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# Global Frameworks for Urban (Displacement) Response

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## Introduction

Some years back, before Beirut was hit by successive cataclysmic events, including the port explosion, the COVID-19 pandemic and an economic and political crisis that led the city and country into the abyss in which it currently finds itself, the 'only' crisis affecting the city was the Syrian refugee crisis. Those who know Lebanon of course know that this was far from the truth in a country with layered pre-existing challenges, yet the humanitarian coordination system was activated as a response to the Syrian refugee influx. At the time, despite the economic consequences of the war across the border, there were signs of optimism and prosperity in a city that had been grappling with the aftermath of the civil war for decades. The Ferrari shop, overlooking the Martyrs' Square, frequently sold cars with engines too big for Beirut's traffic jams; luxury brands like Channel, Dior and Prada all had flourishing shops; and the construction of high-end apartment towers overlooking the Mediterranean was non-stop, with apartments being bought by overseas buyers. In this largely privatized downtown area, people's use of 'public' space was increasingly regulated, while in the poorer neighbourhoods on the fringe of the city, areas were densifying inwards and informally extending upwards. Some of the inner-city neighbourhoods best known for their vibrant restaurants, nightlife and cultural scenes emerged during the same years. The nightlife caused a Saturday rush hour around midnight from the city centre towards Mar Mikhail – one of the most vi-

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brant neighbourhoods at the time. The inequality between the downtown neighbourhoods inhabited by an ultra-rich minority and the less well-off outer city grew.

The conflict in Syria led to the influx of more than a million Syrian refugees to Lebanon, the majority of whom found shelter in the largest cities, Beirut among them. While the government imposed strict regulations on Syrian refugees' access to work and a no-camp policy to 'avoid a repetition of the Palestinian experience' (Carnegie Middle East Center 2018), many economic sectors and the growing wealth in the country were highly reliant on the Syrian workforce. Meanwhile, vulnerable Syrian households settled where they could find affordable housing, often in neighbourhoods housing poor Lebanese, Palestinian and migrant households (UN-Habitat 2021a) such as the impoverished and informal or semi-informal neighbourhoods surrounding the city centre. Syrians were, like other residents, subject to a housing market with a significant and rising mismatch between supply of high-end apartments and demand for lower-end housing, with minimal or lacking access to basic services and tenure security as a result. Whatever wages the breadwinners of the families could collect from construction work or the service sector were rarely enough to meet the needs of their dependents.

The evolution of events since has removed any doubt: Beirut and Lebanon are in a state of crisis. In October 2021, 98 per cent of Syrians lived in poverty, while some 80 per cent of Lebanese had fallen under the poverty line. The downtown areas in Beirut remain highly affected by the massive explosion that hit the capital on 4 August 2020. Yet at the start of the Syrian refugee crisis, Beirut was somehow both in a crisis and not. While there were signs of a worsening of the situation looming on the horizon, Lebanon was still regarded as an upper-middle-income country by international institutions, limiting its eligibility to various forms of international aid. The influx of Syrians added stress to underlying historic, social and economic factors, with unequal effects across the city. Being defined as a refugee crisis in turn guided what could or could not be done as part of the response. So, while Lebanon was indeed regarded as a middle-income country, the situation was one of high fragility, with a response that was slow to adapt to the multifaceted challenges refugees, migrants and host populations faced. The situation illustrated, in many ways, the extremes of crises in cities of the twenty-first century, where inequalities, contrasts and contradictions manifest through interlinked (dysfunctional or ineffective) systems. This meant that the capacities to absorb shocks were asymmetric across Beirut, with implications for the national economy and governance.

This chapter examines the evolution of global approaches and tools designed for urban response. Beirut is part of the bleak statistics of crisis-affected cities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The experiences from the region and beyond will be used to discuss the application

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and appropriateness of such emerging approaches and tools, and their intersection with the humanitarian response system, national and decentralized governments, and formal and informal city systems.

## The Emergence of an Urban-Focused Crisis Response: An Urbanization of Humanitarian Crises

Over the last decade, conflicts, natural hazards, environmental disasters, climate change impacts and large-scale displacement have increasingly unfolded in cities. The Haiti earthquake in 2010 and the distinct urban nature of the ensuing crisis represented a critical juncture for humanitarian response (Earle 2020). The crisis, which hit the capital Port-au-Prince and particularly affected informal settlements, led to a mobilization of international funding not seen since the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami (Gill et al. 2020). Unlike in most previous large-scale responses, the humanitarian actors were now inserted into a highly urban context with pre-existing systems, actors, chronic poverty and inadequate housing and service provision. The situation challenged a humanitarian response system tailored to operating in camp and rural settings, structured according to sectors, where the initial phase of lifesaving assistance (such as supplies of material, food, health, water and sanitation, and shelter) was gradually replaced by more service-oriented support (e.g. livelihoods, basic services and housing). The Haiti crisis response made it evident that there was a need to revise this relief model.

In the same year as the Haiti earthquake, the Arab Spring erupted. Here too, cities were the centre stage of events. Many urban areas were directly impacted by conflict, including cities in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya. It was in Iraqi cities, for example, that the events propelling the country into years of conflict converged. This included the seizure of strategic cities by ISIS and the subsequent battles to regain control, with large-scale displacement from and to urban areas. In early 2011, the conflict in Syria broke out and continued to increase in intensity in the years that followed. This resulted in wide-ranging damage and destruction of Syrian towns and cities, as well as large-scale displacement towards and between cities.

In the highly urbanized MENA region, countries such as Lebanon and Jordan have more than 90 per cent of their population living in urban areas. For the 5.5 million registered Syrian refugees living in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, the share is 95 per cent (3RP 2021), while 84 per cent of the 6.9 million internally displaced Syrians live in cities (OCHA 2022b). This accentuates many challenges faced by humanitarian actors. Displacement remains one of the most daunting challenges in the region, and response efforts to this form of urban crisis and additional compounding shocks require urban-specific approaches.

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## The Humanitarian Response Architecture is Slow to Change

Lessons from humanitarian crises over the last decade led to a growing recognition at the global level that the humanitarian system required a revamp and a change of working modalities. This resulted among other things in the Global Compact for Refugees and the Grand Bargain on 'the New Ways of Working', a commitment first made by eight UN agencies and the World Bank, led by the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, to 'meet people's immediate humanitarian needs while at the same time reducing risks and vulnerabilities' (World Humanitarian Summit 2016). The Global Compact and the Grand Bargain acknowledged both that prominent challenges (and opportunities) in humanitarian response are now in cities and that local authorities have a central role to play in response. The shift was also prompted by unprecedented pressure on the humanitarian system globally and demand for a cost-efficient response that would bring about relief with impact that corresponded to the scale of needs on the ground.

However, urban emergencies are yet to be raised to the forefront of humanitarian coordination. While the humanitarian response system has undergone reforms and changes, in practical terms not much has changed since it was first conceived in Africa in the 1960s. Urban response remains fragmented, and the current clusters system is in essence based on a non-urban way of thinking. The experience from Haiti underscores how slow this change is: despite the response largely being considered inefficient, with few lasting outputs and a long list of identified failures, organizations that were part of the Haiti response ten years prior reported that they would respond in similar ways had the crisis happened today. Illustrating this, many of the issues identified following the Haiti response seem to recur in new urban emergencies.

### *Adopting a Cluster Approach to Urban Settings*

The 'cluster approach' structures the coordination of humanitarian response under several clusters (e.g. Shelter, Livelihoods or Health), with a clear delineation of agencies' responsibilities according to their respective mandates and associated sectors. While its foundation was set in the UN General Assembly resolution 46/182 in 1991, the Humanitarian Reform Agenda of 2005 introduced the cluster approach as a means to enhance 'predictability, accountability and partnership' in humanitarian response (OCHA 2021). Shaped by the 'traditional' humanitarian response settings, the cluster system is designed to respond to camp or rural settings. Simplified, this system is structured to ensure provision of services under the respective clusters in the *absence* of systems, while the increasing frequency of response in urban

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or out-of-camp settings means responding to the needs of displaced and crisis-affected urban residents in localities *where systems exist.*

The challenge of adapting cluster approaches to respond in cities is twofold. Firstly, the cluster system is rigged for short-term interventions, while urban crises are protracted and require longer-term support and planning. That means that even (in theory) short-term interventions should support medium- and longer-term efforts. Instead, humanitarian response has largely maintained repetitive, short-lived relief that benefits a targeted number of beneficiaries, without linking this to systems that can support people over time. An illustrative example here is water trucking repeated over months or even years in lieu of repairs or extension of water networks. Several factors, including red lines among donors in conflict settings and political preference for return rather than integration, are contributing to this. Secondly, cluster interventions usually do not account for the market dynamics in cities. Emerging models, such as minor repairs to housing units against rent freezes or reductions and tenure contracts, may be less suitable in large cities. In market economies, reduced rent in exchange for investment in upgrades is only feasible if the landlord receives more in support (investment in upgrades) than they are required to reduce the rent. This can quickly become expensive in a demand-driven, low-cost housing market. Real estate speculators usually do not have a problem securing new tenants in such markets. This means that minor fixing of windows, doors, bathrooms and so on that does not lead to noticeable improvements in overall standards might not be attractive as an alternative to maintained income from rents. It should be noted that one of the successful examples of the humanitarian community adapting to the changing realities of their response environments has been the testing and roll-out of unconditional cash support. This is allowing displaced and other vulnerable populations to prioritize how to spend their funds, across the various priorities set by various humanitarian sectors such as shelter, education and food, while also contributing to local markets.

Efforts have been made to support knowledge exchange and guidance within clusters on how best to respond in urban contexts. Examples include the 'Urban Displacement & Outside of Camp' desk review conducted by the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) cluster, which also initiated an Area-Based Working Group under their global cluster. Further, the global Shelter Cluster established a Settlements Approaches in Urban Areas Working Group, which produced a Settlements Approach Guidance Note. While these initiatives have demonstrated an initial concerted engagement by humanitarian agencies to try to understand what responding in cities means, the core element of such engagements – cities – somehow became secondary in these guiding documents.

In places where there is an ambiguity in the type of crisis situation (e.g. refugee or humanitarian emergency or environmental disaster) and the cri-

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sis does not 'fit' into the structure and leadership of the global humanitarian system, an agreement must be reached between the inter-cluster coordinator and the UNCHR refugee coordinator on whether the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) cluster or the UNHCR cluster system should be utilized (OCHA and HCR 2014). In Lebanon, the overlap of different types of response led to a decision at the highest levels of the UN on who should lead the response. While in the end it was agreed that the UNHCR should lead, the discussion has impacted the response to this day, and only intensified as the situation in the country rapidly deteriorated.

## Evolution of Global Urban Crisis Approaches

### *Area-Based Approaches*

To address the urbanization of humanitarian crises, international organizations (among others within the Global Alliance for Urban Crises and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's cluster system) started to develop unified tools and approaches and sought to establish mechanisms that would enhance adequate, timely and at-scale responses in cities. Several of these global approaches and tools were tested, or partially initiated, in the response to the crises in the MENA region.

A commonality among these urban-specific approaches is that they are geographically targeted, multisectoral, participatory (Parker and Maynard 2015) and multistakeholder (Urban Settlements Working Group 2019). Examples include settlement approaches, place-based approaches and neighbourhood approaches (Sanderson 2019). Using the umbrella term 'area-based approaches', such approaches have been adopted by a growing number of actors. Their application has largely focused on the neighbourhood level, but they are also used to describe a city-based entry to response, for instance with the emergence of 'urban recovery frameworks' and the adoption of camp management tools to urban settings. While these approaches to an extent have supported humanitarian actors in tailoring their programmes and coordination to urban settings, the uptake and institutionalization of area-based approaches within the global response system remain modest.

### *Urban Profiling*

A starting point for many area-based approaches is profiling. The lack of reliable, up-to-date, granular and comparable data continues to be a critical barrier to designing and tailoring urban response. Without even basic information, such as reliable population data, planning and coordination

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is difficult. Urban profiling seeks to fill such knowledge gaps and inform programming. The development of city and neighbourhood profiles as multisectoral and spatial assessment tools has been one notable contribution. Such profiles span both rapid and in-depth analysis (e.g. damage assessments and urban functionality studies). Compared to traditional humanitarian needs assessments, profiling tools are generally more time-consuming. This entails trade-offs in terms of reliability, comparability and how fast data can be produced to inform time-sensitive humanitarian responses.

UN-Habitat has been at the forefront of developing urban analysis products, in particular in the MENA region, including in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Libya and Somalia (UN-Habitat 2021b). This has contributed to contextually adapted profiling tools and a substantial quantity of urban analysis. In Lebanon for example, UN-Habitat started developing tools for city and neighbourhood profiling in 2014 to respond more effectively to the refugee crisis. The profiling was intended as contextual urban analysis, building on existing methodologies, to map neighbourhoods and inform intervention strategies between different partners including local authorities, service providers and responding organizations (Bergby 2019). The first city and neighbourhood profiles were launched in 2015 at the tail end of extensive advocacy to convince the humanitarian system that the Syrian refugee crisis was indeed an urban crisis. A key message was that humanitarian needs analysis was done in a manner that to a degree masked the urban reality of the crisis. Early shelter reports showed that most Syrian refugees had found shelter in apartments, non-residential buildings and unfinished structures. Yet, in the first years of the response, the focus remained limited to needs in rural 'informal tented settlements' and shelter repairs outside of the main urban areas. This was arguably in part due to donor policies – the expectation of direct beneficiary support, with what that meant in terms of visibility and showcasing of donors, agencies' branding on tents and so on, rather than promoting systems' or services' enhancement. UN-Habitat's urban profile initiative was therefore an important contribution to nuancing the picture and making evident the impact of the displacement crisis on Lebanese cities. The neighbourhood profiling was eventually set up as a joint project between UN-Habitat and UNICEF.

With the development of urban profiling tools and as the awareness on urban needs grew in Lebanon, the focus on area-based and neighbourhood-based response tools also grew. However, agencies continued to carry out their own assessments to identify needs that responded to their mandates, focus and available funding, and that had potential to support their fundraising strategies. This led to situations where agencies assessed the same neighbourhoods and came up with separate 'area-based plans'. As such, despite the recognition of area-based data collection (and response), implementation of such data collection contradicted the overall ambitions of

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area-based approaches, in which activities are streamlined across actors and used to promote multistakeholder engagement under a shared plan.

Moreover, profiling has usually been concentrated in highly disadvantaged areas of cities. While this is essential to identify needs and crisis impacts among groups of concern, including access to services, housing, local businesses, livelihoods and more, this does not provide a holistic understanding of interlinkages and variations across the city. Identification of potential strategic entry points for city-level interventions, such as enhancing primary infrastructure networks and service delivery, are thus likely missed. Beyond foregoing strategic and cost-efficient efforts on a city level, this also limits the overall understanding of intra- and inter-city variations in needs. The skewed conception and narrative of the city that emerges from only mapping selected (vulnerable) areas may contribute to a politicization of funding and further underpin segregation between different areas or target groups in the city, with potential ramifications for social cohesion and stabilization.

Following the 2020 port explosion in Beirut, extensive efforts were made by humanitarian actors, local authorities and the army to coordinate damage assessments and to elaborate a system for clear spatial delineation of areas to be assessed by partners. This system mainly pertained to initial damage and needs assessments focused on a few sectors, where more detailed assessments and profiling followed the initiatives and respective funding of some agencies. For example, Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), in partnership with the American University of Beirut's (AUB) Urban Lab, conducted joint profiling exercises for affected neighbourhoods, while UNDP conducted a study and undertook a strategy development for the Karantina area (a severely affected area with a large Syrian population next to the port). The focus on certain heavily damaged neighbourhoods further detracted attention from the overall crisis impact on other poor neighbourhoods and the city at large. Particularly, certain neighbourhoods surrounding the inner city with a large share of vulnerable households, including many refugees, were suffering from the economic impact of successive crises and the loss of jobs in the city centre, yet were not considered in many of the assessments, including profiling (UN-Habitat 2021a).

## *Integrating Area-Based Approaches in Urban Crisis Response*

A key barrier to the advancement of holistic and area-based approaches in crisis response is the slow mobilization of agencies around approaches as shared across sectors and actors. In Lebanon, the increased attention to urban-specific challenges led to the formation of a neighbourhood task force under the Shelter Working Group to discuss what area-based approaches would mean at the sub-city levels. This led to a formulation of guidelines

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with minimum standards for certain sectors.[1] While the neighbourhood scale was included in the first Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) 2015–16 (United Nations and Government of Lebanon 2014) and guidelines were incorporated in the Shelter WG's plans and adopted, in some form, by a handful of agencies and sectors, the guidelines were never fully endorsed as an inter-sector approach. Being developed and pushed through the shelter sector, area-based response was considered by some to be mandate-specific (i.e. UN-Habitat-owned) or mostly relevant for the built environment and shelter sectors. This made it difficult to secure support from the UN Country Team (UNCT) and Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) for any holistic plans to address the compounded crisis impact on cities.

The importance of multisector and multistakeholder approaches in urban response is typically not reflected in country response plans. Most response plans do not distinguish between urban and rural areas in the situational analysis and for the sake of funding requirements, even in highly urbanized contexts and despite most refugees settling in cities. In the MENA region, the Regional Response Plan has been set up as a strategic platform for humanitarian and development partners responding to the Syria crises, covering Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Despite urban areas serving as the backdrop for the issues discussed in the plan, the implications of the urban dimension for the regional efforts are not specifically mentioned in the Regional Needs Overview (3RP 2021).

In Lebanon, several plans have been developed in recent years to guide crises responses.[2] With the 2020 blast response in Beirut, the UN, European Union and World Bank initiated the Reform, Recovery, and Reconstruction Framework (3RF) for coordination. The 3RF involved many of the same actors who are part of the Syrian refugee response, though with separate working groups. Renewed efforts were also made to elaborate an updated version of the neighbourhood approach. However, in most part the efforts led to a reinvention of the same ways of working. Within the already overcrowded and competitive relief environment, actors were admitting to being 'frameworked out'. This made integration of urban approaches within existing humanitarian and governmental plans difficult. With the Syrian refugee response already active for eleven years and with over two years since the 2020 blast, alignment of coordination systems and identification of unified objectives and actions were still slow. As a result, few actors coordinated through comprehensive (spatial) plans even when responding in the same area. Further, local authorities were not involved or capacitated to lead in the efforts, while many of the active organizations are yet to be part of any of the response plans or coordination systems of either the government or the international system.

Evaluations suggest the value of area-based approaches. While the LCRP has a sectoral set-up, more than half of the best practices identified in the

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review of its five years of implementation were based on multisectoral approaches (Julian Murray Consulting and Annabella Skof Consulting 2021). This underscores the importance of continuing to integrate cross-sectoral analysis, strategies and planning in all response plans.

### *Urban Recovery Framework*

In recent years, UN-Habitat and other organizations have spearheaded efforts to develop a comprehensive area-based approach to urban response called the 'Urban Recovery Framework' (URF). The URF seeks to respond to natural and man-made disasters in cities, addressing both systemic and governance issues and affected population needs. Applied in conflict or crisis settings, the URF is described as 'an enabling institutional and policy framework and related programming to support resilient urban recovery at scale, and the renewal of the social contract' (UN-Habitat 2022). The URF is designed to work as a scalar approach linking neighbourhood and city-level interventions with national-level policies and considers strategic interventions across 'absorptive, adaptive, and transformative phases' (ibid.). It further places emphasis on community perspectives and participatory processes that put local authorities and communities at the forefront of urban recovery efforts. The approach is intended as a practical guide to bridge humanitarian and development interventions and to reduce siloed workstreams by advancing the 'New Ways of Working'. The URF embeds urban profiling and analysis as a starting point, followed by inclusive and participatory recovery planning, implementation and monitoring.

The URF is still in the early stages. It is currently being tested in Syria, and key elements are being implemented in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and other countries. The methodology has not yet been institutionalized with humanitarian response plans, UN Strategic Frameworks or UN Development Assistance Frameworks, and remains an initiative promoted by some select agencies. Currently, the advancement of the URF is reliant on project funding through agencies and there is limited funding readily available to initiate new URFs in response to emerging crises. This limits the extent to which frameworks such as the URF can function as a coherent urban recovery approach between 'all' responding agencies in an urban crisis setting.

## The Global Alliance for Urban Crises

The launch of the Global Alliance for Urban Crises ('the Alliance') during the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 was a key initiative for progressing urban response modalities. Acknowledging that urban contexts require multisector and multiscalar responses anchored across global to local levels,

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the Alliance was established as a community of practice, bringing together humanitarian agencies, local governments, donors, built-environment professionals and academics, counting close to hundred member organizations. The objective of the Alliance is to promote tailored urban response approaches and coherence among responders and better alignment between humanitarian and development capacities and funding, and to leverage non-traditional partners including the private sector. Since its inception, the Alliance has furthered the discourse on urban crisis response approaches, including through the development of several knowledge products,[3] and has been important in bringing together a broad set of stakeholders at the global level. A challenge for the Alliance is that it does not have a permanent secretariat and dedicated funding and therefore has been unable to ensure regular and frequent activities or to operationalize agreed principles and methodologies at the country and local levels.[4]

## The Role of Local Authorities

Local authorities have, as primary duty bearers, a key role to play in responding to the needs of residents and displaced populations in crisis situations, and in strengthening systems and resilience over time. Despite the increased financial burden on local authorities and the added pressure of influxes of displaced (who are usually not accounted for in municipal budget allocations), aid has not been traditionally channelled through local authorities. Red lines and concerns over collaboration with local (and national) authorities on the part of international actors may contribute to this. Nevertheless, with the evolution of urban crisis response and the focus on localization, international assistance has increasingly been connected with local authorities to promote cost-efficiency and support longer-term commitments and alignment with development agendas (Paragas et al. 2016).

Local authorities, for their part, have become more present and articulate in global discourse on how the international community and donors can support them. Several city networks have emerged that connect cities and municipalities and their elected officials and technocrats for exchanges of experiences and approaches. Interestingly, while humanitarian and 'urban' agencies often underline the 'uniqueness' of a given context, local authorities have emphasized the importance of exchange between cities facing similar challenges (MMC 2021). City networks include the Mayors Migration Council (MMC), the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40), 100 Resilient Cities/Rockefeller Cities, Mediterranean City-to-City Migration (MC2MC) and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). UCLG in particular has become important, representing more than 240,000 towns, cities, regions and metropolises, as well as 175 local and regional govern-

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ment associations (UCLG CGLU 2021) across the world. Perhaps to an even larger extent than humanitarian actors, these networks have a role in unlocking funds to enable local authorities to innovate and pilot, such as the MMC's Global Cities Fund (MMC 2021).

As response actors increasingly turn to local authorities to partner on urban response modalities, collaboration often happens with the same selected municipalities. Municipalities that are part of international networks appear to be relatively resourceful or to have a concrete entry point. Across networks, there are thus some 'usual suspects' in a position to attract more attention and thereby support, while not necessarily representing the most vulnerable populations or the municipalities most in need of such support. Such select engagement is also observed in cities made up of several municipal entities. In Lebanon for example, there are over 1,100 municipalities (UN-Habitat 2021a) in a country of 10,452 km$^2$ (CAS n.d.). Beirut alone encompasses thirty-one municipalities (UN-Habitat 2021a).[5] While services such as solid waste management are indeed managed by the municipalities, the size of the municipalities allows neither for sound waste management plans nor efficient resource spending. Also, most small Lebanese municipalities do not have any full-time staff. In the response to the Syrian refugee crisis, international organizations supported municipalities with various equipment and vehicles to support service delivery and mitigate social tensions. Oftentimes, municipalities were approached one by one, without a shared plan with all response actors' input. Usually, the equipment was not incorporated into fleet management plans, resource plans and so on, and no one sought to optimize by sharing equipment across several municipalities. At a regional level this meant that municipalities were over-equipped in some domains (e.g. garbage trucks), yet still under-resourced to operate these in an efficient manner (Bergby 2019). This system could be beneficial for municipalities who could put forward their priorities to several actors in parallel. Recognizing these issues, actors such as UN-Habitat shifted some support to Unions of Municipalities (UoMs). This only partially resolved the service delivery on a systems level, however, as UoMs do not necessarily cover a whole city and usually focus only on certain interventions; at the same time, supporting UoMs also contributed to the 'favouritism' of certain municipalities.

## Influx of Humanitarians and Do-Gooders

A common denominator in urban crisis settings has been the proliferation of response actors. Unlike in camp situations, regulating or controlling the high number of actors and their activities in urban crisis settings is challenging. When a crisis hits, a significant increase in the number of active actors is

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usually observed, including many new actors and their employees who may not have worked in the specific context before. Experience demonstrates that the time required for new actors to establish themselves, including setting up systems, networks and programmes, is costly and that such actors are ineffective and more likely to have unintended negative consequences.

In the absence of a systemic application of tailored urban response approaches, agencies operating in cities mainly initiate collaboration for projects with a limited number of stakeholders, independently of overall coordination structures. Collaboration therefore means greater reliance on a history of partnering, trust-building and a conducive institutional environment. Based on personal experience, collaborations often come about due to personal relationships rather than resulting from formal agreements on a global level or mechanisms for implementation at an operational level. Protocols for engagement in urban crises and general guidance are often not specific enough or sufficient to regulate or 'design' partnerships. Key decisions and insight are only available to those on the 'inside' and must usually be acquired over time. Building partnerships and securing institutional memory thus requires on-the-ground presence over time. With the influx of actors, short-term assignments for international experts, and local expertise and knowledge threatened by brain drain, poor coordination and collaboration are major barriers for effective urban crisis responses.

Among the central issues that emerged in the Haiti response was exactly the lack of coordination among the multitude of actors. This added to other issues such as the failure to involve local authorities, the uneven distribution of investment and the fact that multisector, participatory planning on a neighbourhood level using available (albeit large) funding was not enough to secure sustainable impact (Gill et al. 2020). While some issues were specific to the crisis, others were not new, but rather heightened. Already prior to the earthquake, Haiti was called the 'republic of NGOs', with more than ten thousand NGOs operating in the country and the second highest NGO per capita density in the world (Edmonds 2013). After the earthquake, it is believed that this figure rose dramatically, but with little reliable tracking to confirm the number of organizations. However, as a pointer, six hundred actors were enlisted in the Health Cluster alone within a month of the earthquake (Binder 2013). Concerns over corruption and a lack of trust in national authorities were reasons for channelling aid through NGOs rather than through government entities. This contributed to a competitive market for NGOs that constrained the ability to unify efforts under common objectives, and importantly led to limited investment in local service provision and a severe dependency on NGOs for services. With the close to USD 14 billion disbursed in aid since the 2010 earthquake (MGAE 2022), one could argue that there has been ample opportunity to support enhancement of infrastructure and services, yet the deficient response to the 2021 earth-

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quake suggested otherwise. Similar patterns, with response actors working independently from the government and coordination systems, have been reported in other urban crises, such as in Tacloban, the Philippines, after Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 (Paragas et al. 2016; Archer 2017).

In the first years of the Syrian refugee crises in Lebanon, internationally coordinated relief efforts were scaled up to around one hundred agencies and approximately two thousand employees (Little 2016). Adding to this were countless smaller and larger national or local NGOs, faith-based organizations and community groups. The response was, as mentioned above, initially coordinated by the UNHCR alone, while UNDP and the government eventually became co-leads to ensure both governmental anchoring and due consideration to stabilization efforts. The 4 August 2020 blast brought a new inflow of aid actors, from local to international, privately initiated to donor funded. Despite the number of actors in the response and the funding coming from traditional and non-traditional funders, the response was slow. However, the role taken by civil society in Beirut and Lebanon in the aftermath of the explosion shows the enormous potential of local stakeholders as leading actors in urban response. It confirms that they – together with local authorities – are often the first to respond. The rapid mobilization of civil society meant that international support and diaspora remittances could be channelled directly to these efforts early on, unlocking capacities for immediate response at scale. Yet in the first months of the blast response these efforts were largely independent and without coordination. For civil society actors, the international response was mostly unreachable, with a sense that local capacities were being overlooked or efforts duplicated.

Given security constraints and lack of access, the urban response in conflict contexts usually does not involve the same inflow of external actors. Nevertheless, various national and local actors outside of the coordination structures and diverse funding sources (e.g. through diaspora) may contribute to a situation where a large share of response activities still take place outside of both government and internationally led aid coordination and recovery planning. In the first weeks of the Ukraine conflict, for instance, inflow of private aid through self-organized networks was delivered to the border crossings or to local partners in the neighbouring countries. One consequence of not having a clear organization of aid delivery was that it did not always address the most urgent needs. One example of this was supplies of clothes and equipment that arrived only to pile up on the roadside.

## The Funding Predicament

In an environment of global funding deficits and increasingly protracted crises, response efforts are premised on making difficult choices and priorities.

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Immense needs and limited funds require urban response to deliver with value for money, considering sectoral and institutional costs of operations and opportunities of scale, to secure the highest possible impact. The size of appeals for the refugee component for Syria-crisis-affected countries in the region is USD 5.83 billion, with 28.6 per cent funded (OCHA 2022a). The funding shortfalls are particularly pronounced in urban areas that receive the largest share of refugees. While the needs cannot realistically be addressed through funding alone, multi-year, flexible funding may go some way in providing cost-effective relief. Less 'clear-cut' crisis situations, such as countries with middle-income status, pose particular challenges for funding. Accounting for more than half of the humanitarian funds appeals in 2015, middle-income countries have considerably higher cost metrics relative to other crisis contexts, yet applied response and funding models are the same across countries (Scott 2015). In the main Syrian refugee host countries, which classify as middle-income, most of the funding comes from humanitarian, not development, funds. This limits opportunities to address systemic failures or support resilience.

In Beirut, the downward spiral of events after the blast has severely impacted the national economy and has been a driver of subsequent large-scale emigration of Lebanese residents. With the national-level impact of the crisis, any sustainable improvement of the situation is dependent on economic recovery at scale. It can be argued that beyond addressing immediate needs, the current focus on household-level and small- and medium-sized business will have little impact on the overall crisis situation or potential for recovery (UN-Habitat 2021a). Sustainable response results are premised on supporting economic activities and basic and social services enhancement at the systems level and on mitigation of further risk exposure contingent on, among other things, environmental management and clean energy transition. So far, flexible funding allowing for such transitional planning has not been unlocked.

## Conclusion

Fall 2021 in Beirut. On Saturday evening, Gemmayze Street, famous for its nightlife, was left completely dark during one of the now frequent power cuts. The distant lights from a single car slowly approaching served as a disheartening reminder of the now long-gone excitement of people in the queue of cars on their way to a night out. Lebanon experienced yet another crisis – an energy and fuel crisis, the last of a series of recent events with detrimental effects – as the Lebanese pound plummeted. For many shops, workshops, restaurants and bars, the energy crisis was the final blow in their struggle to stay afloat in the wake of the explosion, the downturn

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in the economy and loss of customers. In a country that relied on private diesel generators to supplement unreliable power supply and alleviate daily power cuts, the fuel shortage meant that even for those who had access to funds, operating businesses was difficult. An exodus of educated and more well-off Lebanese, coupled with the many residents who had fallen under the poverty line, meant that the middle class had practically vanished from Lebanon. Gone also were those who would invest in new ventures. In the neighbourhood bars in Beirut, young Lebanese have shifted the conversation from their entrepreneurial ideas and ambitions for the future to a conversation about when and how the 'move' away from Lebanon will take place. For many this will mean leaving Lebanon for good.

Crisis situations change over time. And as the saying goes, misfortunes rarely come alone. In many cases, crises are made up of compounding shocks. The global trend is towards increasingly urban, protracted and complex crisis situations. While the world is watching the war unfold in Ukrainian cities, Beirut and Lebanon serve as disconcerting examples of what protracted urban crises may entail, and the progression, application and appropriateness of emerging urban-specific approaches and tools to address urban crises. In Beirut, new shocks added to or reinforced the effects of previous shocks, with ripple effects across the country. Over time, response actors have worked hard, with renewed determination following each shock, to ensure better adapted ways of addressing the crisis. The Beirut blast response thus took place within a country and city where area-based tools had already been piloted, trialled and tested over years, and where holistic and area-based responses had been discussed among partners at a strategic, high level. Yet the revamped guidance for a neighbourhood approach suffered from low institutional memory and a common tendency towards reinventing the wheel. The recent application of urban response approaches has remained geographically targeted at the sub-city level, based on agencies' funding and mandates. Rather than addressing pre-existing vulnerabilities from the refugee crisis across the city and beyond in the blast response, responders mainly focused on the most physically affected areas. The response has only to a lesser degree been cross-sectoral, participatory and – importantly – multistakeholder.

The application of urban-specific approaches has, as described in this chapter, only been partially realized and the process has been slow and filled with hurdles. Lessons to date suggest that the advancement of area-based approaches with improved data and analysis tools is only a first step towards agreeing on a shared vision and process for interventions among actors. Without an institutionalized, urban-adapted response architecture, global frameworks for urban response fall short of providing clarity and guidance at a systemic level. A hard-to-change humanitarian response system, originally conceived to work in rural and camp settings characterized by an absence of

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systems, is a primary challenge. Factors such as funding shortfall, inequitable support of local authorities, a vast number of existing and new response actors with widely different and sometimes competing mandates, incentives and financing, and actors being 'frameworked out' are also contributing. To support better urban response, urban emergencies must be raised to the forefront of humanitarian coordination, and urban-specific analysis and programming must be integrated into response plans and funding appeals. Formulating guidance for such efforts requires allocation of time and resources across agencies. Promising initiatives include the Urban Recovery Framework and the Global Alliance for Urban Crises, but work remains to anchor these within the established response architecture and the donor community. Without taking into consideration lessons learned to date – both what works and what does not work – there is no guarantee of arriving at a better result.

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## Notes

1. Bergby was co-lead of the Shelter WG in Lebanon at the time and coordinated this work.
2. The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) was developed in 2016 with a new iteration released in 2021 (GoL and United Nations 2021) to guide the response; the United Nations Strategic Framework in 2017 to guide the United Nation's work (United Nations 2017); and the 3RF in 2020 following the Beirut explosion (World Bank et al. 2020).
3. These include 'Urban Profiling for Better Responses to Humanitarian Crises' (Global Alliance for Urban Crises 2019d), 'Urban Displacement from Different Perspectives' (Global Alliance for Urban Crises 2019c), the 'Protocol of Engagement between Local Governments and Humanitarian Actors' (Global Alliance for Urban Crises 2019a) and the 'Urban Competency Framework for Humanitarian Action' (Global Alliance for Urban Crises 2019b).
4. A systemic review was carried out by the authors on behalf of the Alliance in 2019, with interviews conducted among response actors in Uganda, Somalia, Tu-

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nisia, Libya and Lebanon, as well as HQ global-level interviews, which showed that many interviewees, including individuals working for Alliance member organizations that are actively engaged at the global level, were not aware of the Alliance or the knowledge products it produced to support member organizations at an operational level.

5. This definition is based on the continuously built-up area of Beirut, which functions as a city.

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