessed in urban crises, where humanitarian best practices point instead to holistic, longer-term action and higher levels of engagement with sub-national actors”. Many relief and recovery actions therefore should not be rushed – an issue that contrasts, as noted, with the tight timeframes that aid organisations, donors, and sometimes national governments, may impose, and which may be at odds with the realities of the pace of recovery needed for success to be achieved.

ABAs are people centred (see Principle 4) and rely as far as possible on people determining their own recovery. Needless to say, this approach takes time. Such activities, if they are to be successful, may fall outside strict timeframes of some donors, whose windows for relief and recovery operations can be short.

If project timeframes are too short, and there is little scope to extend, **then aid provision should be used as investments** towards long-term recovery actions that will live long after the aid programme has ended, and have the chances of being scaled up (see Principle 9). There are examples of this: a report reviewing urban programming following the 2010 Haiti earthquake (Clermont *et al.*, 2011: 17) recorded that “Oxfam’s support for the master development plan for Carrefour Feuilles is a good example of longer-term thinking. Oxfam is working with six pre-existing partners on a joint plan for the development of their neighbourhood. The plan includes education and waste management, as well as efforts to address flash flooding. Participatory planning has been used with support from the NGO Architectes d’Urgence. A pilot programme is being launched where local leaders will be trained in community consultation techniques they can replicate elsewhere”.

### KEY ACTIONS

1. Begin projects from inception with a view to the long-term benefits, ie. focus on outcomes and impact, not only outputs.
2. Use aid inputs as investments: consider how expenditures assist in the long term, and not only meet short-term needs.
3. Be prepared to argue for extended timeframes to relevant funding bodies (see Principle 9).

### Resources

Anderson, M, Brown, D and Isabella, J (2012) *Time to Listen. Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid.* CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Available at: <http://cdacollaborative.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Time-to-Listen-Hearing-People-on-the-Receiving-End-of-International-Aid.pdf>

Clermont, C, Sanderson, D, Spraos, H and Sharma, A (2011) *Urban disasters – lessons from Haiti. Study of member agencies’ responses to the earthquake in Port au Prince, Haiti, January 2010.* Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), London. Available at: [www.alnap.org/resource/9263.aspx](http://www.alnap.org/resource/9263.aspx)

IMPACT and UCLG (2016) *Consultation on humanitarian responses in urban areas perspectives from cities in crisis.* IMPACT, UCLG. Available at: [https://issuu.com/uclgcglu/docs/cities\\_in\\_crisis](https://issuu.com/uclgcglu/docs/cities_in_crisis)

# Core Principle 4: People-centred actions – whose reality counts?

In enacting urban programmes relating to poverty and vulnerability, **development practice spanning several decades has made the case for community level empowerment, enablement and participation** (Hamdi and Goethert, 1997; Chambers, 1995). In summary, the more engagement people themselves have in determining their own outcomes (as noted in Principle 1), the better the results.

A question for successful neighbourhood interventions coined by participation expert Robert Chambers (1995) is **‘whose reality counts?’** The question relates to interventions undertaken by external agencies on local populations, and is intended to question the assumptions and approaches of agencies. Asking ‘whose reality counts?’ forces interventions to consider the aims, desires and aspirations of affected people first (and to question their own assumptions), and from that, to implement programmes that are relevant first and foremost to people.

Adherence to such an approach, more commonly known as people-centred approaches or actions, involves: supporting affected populations in their own recovery; adopting a consultative, facilitating approach; taking time to listen to affected populations (see Principle 1); and utilising tools such as those used in action planning (see Principle 7). The importance of such an approach is identified in the Core Humanitarian Standard (2014), namely Standard Four, that response is based on participation.

Following the 2004 Asian tsunami, Archer and Boonyabantha (2011) record the importance of such an approach: “In Thailand, the Bang Muang camp housed 850 families in the aftermath of the tsunami in December 2004. The camp was managed by the tsunami victims themselves, who organised into committees dealing with issues such as cooking, camp hygiene, water supply, medical care and children’s activities, and tents were set up in an arrangement of ten-family groups and three-group zones, each zone with its own leader. Every evening, camp-wide meetings were held to discuss camp management, in a fully transparent process. From the very beginning, this collective management system helped to prepare the survivors for the longer-term tasks of negotiating for secure land and rebuilding their communities and livelihoods”.

A number of participatory tools can be drawn from Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) (Mitlin and Thompson, 1994; Chambers, 1992). PRA and other tools can be used to elicit joint learning, between affected populations and agencies, at all stages of the project management cycle (assessment, implementation and final monitoring and evaluation). Another is the IRC’s Client Responsive Programming Framework (2016) which aims to, “systematically collect the diverse perspectives” of people in order to inform programme design and delivery.

## KEY ACTIONS

1. Ensure programming actions at all stages engage with affected communities. This might include setting up representative, neighbourhood-level area-based organisations.
2. Adhere to principles of ‘downwards accountability’, ensuring for example regular community meetings and actions that build transparency, such as publishing budgets, timelines and progress.
3. Use participatory tools wherever possible throughout the project management cycle (for example in assessment, programme design and monitoring), and be flexible to adjusting projects as they progress according to changing neighbourhood priorities (see Principles 4 and 7).

## Resources

Archer, D and Boonyabancha, S (2011) Seeing a disaster as an opportunity – harnessing the energy of disaster survivors for change. *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol 23, Issue 2. IIED, London. Available at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0956247811410011>

IRC (2016) *Client Responsive Programming Framework*. Available at: [www.rescue.org/resource/client-responsive-programming-framework](http://www.rescue.org/resource/client-responsive-programming-framework)

Mitlin, D and Thompson, J (1994) Participatory Tools and Methods in Urban Areas. *RRA Notes 21*. IIED, London. Available at: [www.iied.org/rra-notes-21-participatory-tools-methods-urban-areas](http://www.iied.org/rra-notes-21-participatory-tools-methods-urban-areas)

# Core Principle 5: Work with existing structures

A common critique of humanitarian response and recovery programming is the creation of parallel structures, for example the setting-up of medical services that ignore existing societal structures within an affected location, and may undermine pre-existing health care supply services (Clermont *et al.*, 2011).

For interventions to be effective after the life of the programme, **activities must engage with existing structures**, even if these are weak (otherwise, such structures may be weakened even further). Structures here are taken to mean services provided by government, and also utilities such as water supply, electricity, and sewage. Research conducted by the think-tank Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) into humanitarian coordination concluded that, if long-term recovery is to be sustained, then working with government structures is a necessity, not a choice: “In many situations there are possibilities to work closely with line ministries or other parts of government, even where the government is engaged in internal conflicts. Where even this is not possible, coordination models should be designed to align with government structures to the degree possible, to allow for government ownership at a later date” (Knox Clarke and Campbell, 2016: 7). Activities to be undertaken (in association with Principles 2 and 3 on location and timeframes respectively) include:

- Consulting with the structures of government, in particular city authorities.
- Engaging with effective members of civil society, such as national NGOs and faith-based groups.
- Taking time to understand existing dynamics and structures, such as local legislation.

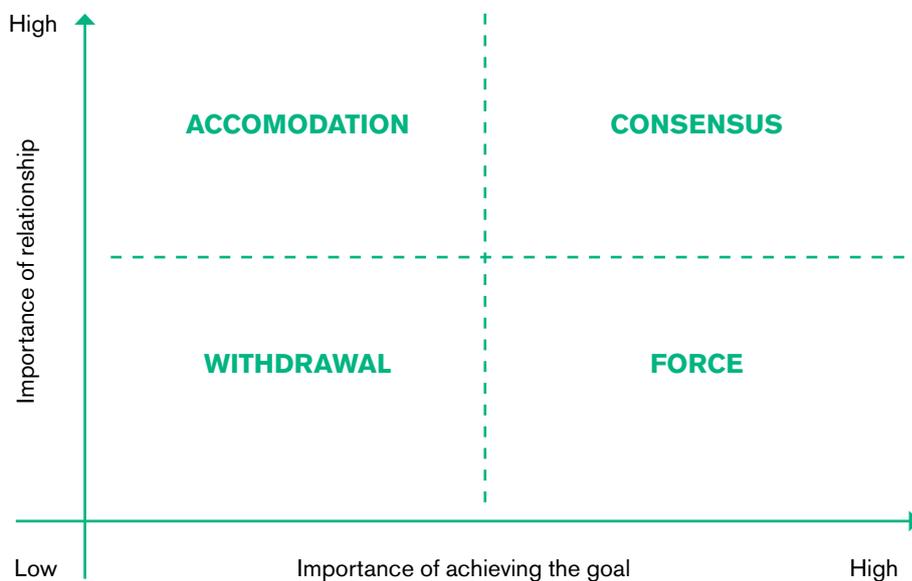
The role of agencies therefore is to adhere local structures and approaches – even if this takes longer and is, in some instances, more difficult. Such an approach may also mean **a shift in roles, away from direct service provision towards consultative and advisory roles**. This is especially the case in urban areas, which are characterised by concentrations of skills. A similar view is drawn in The Sphere Project’s urban guidelines note: “Depending on the capacity of the local authorities, the humanitarians’ role may be more about facilitation and enabling than direct service provision” (Mountfield, 2016: 11).

This observation ties into a key point found in many post-disaster evaluations; that is, a need to work better with local government authorities in particular, wherein agency actions seek to strengthen legitimate local governance structures,<sup>4</sup> as well as provide community-level benefit. In one study of the work of 13 INGOs in post-disaster recovery efforts following 2013’s Typhoon Haiyan, a key finding among all local government authorities interviewed was that municipal engagement needed to be strengthened: “many local government officials expressed concern at NGOs bypassing them to work with communities directly” (Sanderson and Delica Willison, 2014: 15). This echoes IRC’s (2014) observation that key elements for operationalisation include working through existing structures and government leadership in response (where there is sufficient capacity).

<sup>4</sup> Local governance structures can include national and local governments, dedicated urban governance institutions, unofficial gatekeepers, militias and criminal gangs. Aid of course should not go to strengthen non-legitimate structures, such as gangs.

**The choice of approach adopted for engaging with local actors such as city authorities, national NGOs, businesses and other local actors is a vital one.** Figure 3 below illustrates different styles of engagement, relating 'importance of getting the job done' with 'importance of the relationship'. If successful ABAs involve local ownership in scale-up and sustainability, then investing in building relationships is vital for building 'accommodation' and 'consensus', even if this takes time.

Figure 3: Styles of engagement



Source: Suri, 2016, p.171 (after Fisher)

This therefore is a critical point, especially given that the track record of relationships between international agencies and national counterparts has often been poor. Anderson *et al.*'s wide-ranging study of the experiences of affected populations of aid delivery after a disaster found that "at times, local organisations feel used by international NGOs when they are included in proposals in order to comply with donor requirements that local partners be involved. In some cases, local organisations have seen international NGOs effectively take over local initiatives" (Brown, 2011). They also found that "local organisations often feel that there is a lack of respect and appreciation for their knowledge and contributions, and that their partnerships are limited since they are rarely involved in decision-making processes with their partners". A similar finding was made in a study (Alcanya and Al-Murani, 2016:3) of post-disaster urban recovery: "Generally, local actors felt that international actors, and even national actors, lack a contextualised knowledge and cultural understanding, and limited attention is paid to local involvement in the responses. Not enough time is spent in the setting by international actors to understand the situation".

### KEY ACTIONS

1. Ensure productive and meaningful engagement with city authorities.
2. Form meaningful relationships with local actors based on good principles of partnership, such as the Global Humanitarian Platform's Principles of Partnership: **equality, transparency, results-oriented approach, responsibility** and **complementarity**.
3. Make a conscious decision on the style of engagement to be taken with different actors, based on the trade-off between 'getting the job done' and 'importance of the relationship'.

## Resources

Alcanya, T and Al-Murani, F (2016) *Urban humanitarian response: why local and international collaboration matters*. Briefing. IIED, London. Available at: <http://pubs.iied.org/17378IIED>

Basedow, J, Westrope, C and Meaux, A (2017) *Urban stakeholder engagement and coordination*. Guidance note for Humanitarian Practitioners. IIED, London. Available at: <http://pubs.iied.org/10821IIED/>

Global Humanitarian Platform (2006) *Principles of Partnership*. Available at: [www.icvanetwork.org/global-humanitarian-platform-ghp-overview](http://www.icvanetwork.org/global-humanitarian-platform-ghp-overview)

Suri, SN (2016) Stronger Together: Partnerships that Build Resilience. Chapter Six, in Sanderson D and Sharma A (eds) (2016) *Resilience: saving lives today, investing for tomorrow*. IFRC World Disasters Report. IFRC, Geneva. Available at: [www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/201610/WDR%202016-FINAL\\_web.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/201610/WDR%202016-FINAL_web.pdf)

# Core Principle 6: Collaborating sectors and programmes

Collaboration between sectors is essential in order to deliver a more coherent and unified response. As the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2005) notes, “no single humanitarian agency can cover all humanitarian needs, collaboration is not an option, it is a necessity”. In urban areas, with overlapping and complex needs, collaboration is especially important.

A number of key informants stated that an important element of ABAs concerned effective collaborations and partnerships; as one put it, “it’s not just about you; it’s a partnership”, pointing towards a wider recognition that what matters is the eventual outcome of operations rather than individual project outputs. One key informant argued that, in urban areas in particular, greater collaboration is needed, given the complexity and number of partners. The point was made for regular coordination meetings between sectors, and a constant, concerted effort to ensure that programme personnel did not just spend time in their own sector (an issue in part that can be addressed through the appropriate use of programming tools; see Principle 7).

While the cluster system has led to improved coordination in humanitarian action, there are also deficiencies, which include: weak coordination between operational actors; a lack of sufficient engagement with local structures; and insufficient engagement with local and national government (Humphries, 2013). These challenges are especially compounded in urban areas. As a result, the IASC has challenged the very validity of the cluster approach in urban recovery operations: “the current cluster system is structured around sectors of expertise and sectorial coordination, while in a context of urban crises there might be a need to identify and respond holistically to multi-sectorial needs in a given territory, requiring stronger inter-cluster linkages and coordination at city-level” (IASC, 2016: 1). The IRC (2015) agrees: “The traditional cluster system does not lend itself to the complexity of needs, services and systems across an urban landscape with humanitarian agencies struggling to deal with the complexity, density and built environment of towns and cities or able to take full advantage of the potential a city has to offer”.

It is essential for ABAs that aid providers, both within and between sectors, ensure a coordinated and collaborative approach – the risk of not doing so is reduced effectiveness and efficiency in implementation. Key actions therefore include:

- Drawing lessons from the Humanitarian Reform Agenda (OCHA, 2005), strong and predictable leadership is required. Ideally this is provided by local structures. As an example of this, following the 2015 Nepal earthquakes, “local government structures provided a strong lead (in the early relief stages) of several of the affected districts in coordinating the response efforts of local and international NGOs, through regular meetings with senior government officials, as well at local level with Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Ward Citizen’s Forums’ (Sanderson *et al.*, 2015).
- As discussed by the IASC in a working document (IASC, 2016: 3), adopting a city-level inter-cluster working group (led by city authorities wherever possible) that “would support stronger coordination among sectors and with local actors”.
- Organisations ceding control to others, for instance one agency undertakes operations in a particular area, and other agencies provide inputs under that agency’s management, in order to provide clarity of whom to engage with, from the point of view of the local population.
- Identifying representative local structures with which collaborating organisations can engage (see Principle 5).

## KEY ACTIONS

1. Seek and support the establishment of strong and predictable leadership to ensure coordination and collaboration. Where possible seek local leadership.
2. Ensure where possible that one organisation overall leads in an area, to provide clarity to local populations.
3. Wherever possible, sectors coordinate and are informed of each other’s activities.

## Resources

Humphries, V (2013) *Improving Humanitarian Coordination: Common Challenges and Lessons Learned from the Cluster Approach*. Available at: <http://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/1976>

IRC (2015) *Humanitarian Crises in Urban Areas: Are Area-Based Approaches to Programming and Coordination the Way Forward?* IRC, New York. Available at: [www.syrialearning.org/resource/21830](http://www.syrialearning.org/resource/21830)

Knox Clarke, P and Campbell, L (2016) *Improving Humanitarian Action. ALNAP Working Paper*. ALNAP/ODI, London. [www.alnap.org/.../\[final-copy\]-improving-humanitarian-coordination,-executive-summary-and-recommendations,-interactive-pdf.pdf](http://www.alnap.org/.../[final-copy]-improving-humanitarian-coordination,-executive-summary-and-recommendations,-interactive-pdf.pdf)

# Core Principle 7:

## Flexible programming: adaptive management

A long-recognised hindrance to effective programming in aid responses relates to tools, funding flows and administrative requirements that are insufficiently flexible (Wild *et al.*, 2017). This is particularly the case in urban recovery operations, where needs and requirements may rapidly change (Sanderson and Knox Clarke, 2012).

**Programming tools and approaches therefore need to be flexible.** To these ends, adaptive management, ‘a programming approach that combines appropriate analysis, structured flexibility, and iterative improvements in the face of contextual and causal complexity’ (Chambers and Ramalingam, 2016: 2), may provide one such direction. Adaptive management is currently being explored by a number of agencies, and donors such as the Department for International Development (DFID), as a programming approach that better meets the needs of complex realities (Wild *et al.*, 2017). In a pilot of six case studies (ADAPT, 2016) undertaken by IRC and Mercy Corps across six locations in Africa and Asia, the ingredients of adaptive management comprised: dynamic and collaborative teams; agile and integrated operations; appropriate data and reflective analysis; trusting and flexible partnerships; and responsive decision-making and action (Chambers and Ramalingam, 2016: 6).

In one example, in a health-related programme in Kayah State, Myanmar implemented by IRC, Chambers and Ramalingam (2016: 4) record that, ‘IRC, used a six-month inception period to build relationships among partners and craft a context-tailored approach to serving basic health needs of the most vulnerable populations. The resulting programme design included health plans for each of six ethnic health organisations, as well as township-level plans for the seven areas where those organisations work. Relationships built among civil society and state partners, as well as opportunistic programme funding, have been critical to adaptive management’. They also record however that, ‘Onerous reporting and centralized decision making have been key constraints, slowing implementation timelines and decisions’, which is discussed in Principle 8, below.

### Flexible use of tools: logframes

Tools such as logical framework analysis (logframes) are well suited to ABAs. When used correctly, they provide a clear project focus (the purpose), clarity of accountability (the indicators) and a testing of potential project risks (the assumptions). Logframes however are all-too-often misused (or their intention misunderstood), which can lead to reduced effectiveness and efficiency in implementation. Three common issues for the misuse of logframes that can hinder an ABA are:

- Logframes with a single sector purpose, which forces implementers at project level to focus exclusively on achieving that purpose. A single-sector purpose results in a singular ‘metric of success’ which by definition forces a single-sector approach throughout a project, from inception to implementation and monitoring and final evaluation.
- Outputs and indicators that are inputs, for example, ‘1000 tents delivered’, which if not accompanied by other indicators that measure quality (for example, ‘degree of satisfaction of users’) lead to programmes with little incentive to monitor project benefits.
- Inflexible logframe usage, wherein implementing agencies cannot make adjustments to changing circumstances once a project is underway (and therefore not reflecting the quick-changing nature of urban programming). This issue touches on a wider usage of logframes when they become part of a contract between donor and implementer, and are then at risk of becoming inflexible (unless an agreement is in place to regularly amend operational logframes).

Logframes therefore need to be flexible in their usage, which can be achieved through the careful crafting of purpose, outputs and indicators. In programming terms, this suggests a less tight control over day-to-day actions, with greater autonomy of actions in the hands of others. Or, as one key informant noted for this guidance note, “a partial understanding is as good as it gets”. As with probably all tools, the issue is to use the tool correctly to achieve the desired outcome. Following on from the above, a key issue for example would be to craft a purpose to align with the components on an ABA, relating to the area, to those in that area, and to have more joined up and engaged actions between implementers.

An additional point, in relation to flexibility, concerns funding. Wherever possible, funding allocations and flows need to reflect the fast-changing nature of urban recovery. To these ends, agencies should negotiate as well as they can for flexibility in funds. And, in the same vein, international NGOs should apply the same degree of flexibility to implementing local partners (see Principle 5).



Neighbourhood action planning for cyclone and flood, Orissa. Credit: David Sanderson.

## Taking an action planning approach

Action planning provides an established people-centred approach for working in urban low-income urban settings (Hamdi and Goethert, 1992), and was originated to reflect the complexity and fast-changing nature of urban life, where people themselves need support to determine their own actions. Action planning can be defined as, 'a framework guided by the belief that people are creative and capable, and can and should do much of their own investigation, analysis and planning ... that outsiders (funders, experts, public officials) have a strategic role to play as convenors, disseminators, catalysts, facilitators and policy formulators ... creating opportunities for discovery and a context for work which can be understood by all' (ibid).

### Characteristics of action planning

The following characteristics relate to approaches to be adopted by implementers wherever appropriate. This is therefore not a checklist to be adhered to, but rather a set of attitudes about how to engage in urban complexity.

- **Problem-based and opportunity driven**, to give clarity to actions to be undertaken.
- **Based on achievable actions**, which is important to build confidence that recovery can take place.
- **Reliant on local knowledge and skills**, emphasising local ownership.
- **Non-reliant on complete information**, using the principle of 'optimal ignorance' to avoid the notion that everything needs to be known before anything can happen.
- **Embrace serendipity**, given the importance of local connections, etc.
- **Actions are incremental rather than comprehensive** – this is particularly important given the short funding cycles often associated with post-disaster recovery.
- **Focus on starting points rather than end states**, reflecting the complexity of urban programming, where initially-envisaged approaches may not be appropriate as the project progresses.
- **Fast, but not rushed**, to ensure momentum for recovery.
- **Visible, tangible outputs**, to encourage replication elsewhere.

### KEY ACTIONS

1. Employ an adaptive management approach wherever possible in programming approaches.
2. In a logframe, ensure the purpose is multi-sectoral, and reflect different sectors in the outputs.
3. Seek to use action planning principles throughout project implementation, and ensure that the logframe is flexible enough to accept this.

## Resources

Chambers, R and Ramalingam, B (2016) *Adapting aid. Lessons from six case studies*. IRC and Mercy Corps. Available at: [www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/Mercy\\_Corps\\_ADAPT\\_Adapting\\_aid\\_report\\_with\\_case\\_studies.7.21.16.pdf](http://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/Mercy_Corps_ADAPT_Adapting_aid_report_with_case_studies.7.21.16.pdf)

Hamdi, N and Goethert, R (1997) *Action Planning for Cities. A Guide to Community Practice*. IT Publications, Rugby.

Mercy Corps (2016) *Managing complexity. Adaptive management at Mercy Corps*. Available at: [www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/Adaptive%20management%20paper\\_external.pdf](http://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/Adaptive%20management%20paper_external.pdf)

## Core Principle 8: Nimble internal systems

Closely aligned to Principle 7 concerning flexible approaches, the internal systems of implementing organisations also need to adapt to the realities of urban programming, if interventions are to be successful. For an urban ABA to have the best chance of success, **the internal systems of agencies, such as human resources (HR) and finance, need to be aligned to the purpose and overall goal of the programme.** One way to achieve this is to involve HR and finance staff at the earliest stages of the design of an ABA, which can lead to a smoother functioning of support services in the subsequent implementation of a programme, with agreed clarity (between programme and non-programme staff) on the overall aim of the programme. As one key informant stated, ‘the intent here is the need to ensure the finance manager is not a book keeper, but rather understands what the (programme’s) intent is’.

Sometimes this can be a challenge. As one key informant observed, systems may be at odds with the complexity inherent in an ABA, in as much that, “finance puts barriers around complexity, to simplify servicing the system”. The resulting risk to an ABA is that servicing the finance function (in relation to accountability of expenditure to the donor) unwittingly shapes the programme.

A similar note relates to HR, wherein, for example, the development of job performance indicators, from which personal success is measured, may relate to a particular sector, but not to wider activities, which an ABA demands. HR functions therefore need to be flexible: job descriptions may need to be written to be open-ended, which of course need to be matched with the hiring of sufficiently qualified personnel.

In an ABA, skills that were relevant for the logistical delivery of relief items may not be relevant (and in fact may be an obstacle) for that of longer-term engagement and facilitation. An example of this is provided in the relief to recovery operations following the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, wherein the same team of one NGO assigned to deliver relief materials in the immediate relief phase transitioned to the team assigned to deliver more complex recovery activities, but without relevant technical skills. This led to a programme which relied on the monitoring of inputs rather than the measuring of community or individual benefits resulting from the interventions. The final evaluation found that: “For the weaker sectors, an adherence to numerical targets tended to end in achievements that recorded project inputs, eg numbers trained, rather than outputs, eg the impact of the training” (Hasan *et al.*, 2009).

A seemingly obvious, but no-less important point relates to having the right managers in place. Given urban ABAs represent a substantial shift away from ‘business as usual’, for example the delivery of goods and services to rural areas, this is a critical point. One key informant named this as the ‘Achilles’ heel’, stating that, “we over-design, and we under-invest in complex management at the operational level”. For urban programming therefore, staff management profiles might resemble those more of a combination of social entrepreneur, negotiator and networker than of say an engineer, house builder or logistician. Such open-ended and flexible jobs, therefore, need to translate into job descriptions for more successful ABA implementation.

### KEY ACTIONS

1. Engage HR and finance personnel in the design of an ABA from the earliest stage, to share the intentions of the overall purpose and outcomes of the actions.
2. Build in flexibility at every stage, in particular in job descriptions.
3. Ensure competent and appropriately skilled management that engages successfully with local priorities and concerns.

## Resources

Jha, A, Barenstein, D, Phelps, P, Pittet, D and Sena, S (2010) *Safer Homes, Stronger Communities: a Handbook for Reconstructing after Natural Disasters*. World Bank, Washington. Available at: [www.urban-response.org/resource/12606](http://www.urban-response.org/resource/12606)

Sanderson, D, Knox Clarke, P with Campbell, L (2012) *Responding to Urban Disasters: Learning from previous relief and recovery operations*. [www.alnap.org/resource/7772](http://www.alnap.org/resource/7772)

Wild, L, Booth, D and Valters, C (2017) *Putting theory into practice. How DFID is doing development differently*. ODI, London. Available at: [www.odi.org/publications/10729-putting-theory-practice-how-dfid-doing-development-differently](http://www.odi.org/publications/10729-putting-theory-practice-how-dfid-doing-development-differently)

# Core Principle 9: Plan for scaling-up

Scaling-up here is taken to mean the replication of actions to other areas in a city, and also the potential adoption of approaches into a wider policy level.

ABAs, by definition, are geographically focused (see Principle 2). In identifying locations in which to work, a risk is an uneven approach, where for example one neighbourhood receives support and the one next door, with the same needs, does not. One key informant called this ‘the area problem’, where for example, “the issue may be a rich agency on one area, and a poorer one leading another”. CRS also experienced this challenge in relation to its recovery efforts in Tacloban: “We have received a lot of feedback, or complaints, from neighbouring neighbourhoods to the area where we work” (ALNAP, 2015:6).

Addressing this issue, the World Bank’s review of ABAs following the 2010 Haiti earthquake concluded that: “Concentration of assistance in discrete areas reduces equity, coverage, and sustainability. In contrast, area-based interventions led by local authorities or communities can have wide-ranging benefits, and should be encouraged” (IRC, 2015:5). As well as careful consideration in assessment on deciding where to work (see Principle 1), successful ABAs should take into account from the very start how the programme will be scaled up to other locations and within wider city actions (as well as continuing to develop in its own right).

In order to increase the chances of scale-up, the following actions need to be considered at the outset of an action:

- Ensure local ownership as far as possible (see Principle 4).
- Work within local structures (see Principle 5) – unfortunately there are plenty of examples of post-disaster recovery programmes that come to an end when external laid funding is withdrawn.
- In deciding on locations to work, discuss with other implementing organisations how an uneven approach can be avoided.

Scaling-up is rarely discussed in post-disaster recovery programmes given that very often timeframes are tight, yet, as with other advice in this guidance note, the enactment of successful ABAs call for a different way of working. Given that there is relatively little literature on scaling up, two sources given below, from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), provide relevant lessons that can be adapted to urban ABAs (WHO, 2010).

## WHO's nine steps for scaling up

- Step 1.** Planning actions to increase the scalability of the innovation.
- Step 2.** Increasing the capacity of the user organisation to implement scaling-up.
- Step 3.** Assessing the environment and planning actions to increase the potential for scaling-up success.
- Step 4.** Increasing the capacity of the resource team to support scaling-up.
- Step 5.** Making strategic choices to support vertical scaling-up (institutionalisation).
- Step 6.** Making strategic choices to support horizontal scaling-up (expansion/replication).
- Step 7.** Determining the role of diversification.
- Step 8.** Planning actions to address spontaneous scaling-up.
- Step 9.** Finalising the scaling-up strategy and identifying next steps.

## UNDP's challenges to scaling up

- **Conceptual framework** and project design, wherein an analysis of social, cultural and economic dynamics is insufficiently carried out, leading to projects that have an unnecessarily narrow focus that is hard to replicate.
- **Duration of the project**, which may be short and insufficiently aligned to the timetables of other organisations that might be involved in future scaling-up.
- **Financing** that is limited, short-term and/or unpredictable. UNDP notes the high risk of projects that are “purely driven by donor resources without any commitments from national and local budgets” (UNDP, 2013:13).
- **Ownership and sustainability:** carry out assessments to ascertain how the results of the projects are impacting the stakeholders.
- **Knowledge:** seek to share and disseminate learnings as much as possible.
- **Monitoring and evaluation** that captures learning of ‘soft’ skills and actions, such as improved management capability or changes in neighbourhood dynamics, which “are often overlooked and not acknowledged properly (ibid).

A powerful example of neighbourhood-driven scaling-up (that occurred largely in spite of agency efforts, rather than because of them), and which ties into a number of other principles (notably people-centred approaches and flexible programming), as well as the actions stated above, is provided by the establishment of Cnaan following the 2010 Haiti earthquake. The area, just outside Port-au-Prince and originally designated as a camp, is now a vibrant neighbourhood, with construction and investment driven largely by local communities. Meaney and Stephenson (2016:181) record the process as follows: “From 2010, several humanitarian organisations supported earthquake-displaced families in Cnaan, many considering the initial early settlement as a temporary camp situation. Organisations such as Techo (*Un Techo para mi País*) remained, supporting vulnerable households and community development. However, post-earthquake reconstruction funding was generally committed to areas of direct disaster impact and as a result of the illegal land invasion process in Cnaan, most humanitarian organisations were reluctant to become involved”.

In 2011, UN-Habitat – with support from Cambridge Architectural Research – documented the process of land parcelling, the typology of housing construction, and the extent of investment to date. They argued that what had been perceived as a chaotic emergence of a slum was, in fact, well organised, representing housing development by a mix of income groups and already of more than US\$60 million in permanent housing construction (estimated at over US\$100 million in 2013).

## KEY ACTIONS

1. Always plan from the outset of an ABA how it may be scaled-up to other locations and possibly adopted into wider strategic approaches at city level.
2. Wherever possible, seek to secure some form of funding commitment from the local budgets of local partnering stakeholders.
3. Work closely with other stakeholders in ensuring as much co-ownership as possible of approaches and learning.

## Resources

Meaney, M and Stephenson, M (2016) *Learning from people's actions: Canaan, Port-au-Prince, Haiti*. Box 6.5, p.181. In: Sanderson, D and Sharma, A (eds) (2016) *Resilience: saving lives today, investing for tomorrow. IFRC World Disasters Report*. IFRC, Geneva. Available at: [www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/201610/WDR%202016-FINAL\\_web.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/201610/WDR%202016-FINAL_web.pdf)

UNDP (2013) *Guidance Note: Scaling up development programmes*. Available at: [www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/participatory\\_localdevelopment/guidance-note--scaling-up-development-programmes.html](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/participatory_localdevelopment/guidance-note--scaling-up-development-programmes.html)

WHO (2010) *Nine steps for a scaling up strategy*. WHO. Available at: [www.expandnet.net/PDFs/ExpandNetWHO%20Nine%20Step%20Guide%20published.pdf](http://www.expandnet.net/PDFs/ExpandNetWHO%20Nine%20Step%20Guide%20published.pdf)

# Core Principle 10: Measure contribution not attribution

An opportunity for ABA evaluations – to foster greater collaboration and more holistically-based approaches – is **to shift from single-agency measuring attribution (correlating the activities of one project to community benefits), to multi-agency measuring of contribution (how a project may have helped as part of a wider effort)** for determining if a programme's success fits better the ethos of ABAs. This approach is relevant to ABAs because, “the activities of an individual agency, and the effects of those activities, will not normally occur in isolation but rather as part of a multi-layered, complex response by both local and external actors’ (Few *et al.*, 2014:8). This approach therefore ties into Principle 1 of the need for greater collaboration between sectors and programmes in assessments, and also, importantly, Principle 3 on the need to consider realistic (ie long-term) timeframes.

The publication *Contribution to Change* (Few *et al.*, 2014), which provides the steps for implementing this approach, argues that taking a contribution approach overcomes the challenge that, “Existing impact evaluations often focus on outputs achieved or on qualitative assessments of the assistance received by members of affected populations. They tend not to look at the contribution of interventions towards the overall process of recovery.”

The ‘contribution to change’ approach is “focused on assessing positive and negative changes to the lives of affected people and other local stakeholders, in the medium term following a disaster event” (Few *et al.*, 2014:7), ie it focuses on people themselves, and not on particular goods or services delivered by agencies. It combines both qualitative and quantitative data with an eleven-step process beginning with preliminary investigation and methods design, to preparing to work with communities, analysis and the drawing of conclusions.

A similar approach is described simply and clearly in the *Good Enough Guide to Impact Assessment* (ECB, 2007), which emphasises the importance of accountability (to affected people) in undertaking impact assessments.

**The use of livelihood-based approaches drawn from urban development can provide pointers in this area.** Moser's (1998) work on poverty and vulnerability in urban areas, for instance, used individual and community **assets** as the basis for measuring improvements relating to interventions. Assets include: belongings (physical assets); cash (financial assets); power (political assets); and networks and engagement (social assets). Moser's observations provide for a simple relationship, wherein "The more assets people have, the less vulnerable they are, and the greater the erosion of people's assets, the greater their insecurity" (Moser, 1998:24). Assets as the basis for measuring improvements subsequently formed the basis for livelihoods-based approaches that were popular from the mid-1990s onwards (Carney, 1999).

An asset-based approach provides a highly viable way for monitoring and evaluating ABAs. Such an approach does not tie monitoring (and eventual evaluation) to a sectoral input, but rather probes the relative state of individual and collective assets. This then provides a potentially powerful approach, disconnected from sectoral delivery, and geared more towards the benefits accrued in people's everyday lives. The tools for measuring assets can be found within the PRA toolkit (discussed in Principle 4) and include, for example, the use of spider diagrams as a visual and subjective means of community self-assessment of progress, which has formed the basis for subsequent developments of monitoring tools such as the ASPIRE tool by Arup, "an integrated planning, monitoring and evaluation tool for appraising the sustainability and poverty reduction performance of infrastructure projects" (EAP, 2013).

## KEY ACTIONS

1. Set in place the steps to undertake a 'contribution to change' evaluation, including engaging with other actors, organising budgets to accommodate and discuss with relevant donors of the need for such an approach.
2. Ensure lessons from such an evaluation are co-owned by participating communities and relevant stakeholders, and shared widely.

## Resources

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Knowledge  
Products

# Toolkit

June 2017

## Urban

*Keywords:*

Urban crises, stronger cities, disaster, humanitarian, area-based approach

Area-based approaches (ABAs) have gained traction in recent years among humanitarian aid agencies seeking to provide better responses in urban areas following a naturally-triggered disaster. This is in response to existing approaches that have struggled with the complexity of urban programming.

This guidance note presents ten principles for enacting post-disaster urban ABAs. The principles are organised according to the project management cycle (assessment and design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation) and are intended for use by humanitarian aid agencies. They are drawn from humanitarian action, and also good practice from developmental approaches that address chronic urban poverty.

The principles are:

1. Multi-agency, multi-sector participatory assessments
2. Focus on location
3. Realistic timeframes
4. People-centred actions – whose reality counts?
5. Work with existing structures
6. Collaborating sectors and programmes
7. Flexible programming: adaptive management
8. Nimble internal systems
9. Plan for scaling-up, and
10. Measure contribution not attribution.

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