

**SUSTAINABLE RELIEF IN POST-CRISIS SITUATIONS**  
**Transforming disasters into opportunities for**  
**sustainable development in human settlements**

INTRODUCTION

*‘Preventing man-made disasters... and reducing the impacts of natural disasters and other emergencies on human settlements, inter alia, through appropriate planning mechanisms and resources for rapid, people-centred responses that promote a smooth transition from relief, through rehabilitation, to reconstruction to development...’<sup>1</sup>*

1. The increasing occurrence of natural and human-caused disasters causing extensive loss of life, damage to property and harm to the environment, often turns back the development clock. Disasters perpetuate poverty as they force developing countries to postpone national development programmes thus worsening already precarious social, economic and environmental conditions, particularly in human settlements. Increased frequency of disasters makes sustainable development in the affected areas impossible. Many parts of the world are caught in a disaster and re-building cycle whereby the damage may be repaired but the causes underlying the devastation are critically overlooked.

2. The number and nature of armed conflicts has changed significantly in recent years. Today’s conflicts are mostly fought within state boundaries, whereas in the past wars took place across them. Wars are no longer fought only on battlefields between professional armies; rather, they are often waged in cities and villages by amateur militia, driven by long-simmering ethnic and religious ideologies and fuelled by a struggle for political and economic control. As a result, more than 90 % of the victims of today’s wars are civilians and of those, women and children bear an inordinate burden. 20 million refugees are in need of protection and assistance right now. An additional 20 to 25 million people are currently displaced within their own countries as a result of violence and human rights abuses<sup>2</sup>.

3. In the last decade, more than 200 million people annually were affected by natural disasters – seven times more than those affected by conflict<sup>3</sup>. Natural hazards become disasters when they impact the people and assets that are susceptible to their destructive effects. Nowhere is this more significant than in the world’s cities, towns and villages. Factors such as inappropriate land use, poorly designed and constructed buildings and infrastructure, and an increasingly degraded environment put human settlements at risk. Although these hazards exist in both developed and developing countries, they often impact more severely and repeatedly in developing countries where the institutional capacity is lowest, leaving large populations of the poorest inhabitants chronically vulnerable.

Urban risk

4. Today, more people live in urban areas than ever before in human history. The trend of urbanization is irreversible. It has been estimated that the world’s urban population will double to more than five billion by 2025, with 90% of the increase taking place in the developing world<sup>4</sup>. This is the numerical face. Cities hold

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<sup>1</sup> The Habitat Agenda, Chapter III, Commitments / B. Sustainable Human Settlements

<sup>2</sup> Reference required

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<sup>4</sup> UN-HABITAT, Global Campaign for Secure Tenure, Towards Poverty Reduction, [www.unhabitat.org/campaigns/tenure/bboard/poverty.htm](http://www.unhabitat.org/campaigns/tenure/bboard/poverty.htm)

incredible potential as engines of growth and social development, yet the inequalities are tremendous. Many of today's cities are topped with shattering realities; unemployment, violence, insecurity, substandard living conditions, poor health, malnutrition and high infant mortality.

5. Poor people everywhere, especially in urban areas, are most at risk. Most of the world's poor live in densely populated squatter settlements, on the periphery of cities, which lack the basics of life, leaving many inhabitants caught in a spiral of increasing vulnerability. Recent figures show that a quarter of the world's urban population does not have adequate housing and often lack access to clean water and sanitation<sup>5</sup>. Demand for commercial and residential land in cities has led to use of unsuitable terrain prone to natural hazards. As a result, many informal settlements are located in dangerous or untenable areas, such as floodplains, unstable slopes or reclaimed land. In the absence of secure tenure there is little reason for communities to invest in upgrading housing or infrastructure standards. Moreover, these cities are often unable to manage rapid population growth; poorly planned urbanization with increasing numbers of inadequately constructed and badly maintained buildings are further increasing the level of vulnerabilities in cities. Ironically, most of today's largest cities are in areas where earthquakes, floods, landslides and other disasters are most likely to happen. Poverty alleviation must therefore be central to any plan to effectively mitigate and manage disasters.

6. As the nature of disasters in cities becomes more complex, so must our approach to their management. It can be argued that many natural disasters are anything but 'natural', but largely a result of our deficient urban management practices; inadequate planning, population density, ecological imbalance, etc. The solutions are not found on a drawing board alone, but merely lie in improving the decisions we make in managing the growth and development of our cities, including mitigation and preparedness strategies. This is particularly important in managing the new global trend; mega-cities – metropolitan areas with over 10 million inhabitants. Today there are at least 25 mega-cities in the world, many of which have experienced devastating impacts of disasters, and most of which are also co-inhabiting with ever-increasing mega slums.

7. The movement of populations during and after disaster and conflict will have a major impact on the sustainable development of human settlements, and therefore on reconstruction activities. Unsupported urbanization will constrain sustainable development of cities, as well as hampering the well-being of the inhabitants and increasing their vulnerability to future conflicts and disasters.

### The commitment

8. At the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the international community endorsed Agenda 21 as a master plan to achieve sustainable development. Together with the Habitat Agenda – the global plan of action on human settlements issues adopted by the international community at the Habitat II Conference in 1996 – Agenda 21 marked the turning point in international efforts to promote sustainable development, which was no longer seen as a demonstration of good will but a necessity. The governments further restated their commitment towards a sound and fair world in the new millennium through their commitment to meeting the Millennium Development Goals by 2020.

9. The objective of sustainable development is a key element in all these global agendas. Their recommendations, commitments and areas of action vary widely, however, reducing the vulnerability of people and communities at risk from the threats of natural and human-caused disasters is common throughout. The damage caused by disasters is staggering. The loss of life and property poses severe constraints upon sustainable development. Therefore the reduction of vulnerabilities and the protection of citizens and assets from the impacts of disasters should be an indispensable part of national plans and strategies for sustainable development. It is equally imperative, particularly in developing countries, to grasp the opportunities during post-crisis recovery periods to ensure an effective transition to sustainable development.

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<sup>5</sup> Road map towards implementation of the United Nations Millennium Development Declaration, Goal 7, Target, 11, para 118.

10. As the lead agency within the United Nations system for coordinating activities in the field of human settlements, UN-HABITAT is also the focal point for implementing the Habitat Agenda. Subsequently UN-HABITAT is mandated through the Habitat Agenda to take the lead in disaster, mitigation, and post-crisis rehabilitation capabilities in human settlements. Its activities contribute to the overall objective of the United Nations to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development within the context of a rapidly urbanizing world. Through the two Global Campaigns on Secure Tenure and Urban Governance, UN-HABITAT promotes concepts of inclusion, participation and sustainability in the human settlements context. These overarching issues are also reflected in supporting sustainable, people centred solutions in disaster management.

## I. WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE RELIEF IN HUMAN SETTLEMENTS?

*‘Ensuring the development, in line with the principles of sustainable human settlements, of a disaster-resistant environment for residents of cities, towns and villages to live, work and invest’.*<sup>6</sup>

11. The changing nature of conflict and natural disasters is leading to re-visioning of traditional approaches to relief assistance. Natural and human-caused emergencies are increasing in regularity, and perhaps more importantly, their impacts on populations and human settlements are rising alarmingly. This, coupled with cycles of dependency and shortage of resources, all point to the need to develop innovative approaches and re-examine traditional policies on relief assistance.

12. The international community is performing an ever-widening range of relief and rehabilitation activities. This exacerbates the fundamental challenges of the crisis management and recovery processes; how to bridge the gaps that have repeatedly emerged between emergency relief and sustainable development efforts, and how to provide national and local government, civil society and business organizations with practical strategies to mitigate and recover from crises, and also to prevent lapsing back into crisis. It is equally critical to build the capacity of national and international aid agencies to deliver rapid response services that integrate a longer term developmental strategy. Based on these changing dynamics in international assistance, it is clear that a new approach is required. Through analysis of these needs, the concept of sustainable relief has emerged.

### A. Mitigation – building a ‘culture of prevention’

13. Mitigation is the first step towards a comprehensive approach to managing disasters. Disaster mitigation is defined as sustained actions to reduce or eliminate the impacts and risks associated with natural and human-caused disasters. Communities, however, are often unaware of the hazards they face, do not put much trust in mitigation strategies, and rely heavily upon emergency responses from others when the need arises. Sustainable relief encompasses all phases of disaster management, from mitigation to response; with a view to improving communities’ and governments’ capacities to prevent and mitigate disaster events so that needs during response are reduced. However, this focus on mitigation, prevention and preparedness<sup>7</sup> is a particularly important aspect of sustainable relief. Concepts of sustainability and sustainable development offer a crucial framework for integrating vulnerability reduction plans in the context of disaster recovery. Sustainable human settlements development cannot often prevent disaster from happening, but it can help to mitigate their impacts.<sup>8</sup> Disaster mitigation and management needs to look beyond the hazards alone to

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<sup>6</sup> Development objective of the Disaster Management Programme, UN-HABITAT

<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the term mitigation will encompass prevention, mitigation and preparation phases of the disaster management framework.

<sup>8</sup> UN-HABITAT, *Cities in a Globalising World*, Chapter 15, page 182

consider prevailing conditions of vulnerability. It is the social, cultural, economic, and political setting in a country that defines the level of vulnerability, or resilience, of its people and communities to disasters<sup>9</sup>.

14. A better understanding and emphasis on capacity development during mitigation will increase the ability of local actors – civil society, local and national government – to respond effectively to disasters. The cornerstone of the implementation strategy is to build a “culture of prevention” among society at large. Such a culture will not only save lives but will enhance the economic and social fabric of the locale, through working with cities and civil societies to reduce their vulnerability to natural and human-caused disasters, as well as providing sustainable solutions for the re-construction of war-torn and post-crisis societies. Disaster management and mitigation therefore needs to be introduced as an integral part of any on-going development and poverty reduction plans.

15. It is essential that the community as a whole be involved in developing and implementing mitigation and sustainable development programmes. Civil empowerment is a fundamental complement to any mitigation exercise undertaken within cities or by civil society. Without a common understanding of the necessity for mitigation measures, without the active participation of civil society in execution, and without community’s sense of ownership, such measures stand a slim chance of reducing disasters or resolving conflicts.

#### B. Response - meeting the long term needs of many, while supporting the emergency needs of few.

16. When conflicts occur or hazards turn into disasters it is always human settlements, people and property that are among the most affected. Therefore, any recovery process irrespective of its short- or long-term planning horizon has to consider, in addition to meeting urgent human needs, the physical infrastructure and human settlements problems that arise, including adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development. In many post-crisis scenarios, experience has shown that interventions are most effective when they are designed to begin simultaneously; consideration of long term impacts of short term interventions can add value to the latter, and depth to the former. A process of long-term reconstruction and economic recovery should therefore begin while post-emergency actions aimed at restoring normality for the affected populations returning home or settling in new places are being undertaken. In this manner, strategic investment during emergency and relief stages can contribute significantly to building foundations for development.

17. Post-crisis responses by national governments, bilaterals, NGOs and UN agencies have been characterized by rapid rehabilitation projects including water and sanitation, housing, irrigation, food-security measures and health. These tend to be ad-hoc, palliative and not linked to overall development objectives of disaster-hit countries. Piecemeal efforts that are not connected with the long-term development strategy can not only aggravate precarious social conditions creating dependency on aid, but are a critical waste of financial and human resources invested in short-sighted emergency relief plans. Humanitarian agencies can no longer operate in isolation; instead they require active participation from development-oriented agencies. The real challenge lies in broadening the portfolios of humanitarian and developmental actors and in bringing them together in shared realization of recovery processes for sustainable development.

18. The recovery phase can also offer a unique opportunity to revisit past practices and rewrite policies affecting future development in disaster-prone areas. A range of mitigation measures, for example, can be incorporated during recovery to promote vulnerability reduction, such as land-use, environmental and community planning, improving building codes and construction regulations. Beyond the physical aspects of rehabilitation, the recovery period also offers an opportunity for the society at large to strengthen local organizational capacities, and to promote networks, awareness and political mechanisms facilitating economic, social and physical development long after a disaster – that is, to build its own sustainability.

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<sup>9</sup> UNISDR, ‘Living with Risk’, Chapter 1

## II. FROM DISASTERS TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE SETTLEMENTS

*‘[meeting] the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’<sup>10</sup>*

19. How does a community become sustainable? The concept of sustainability evolves around three key elements; economic, environmental and social equilibriums. It means that ‘community’ is a good, safe and healthy place for its members, offering a solid foundation for a prosperous life with equal opportunities for all – in line with the six established principles for enhancing community sustainability. The community that wants to promote its sustainability will

- (a) Maintain and, if possible, enhance its residents’ quality of life;
- (b) Enhance local economic vitality;
- (c) Ensure social and intergenerational equity;
- (d) Maintain and, if possible, enhance environmental quality;
- (e) Incorporate disaster resilience and mitigation;
- (f) Use a consensus-building, participatory process when making decisions<sup>11</sup>.

20. By integrating the principles of sustainability from the earliest stages of recovery in human settlements, strategic investment during emergency stages can contribute significantly to building foundations for development - thus creating viable and less vulnerable communities able to cope with changes and events that time brings.

21. Being aware of the complexity of the post-crisis recovery process from the human settlements perspective, UN-HABITAT has elaborated and applied a set of specific strategies from the transitional phase recovery to medium to long-term development in order to promote peace building, poverty reduction, disaster mitigation and sustainable development of human settlements.

### A. Safety, security and reconstruction strategy:

22. The first pre-condition for achieving sustainable recovery and resettlement of displaced populations is to address the challenge of ensuring security and protection, and the elimination of the circumstances and occurrences that generate dispute and conflict. In this respect, the restoration - or where it did not exist before, the institution - of an effective and sympathetic law-keeping service, backed by an impartial and equally effective judiciary, is crucial.

23. Shelter is one of the most visible and immediate needs in post-crisis settings. Relief efforts are often focused on providing shelter quickly, without taking into account the impact of short-term shelter strategies. Long-term shelter strategies do not only focus on determination and implementation of realistic and permanent reconstruction plans for the affected communities, but also tie up with rebuilding community confidence and support structure for civic responsibility and urban governance, through participatory planning of reconstruction processes. Shelter issues are closely bound to mitigation aspects as well, particularly in disasters. The development of disaster resistant housing is a major factor reducing vulnerability to disasters. However, shelter issues in mitigation go beyond the structural. Rights to ownership and security of tenure make an enormous difference to the maintenance, management and development of shelter, particularly in urban areas. When people have security where they live, they are better able to manage space, and engage in activities that will reduce, rather than increase their vulnerability.

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<sup>10</sup> The definition of sustainable development by The Brundtland Commission ‘Our Common future’ (1987), p. 188

<sup>11</sup> Mileti, Dennis S., ‘Disasters by Design’ (1999), p. 31

24. Access to resources such as land and water is often an underlying cause of conflict. With careful understanding of antecedents, any imbalances and sensitive situations must be addressed through both formal and traditional systems, to ensure equitable access and use of such resources by all communities. In the same vein, the system for allocation, use and registration of land and property will need to be rationalized. This is a crucial tool for conflict resolution, but also in mitigation of future disasters. Security of tenure and access to land are therefore central issues in disaster response, in particular with reference to displaced populations. Secure tenure is crucial when developing programmes to minimize vulnerability of populations to future crises, with key elements of protecting the land and property rights of affected/displaced persons, and developing longer term solutions for land and property dispute resolution.

#### B. Ensuring sustainable returns and reintegration:

25. At least 25 million people spread over 52 countries are displaced by violence, persecution and/or disasters but remain within the borders of their own countries<sup>12</sup>. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)<sup>13</sup> are the single most vulnerable population in the world. During displacement, IDPs are often subject to physical violence; women and children are particularly vulnerable as they are at the highest risk of losing everything. Most importantly, IDPs are unlike refugees, in that they do not have legal status protecting their lives and rights.

26. Large scale movements of populations away from vulnerable areas during conflict or disaster often lead to longer term displacement of these groups. This displacement results from chronic insecurity, lack of rehabilitation of disaster struck areas, or inability to return due to other constraints. The response in addressing immediate needs of the displaced must consider their longer term needs as well, either in-situ, or in their places of origin. The response phase after disaster or conflict tends to approach displaced populations as beneficiaries rather than partners in the recovery process. Displaced populations represent future human resources in the post-conflict and post-crisis environments.

#### C. Promoting economic development during recovery:

27. Natural and human-caused disasters destroy investments, infrastructure and livelihoods. Poverty and lack of resources increases vulnerability, weakens coping strategies and delays the recovery process. A vibrant local economy is one of the key elements in sustainable recovery and development, yet economic recovery is also recognized as one of the most difficult aspects of the process. Despite disasters, many communities have resources that can be tapped such as the availability of local building materials, the existence of a labor force, and most importantly the eagerness of local communities and the private sector to participate in the recovery process. Re-establishing small scale production in the affected areas, creating employment opportunities for local entrepreneurs and the community itself - both affected/displaced and host communities - and reinforcing the local building sectors all are contributing to sustainable recovery. All in all, strategic physical reconstruction of housing, infrastructure, public facilities and utilities play a fundamental role in the functionality and success of local economy.

#### D. Good governance in post-crisis situations:

28. Public participation and inclusive decision-making are well recognized as central elements in UN-HABITAT's global campaign for good urban governance. Good urban governance contributes to the reduction of vulnerability, enables the development of mitigation and recovery methodologies, and empowers civil society to act on its own behalf. The principles of good urban governance; equity, efficiency, transparency, civic engagement and security are key for sustainable development and disaster mitigation and management.

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<sup>12</sup> Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Internal Displacement Unit, [www.reliefweb.int/idp](http://www.reliefweb.int/idp)

<sup>13</sup> There is no single universally accepted definition for an IDP, indicating the lack of status of this very vulnerable group. United Nations defines an IDP as: 'A person who has been forced to flee or leave their home as a result of or in order to avoid the effects; armed conflict; generalized violence, violation of human rights; natural or human-caused disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border.'

29. Cities are managed and communities interact at the local level. Inclusive decision-making is at the heart of good urban governance, and participation of civil society is crucial to achieving sustainable recovery from a disaster. At no time is the opportunity for public involvement in decision-making greater than when a community is faced with the practical problems of recovering from a disaster<sup>14</sup>. Civil society, community groups and NGOs play a major role in disaster management, conflict prevention, reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction. They are much more than recipients of relief assistance, and must be viewed as such for developmentally focused relief and recovery programmes to be successful. Civil society acts as an important channel for awareness raising and education, for promoting a climate of peace and reconciliation, and for preventing and mitigating conflicts and crises.

30. Inclusive decision-making, including women in particular, is a key element in a strategy in building consensus among difference participants in the emergency phase, ensuring an active participation of affected populations, community groups, and local authorities also in the subsequent recovery phases. However, the success of the process is closely related to the quality of the participation of the civil society in the decisions affecting their lives and on the responsiveness of planning and policy-making processes to the needs of the communities. Without the commitment of all the stakeholders involved, recovery efforts will have only limited impact. Ownership at the local level in response and recovery is important if these activities are to contribute to the longer term development and reduction of vulnerability of the population.

31. Truly participatory involvement of all segments of people is not simple. It is a process that requires substantive support to local governments in strengthening their technical and institutional capacities and in understanding the main principles of people's participation and good governance. Throughout the process, national/local governments remain the critical actor in ensuring sustainable development and recovery through their unique role in facilitating dialogue between private and public interests. The links between civil society and local/national government will be the key relationship that sustainable recovery strategies must endeavor to foster. The capacity of local and national governments to address issues during all phases of disaster management, and in the post conflict phase is a critical element in the development of sustainable relief strategies.

32. However, with the displacement of people due to natural or human-caused disasters, a commensurate loss of skill and capacity occurs. Often the most skilled are the most capable of relocating permanently elsewhere or absorbed into other public or private sector employment. Consequently, local government may not exist, or government officials may have limited or in some cases no experience managing their villages and towns. Also, during the initial resettlement stages, the potential for further conflict, or the initiation of new conflict is high. The disaster-affected and returning communities therefore are faced with the uncertainty of nascent local government authorities. The need for capacity building is thus crucial to prepare local government elected officials for expanded leadership roles to practice participative and accountable governance. This includes skills of negotiation, communication, conflict resolution, transparent local financial management and facilitating local economic development.

33. The principles of good governance are critical in disaster management and sustainable recovery, in particular in post-crisis scenarios vis-à-vis nascent or custodial local governments. Good governance enhances institutional capacities and decision-making process affecting economic recovery, development and activities; it is a process of decision-making to formulate national/local disaster reduction plans and policies; and it is a system of policy implementation and requires the existence of well functioning organizations at national and local level to implement and enforce land-use planning, building codes, safety standards and disaster response mechanisms<sup>15</sup>. In the absence of good governance communities become, especially for the most vulnerable, increasingly dangerous and unhealthy places to live and work. Promotion of good governance serves therefore as a cornerstone of sustainable recovery and development in human settlements.

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<sup>14</sup> Sarah Michaels, University of Colorado, 'Participatory Process'(Holistic Disaster Recovery 2001), page 3-1,

<sup>15</sup> UNDP/BCPR 'World Vulnerability Report 2003', Draft, Chapter 3, p. 21

#### E. Addressing sustainable urbanization in post-crisis situation:

34. An understanding of urban vulnerability is the first step in developing mitigation strategies that effectively improve resilience and reduce vulnerability of urban populations in the long term. It is important that during response phases the needs of urban areas and potential urbanization be addressed. Strategies to respond in urban settings after disaster or conflict will differ – there will be needs, issues and dynamics that will be unique in the urban context. Community development strategies, for example, need to be reworked to fit urban populations who often come from different areas, in cases of post conflict, possibly groups from different sides of the conflict.

35. Urbanization in post conflict contexts is a phenomenon that must be prioritized within a sustainable recovery framework. Urban centres are increasingly focal points for economic opportunity, provoking large scale – and often long term – displacement during and after conflict. Urban centres also draw people seeking better infrastructure and services – education and health in particular – than rural areas. What is especially concerning is that many of the expected jobs and educational opportunities in urban areas are not realized and consequently, often crime, ethnic tensions and rising poverty create new threats to peace, security and development.

36. The impacts of natural disasters are magnified in urban centres, not only as a result of the population density, but due to other vulnerabilities, such as dependency on infrastructure and urban services, poor planning, bad and illegal construction practices and ecological exploitation of environment, that are unique to the urban context. Cyclical vulnerability to disasters in rural areas also leads to movement of populations to cities, again further stretching existing urban capacities.

#### F. Gender and the involvement of women:

37. The involvement of women and their equal access to opportunities and resources in disaster and post conflict periods is vital for any relief operation to be sustainable. Sustainable relief strategies can impact the long term objective of promoting gender equality in societies coping with disasters and conflicts. Women represent enormous capability in mitigation of impacts of disasters and conflicts. When an enabling environment exists – and often when it does not – women are effective managers of resources, mobilisers of communities and keepers of the peace. However, women also represent a group that tends to be more vulnerable to the effects of disaster and conflict. It is clear that promoting development, which enables women to mitigate these impacts and reduce their own vulnerability, will have the greatest overall effect. This is closely linked with the protection and promotion of women’s human rights. For example, promoting a woman’s right to own quality land increases her effectiveness as a manager of natural resources and reduces vulnerability to disaster. This reduction will have greater long term impacts on the ability of populations to develop than short term focused relief based strategies.

38. The impacts of conflict on women – and women’s roles in conflict – must be a major consideration when developing sustainable relief strategies. In many cases, relief activities categorise women as victims and beneficiary recipients in programming, rather than enabling them to be actively involved and increase their capacity through relief activities. This is especially important as many of the roles and skills of women in post conflict situations go unrecognised. As such, support for long term recovery of communities is undermined. Involving women in relief efforts will increase the long term impacts of relief based approaches. A sustainable relief approach will also allow for a better understanding of the diversity of women’s roles and experiences in conflict, thus improving the overall effectiveness of interventions from a gender perspective.



### G. Creating strategic partnerships

39. The human settlements component is integral to post-crisis solutions, from refugee settlements planning to development of strengthened institutional capacities, good governance and reviving local economy. However, in order to develop an integrated approach to sustainable rehabilitation of human settlements, limited resources must be coordinated to achieve the maximum possible effect. The multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary nature of disaster reduction and response requires continuous interaction, co-operation and partnerships among related institutions and stakeholders to achieve global objectives of disaster mitigation and sustainable post-crisis recovery. Solutions to insure sustainable recovery are interwoven in such a manner that activities cannot be implemented in isolation. Building strategic partnerships among all stakeholders; civil society, national/local governments, private sector, media and national/international support agencies, is therefore a shared challenge and responsibility. In combination, this contributes to the development of a coherent framework for sustainable recovery of human settlements in post-crisis situations.

### F. Strengthening national and local capacities

40. Post-crisis activities provide unique opportunities for increasing capacities among all national and local actors involved in the recovery process. At the national level this may require strengthening policy making capacities and formulating legal instruments for implementation of national vulnerability reduction plans that promote sustainable development. Municipality authorities can be introduced to the sustainable rehabilitation and recovery process, re-directing the focus from technical and conventional response actions towards incorporation of mitigation measures in disaster management plans, introducing proper land use planning and building regulations, protection of land and property rights, effective project management and improved governance, among others, all within the framework of longer-term reconstruction strategy. Along the process, national professionals at different levels improve their technical and managerial skills and know-how; civil society and communities are empowered through their active participation in recovery efforts and development of a self-sustaining process; local small business, building contractors and organizations have the opportunity to grow and gain experience; and individuals, women in particular, can be trained in income generating activities in the housing and infrastructure sector.

## III. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SUSTAINABLE RELIEF IN HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

41. The development of guiding principles will serve to articulate the basic practice philosophy that actors must adopt to ensure that relief assistance is having a positive effect on the sustainable and equal development of human settlements in post conflict and disaster environments. These principles will establish important baselines and priority areas of focus that are considered necessary for the implementation of truly sustainable relief activities.

42. For sustainable relief to be achieved it will require a shift in thinking about relief and development at all levels. This conceptual change will have to be backed up with new operational approaches from international agencies, from governments, and in communities. Sustainable relief in human settlements is a process. These guiding principles offer a realistic, forward looking approach to recovering from crisis. They can also be considered somewhat elastic, encompassing many different aspects of the process – without a guarantee that every principle will be included in every recovery process. Giving serious consideration in these principles during planning and decision-making, however, can assist communities, authorities and support agencies to realize that decisions made during the earliest stages of recovery will have long-term impacts on the success and sustainability of the joint efforts in recovery.

43. The proposed guiding principles in sustainable relief in human settlements are;
- (a) Permanent links between emergency relief and the transitional phase of development must be established.
  - (b) Facilitation of safety and security of affected populations is a critical pre-condition of any humanitarian or developmental activities.
  - (c) Developing broad-based and long-term reconstruction and shelter strategies at the earliest stages.
  - (d) Ensuring the protection of land and property rights of the affected populations, and developing longer-term solutions for land and property dispute resolution.
  - (e) Sustainable relief must be based on participatory planning and inclusive decision-making models, ensuring involvement of all actors, women in particular, in all planning and implementation activities.
  - (f) Incorporating vulnerability reduction and disaster management into on-going national and local development and poverty reduction plans.
  - (g) Redirecting the focus on disaster risk reduction and mitigation rather than preparedness and response related strategies in human settlements context.
  - (h) The capacities of local governments must be developed to operate as active partners in the process.
  - (i) Building and engaging capacities at all levels and of all actors must be a priority from the earliest stages and throughout the process.
  - (j) Developing productive economic activities the earliest stages of recovery.
  - (k) Sustainable relief activities need to operate within a human rights framework, particularly in terms of land rights and security of tenure, and the equal rights of women.
  - (l) Strategic partnerships and alliances must be created at all levels.

#### IV. THE WAY FORWARD

44. Developing global guidelines on sustainable relief is the first step in turning these discussions and debates into operational realities. However, for this to be truly effective, commitment must be sought from international agencies, governments (local and national) and civil society on these guidelines and the direction of change that they represent.

45. Once commitment and consensus is developed, it is vital that these guidelines are translated into action at all levels. National plans of action on disaster management are being developed, or have been developed in many countries, and these guidelines should further inform the development of these plans.

46. The guiding principles will also support the development of a Declaration of Sustainable Relief in Human Settlements. It is anticipated that the Declaration would eventually constitute a global standard of human settlements recovery and development in post-crisis situations, thus facilitating the creation of various instruments enhancing the operationalisation of the guiding principles. UN-HABITAT has a unique position in the UN system in terms of its long-standing commitment to sustainable human settlements development, and as such, it has a clear role in addressing and contributing to the provision of sustainable relief in



rehabilitation of housing, services and human settlements.

#### A. Challenges for the Second World Urban Forum

47. Based on this background, the WUFII represents an important arena for further elaboration of some of the key issues outlined here. As such, participants in the dialogues on sustainable relief at the WUFII may wish to elaborate and provide some guidance on some specific questions:

- (a) How can the implementation of the guiding principles for sustainable relief become an operational reality;
- (b) How can the guiding principles incorporated into the national and local policies and actions;
- (c) Which are the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in this process, and how can they be best assisted;
- (d) How can the World Urban Forum contribute to the above said process in an effective and sustainable manner?