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Dialogue on urban disasters and reconstruction

Sustainable relief in post-crisis situations; transforming disasters into opportunities for sustainable development in human settlements

Abstract

“Post-conflict, natural and human caused disasters assessment and reconstruction” is one of two special themes included in the provisional agenda for the twentieth session of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) Governing Council. The second session of the World Urban Forum provides an opportunity to bring together an array of experts and representatives to weigh and discuss pertinent issues relating to current disaster management practices in the global context, including, in particular, issues related to sustainable interventions during crises. This document introduces an overview of the methodologies and principles of UN-Habitat’s involvement in supporting human settlements in crisis. During the urban disasters dialogue, UN-Habitat partners will critically review and debate the elements introduced with the aim of preparing an advisory note portraying the joint vision of both UN-Habitat and its partners on guiding principles for sustainable relief in human settlements. The completed advisory note will form the foundation of a report to the Executive Director that will be transmitted to the twentieth session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council in mid-2005.

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I. 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...”¹

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 by forcing 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 affected areas impossible. Many parts of the world are caught in a disaster and re-building cycle in which devastation may be repaired but its underlying causes 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 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 per cent of the victims of today’s wars are civilians and, of those, women and children bear an inordinate burden. Twenty million refugees

¹ Report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul, 3-14 June 1996 (A/CONF.165/14), annex II (The Habitat Agenda), chap. III, commitment B (sustainable human settlements).

are in need of protection and assistance right now². An additional 25 million people are currently displaced within their own countries as a result of violence and human rights abuses³.

3. In the last decade, more than 200 million people annually were affected by natural disasters – seven times more than those affected by conflict. 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.

A. 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 per cent of the increase taking place in the developing world⁴. This is the numerical face. Cities hold incredible potential as engines of growth and social development, yet tremendous inequalities exist. Many of today’s cities are afflicted by 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 peripheries of cities that lack the basics of life and leave many of their 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 lacks access to clean water and sanitation⁵. Demand for commercial and residential land in cities has led to the 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, cities are often unable to manage rapid population growth; poorly planned urbanization with increasing numbers of inadequately constructed and badly maintained buildings is further increasing the vulnerability of urban dwellers. 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 mitigate and manage disasters effectively.

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, and human failings. The solutions are not to be found on a drawing board alone, but lie in simply 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, or 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 characterized by 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 the sustainable development of cities. It will also hamper the well-being of urban dwellers and increase their vulnerability to future conflicts and disasters.

2 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees web site (www.unhcr.ch/statistics).

3 Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) web site, Internal Displacement Unit (www.reliefweb.int/idp).

4 UN-Habitat web site, Global Campaign for Secure Tenure, Towards Poverty Reduction (www.unhabitat.org/campaigns/tenure/bboard/poverty.htm).

5 Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration: Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/326), para. 118.

B. 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 a turning point in international efforts to promote sustainable development, which was no longer seen as a demonstration of good will but a necessity. Governments further restated their commitment to 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, but they all share the goal of reducing the vulnerability of people and communities at risk from the threats of natural and human-caused disasters. The damage caused by disasters is staggering. The loss of life and property imposes severe constraints upon sustainable development. The reduction of vulnerabilities and the protection of citizens and assets from the impacts of disasters should therefore 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.

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. 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 Global Campaign on Secure Tenure and the Global Campaign on Urban Governance, UN-Habitat promotes the 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.

II. 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”.*⁶

11. The changing nature of conflict and natural disasters is leading to a re-examination 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 to re-consider 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 crisis management and recovery processes: how to bridge gaps that have repeatedly emerged between emergency relief and sustainable development efforts; and how to provide national and local governments, civil society and business organizations with practical strategies to mitigate and recover from crises and to avoid 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.

6 Development objective of the UN-Habitat Disaster Management Programme.

A. Mitigation – building a “culture of prevention”

13. Disaster mitigation, defined as sustained action to reduce or eliminate the impacts and risks associated with natural and human-caused disasters, is the first step towards a comprehensive approach to managing 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. Mitigation, prevention and preparedness,⁷ however, are particularly important aspects 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 prevent disasters from happening, but it can often help to mitigate their impacts.⁸ Disaster mitigation and management needs to look beyond hazards alone and to consider prevailing conditions of vulnerability. It is the social, cultural, economic, and political setting in a country that determines the vulnerability, or resilience, of its people and communities to disasters⁹.

14. A better understanding and emphasis on capacity development during mitigation will increase the ability of local actors – civil society and local and national governments – 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 need to be introduced as integral parts of any development and poverty reduction plan.

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 a sense of community 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, human settlements, people and property are always among the most affected. Any recovery process, irrespective of its short- or long-term planning horizon, must therefore, in addition to meeting urgent human needs, address the physical infrastructure and human settlements problems that arise, including adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development. Experience has shown that in many post-crisis scenarios, coordinated interventions designed to begin simultaneously are most effective; 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 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.

⁷ For the purposes of this paper, the term mitigation encompasses the prevention, mitigation and preparation phases of the disaster management framework.

⁸ UN-Habitat, *Cities in a Globalizing World: Global Report on Human Settlements* (2001) (United Nations publication, Sales. No. 01.III.Q.1, chap. 15, page 182.

⁹ United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, *Living with Risk: A Global Review of Disaster Reduction Initiatives* (2004) (United Nations publication, Sales. No. GV.03.02), chap. 1.

17. Post-crisis responses by national Governments, bilateral arrangements, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies have been characterized by rapid rehabilitation projects relating to water and sanitation, housing, irrigation, food security 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 long-term development strategies 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. For example, a range of mitigation measures such as land use, environmental and community planning, improving building codes and construction regulations, can be incorporated during recovery to promote vulnerability reduction. 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.

III. From disasters towards sustainable settlements

“[Meeting] the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”¹⁰

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 will¹¹.

- (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.

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.

10 The definition of sustainable development by The World Commission On Environment and Development in *Our Common Future* (1987), p. 188.

11 Mileti, Dennis S., *Disasters by Design: A Reassessment of Natural Hazards in the United States* (1999), p. 31.

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 eliminating the circumstances 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 focus not only on determining and implementing realistic and permanent reconstruction plans for affected communities, but also seek to rebuild community confidence and support structures 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 in reducing vulnerability. Shelter issues in mitigation, however, 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.

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 to and use of 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 for 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 countries¹². Internally displaced persons¹³ are the single most vulnerable population in the world. During displacement, internally displaced persons are often subject to physical violence. Women and children are particularly vulnerable, as they are at the highest risk of losing everything. Most importantly, internally displaced persons 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 home due to other constraints. Efforts to address the 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.

12 Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) web site, Internal Displacement Unit (www.reliefweb.int/idp).

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

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 increase vulnerability, weaken coping strategies and delay recovery processes. 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 labour force and, most important, the eagerness of local communities and the private sector to participate in the recovery process. Re-establishing small-scale production in affected areas, creating employment opportunities for local entrepreneurs and affected communities -- both the displaced and host communities -- and reinforcing local building sectors all contribute to sustainable recovery. All in all, strategic physical reconstruction of housing, infrastructure, public facilities and utilities plays a fundamental role in the functionality and success of local economies.

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 on 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.

29. Cities are managed and communities interact at the local level. Inclusive decision-making is at the heart of good urban governance, and civil society participation 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 disaster¹⁴. Civil society, community groups and non-governmental organizations play a major role in disaster management, conflict prevention, reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction. They are much more than recipients of relief assistance, and this must be recognized 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 of building consensus among different participants in the emergency phase, and serves to ensure the active participation of affected populations, community groups, and local authorities in the subsequent recovery phases. The success of the process, however, is closely related to the quality of civil society participation in the decisions affecting their lives and to 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 and local governments remain the critical actors 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 and national governments comprise the key relationship that sustainable recovery strategies must endeavour to foster. The capacity of local and

14 J. Michaels (ed.), *Holistic Disaster Recovery* (2001) (chapter entitled Participatory Process, by Sarah Michaels, University of Colorado), page 3-1.

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. 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 or being absorbed into alternative public or private sector employment. Consequently, local government may not exist or government officials may have limited or no experience managing their villages and towns. Also, during the initial resettlement stages, the potential for further or new conflict is high. 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 officials for expanded leadership roles to practice participative and accountable governance. This includes skills in negotiation, communication, conflict resolution, transparent local financial management and facilitation of local economic development.

33. 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 processes, positively affecting economic recovery and development; it is a process of decision making to formulate national or local disaster-reduction plans and policies and it is a system of policy implementation that requires the existence of well-functioning organizations at the national and local levels to implement and enforce land-use planning, building codes, safety standards and disaster response mechanisms¹⁵. In the absence of good governance, communities become increasingly dangerous and unhealthy places to live and work, especially for the most vulnerable. Promotion of good governance therefore serves as a cornerstone of sustainable recovery and development in human settlements.

E. Addressing sustainable urbanization in post-crisis situations

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 from those appropriate to rural settings; 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 and, in post-conflict situations, may comprise groups from opposing sides.

35. Urbanization in post-conflict contexts is a phenomenon that must be prioritized within a sustainable recovery framework. Urban centers 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 are available rural areas. What is especially troubling is that many of the expected jobs and educational opportunities in urban areas are not realized; consequently, crime, ethnic tensions and rising poverty often 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 population density, but also due to other vulnerabilities that are unique to the urban context such as dependency on infrastructure and urban services, poor planning, bad and illegal construction practices and ecological exploitation of the environment. 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, mobilizers of communities and keepers of the peace. Women also represent, however, a

¹⁵ United Nations Development Programme/Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, World Vulnerability Report 2003, draft, chap. 3, p. 21.

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 categorize 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 unrecognized. As a result, 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 economies. In order to develop an integrated approach to sustainable rehabilitation of human settlements, however, 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, cooperation 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, including civil society, national and local governments, the private sector, media and national and international support agencies, is therefore a shared challenge and responsibility. In combination, this contributes to the development of a coherent framework for the sustainable recovery of human settlements in post-crisis situations.

H. 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. Municipal 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, introduction of proper land use planning and building regulations, protection of land and property rights, effective project management and improved governance, among other things, all within the framework of a longer-term reconstruction strategy. Throughout 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 the development of a self-sustaining process; local small businesses, including building contractors and other 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.

IV. 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 has a positive effect on the sustainable and equal development of human settlements in post-conflict and post-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, a shift in thinking about relief and development will be necessary at all levels. This conceptual change will have to be backed up with new operational approaches by international agencies, governments and communities. Sustainable relief in human settlements is a process. The guiding principles mentioned here offer a realistic, forward-looking approach to recovering from crisis. They can also be considered somewhat elastic, encompassing many different aspects of the process, and it should be understood that not every principle will be applicable to every recovery process. Giving serious consideration to these principles during planning and decision-making 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 joint recovery efforts.

43. The following guiding principles in sustainable relief in human settlements reflect UN-Habitat's experience in and approach to facilitating sustainable interventions during crises. The proposed principles are to be reviewed and discussed during the World Urban Forum:

- (a) Permanent links between emergency relief and the transitional phase of development must be established;
- (b) Facilitation of the safety and security of affected populations is a critical pre-condition of any humanitarian or developmental activities;
- (c) Broad-based and long-term reconstruction and shelter strategies should be developed at the earliest stages;
- (d) Land and property rights of affected populations must be protected and longer-term solutions for land and property dispute resolution must be developed;
- (e) Sustainable relief must be based on participatory planning and inclusive decision-making models, ensuring the involvement of all actors, including women in particular, in all planning and implementation activities;
- (f) Vulnerability reduction and disaster management must be incorporated into national and local development and poverty reduction plans;
- (g) The focus should be redirected on disaster risk reduction and mitigation rather than preparedness and response-related strategies in the human settlements context;
- (h) The capacities of local governments to operate as active partners in the process must be developed;
- (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) Productive economic activities should be developed at 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 in recognition of the equal rights of women;
- (l) Strategic partnerships and alliances must be created at all levels.

V. The way forward

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

45. Once commitment and consensus is developed, it is vital that these principles be 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 principles should further inform the development of those plans.

46. The guiding principles will also support the development of a planned declaration on sustainable relief in human settlements. It is anticipated that the declaration will eventually constitute a global standard of human settlements recovery and development practice 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 United Nations system in terms of its long-standing commitment to sustainable human settlements development, in the light of which it has a clear role in addressing and contributing to the provision of sustainable relief in the rehabilitation of housing, services and human settlements.

VI. Challenges for the Second World Urban Forum

47. Based on this background, the second session of the World Urban Forum represents an important arena for further elaboration of some of the key issues outlined here. Participants in the dialogues on sustainable relief at the session may therefore wish to elaborate and provide some guidance on some specific questions:

- (a) Do the proposed principles cover sufficiently the issues of sustainable relief in human settlements? A critical review and debate is necessary;
 - (b) How can the implementation of the guiding principles for sustainable relief become an operational reality?
 - (c) How can the guiding principles be incorporated into national and local policies and actions?
 - (d) What are the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in this process, and how can they be best assisted?
 - (e) How can the World Urban Forum contribute to the above process in an effective and sustainable manner?
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