

**MEMORANDUM**

**IASC REFERENCE GROUP FOR MEETING HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES IN URBAN AREAS**

21 MAY 2014 – MEETING MINUTES

**PARTICIPATING AGENCIES:**

UN-Habitat Geneva   
IFRC - Geneva  
GFSC/WFP - Rome   
Shelter Center-Geneva   
SR for IDPs/OHCHR – Geneva   
Concern International - Dublin   
Concern Kenya - Nairobi   
Groupe URD – France   
British Red Cross - UK

**MEETING MINUTES:**

I. **Indicator Development for the Surveillance of Urban Emergencies – IDSUE Project (Concern Kenya)**

This activity supports implementation of IASC Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas (MHCUA) Strategy objectives: (a) Developing or adapting humanitarian approaches and tools for urban areas in emergency; (b) Developing urban vulnerability indicators for chronic emergency contexts

**Discussion Summary:** Concern-Kenya’s Wendy Erasmus and Jay Chaudhuri presented the findings from this three-year, USAID-funded project which calls for a new paradigm for responses to urban emergencies with respect to surveillance, early warning, thresholds and action triggers/tipping points.

Some of the key findings based on analyses of communities in Kenya include: averages mask reality; the most vulnerable households are most likely to inform us about slow-onset urban emergencies; women are disproportionately poor; things are getting worse; and negative coping strategies are significantly compromising long-term well-being for short-term survival needs.

Critical next steps in the way forward include: developing an operational surveillance system; defining thresholds and triggers; building consensus among stakeholders; finding a local and/or national government home; advocacy on the issues nationally and internationally; and transference and replication in other contexts.

There was a rich discussion around coping mechanisms particularly the importance of documenting through this impressive field-based initiative the positive coping mechanisms of the urban poor in chronic emergency contexts to help inform the work on urban resilience and vulnerability measures. Participants also emphasized the importance of institutionalizing this approach with Kenyan partners including the Kenyan Red Cross in addition to Kenyan governmental partners. There was also a robust discussion around how this project can continue to contribute impress field findings for the better definition of tipping points to urban emergency, cross-sectoral urban vulnerability indicators and extrapolation of the methodology to other cities and communities including the Horn of Africa (Mogadishu/Addis), other African countries, Asia and Caribbean.

**Action Point:** Concern-Kenya will give the RG an update on the IDSUE Project at its next critical juncture of implementation.

**II. Global Food Security and Livelihoods in Urban Settings Working Group (WFP/Global Shelter Cluster)**

This FGSC Urban Working Group’s work plan supports implementation of the IASC MHCUA Strategy’s objective to ‘restore livelihoods and economic opportunities as a priority starting in the emergency phase for expedited recovery’**.**

**Discussion Summary**: Ms. Marina Angeloni of the FGSC Urban Working Group presented lessons learned from a recent field assessment of the urban response to Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines. The assessments’s aim was to capture experiences, input and suggestions on food security responses to emergencies affecting urban populations and to inform the priorities and the work plan development of the Group for tool and guidance development.

Some of the main findings of gaps and needs include: (a) difficulty in identifying /defining urban livelihoods especially as distinct from agricultural activities; (b) assessment tools were inadequate for urban contexts; (c) targeting of beneficiaries was among the biggest challenges; (d) liaising with the Government on wage norms for cash programs was inadequate; (e) there was poor communication and inadequate coordination for program development and implementation between the country food security, early recovery and shelter clusters on urban livelihood and cash activities; vulnerability targeting and livelihood analyses were done in non-coherent manner by agencies; and more consultation with local stakeholders in local government and NGOs would have improved activities design and impact on affected populations.

In terms of next steps, the GFSC Urban Working Group prepared a joint proposal with partners ‘Adapting to an Urban World’ with Phase I funding from WFP to: (a) undertake a desk review of achievements and gaps in this area of work and (b) develop an urban assessment tool for food security and livelihoods in urban emergencies with pilot testing in at least one country. The GFSC Urban WG has also mapped urban activities in cooperation with country FSC Urban WGs in Somalia, South Sudan, OPT and Yemen among others.

For more information on the GFSC Urban WG, visit its website at: <http://foodsecuritycluster.net/working-group/food-security-and-livelihoods-urban-settings-working-group> or contact Marina Angeloni at: marina.angeloni@wfp.org

**Action Point:** GFSC Angeloni will share the full analysis and assessment from Philippines with the RG.

**III. Urban Emergency Shelter Projects Evaluations (Groupe URD-France)**

The major findings of these recent set of evaluations of urban shelter responses confirmed many of the findings and recommendations of the IASC MHCUA Strategy and the need for partners to better adapt to growing urban challenges in order to undertake effective responses that impact affected urban populations, especially the poor. Similar issues and conclusions emerged from the discussion of urbanization as one of the emerging global humanitarian challenges at this year’s Worldwide Humanitarian Coordinators’ Retreat during 12 – 13 May 2014 in which some RG members participated.

**Discussion Summary:** Groupe URD’s François Grunewald presented the major findings and conclusions from recent emergency shelter evaluations, including on behalf of ECHO. Among the conclusions presented at this meeting to improve humanitarian responses and impact in urban emergencies included:

(a) The complexity of urban contexts needs to be recognized and better understood for higher impact design and delivery of humanitarian responses. It is impossible to generalize for urban areas as a whole including in some cases for a city as a whole because of the diversity of populations and communities in cities. Urban tools are currently inadequate and new urban tools are needed. A key recommendation is the need to field urban advisors to the HC/HCTs to analyse urban contexts and engage urban stakeholders for higher impact responses.

(b) Crises in cities often have cascading impacts in unforeseen ways because of the density of urban areas and the sheer numbers of populations affected. Urban violence is often exacerbated by emergencies putting yet more people at risk.

(c) Cities, even in crises, present opportunities for humanitarians because of the concentration of human resources and institutions which can be part of the delivery of the humanitarian response and mitigate the establishment of parallel systems which are rarely sustainable post-emergency. Partnerships with local authorities/communities is essential to tap into this resource as early in the response as possible.

(d) Cities require new technical tools and solutions. The standard toolbox of the humanitarian community developed from camp and rural settings is inadequate for effective urban humanitarian responses. Urban responses require new technical solutions. New technical skills, which are not currently on most agencies’ staff rosters, are required in the urban response design and implementation especially in the areas of urban planning, urban water/sanitation, land management and security of tenure issues and urban stakeholder engagement.

(e) Inter-cluster/sectoral coordination is critical for successful urban responses. The stove-piped, sectoral approach is inadequate. An area-based approach to design and implementation of the response is required. Urban stakeholder engagement is indispensable.

(f) Cities are political entities. Humanitarians need to be cognizant of the political dynamics between local and national governments to better appreciate how much support might be forthcoming in a local humanitarian response from a national government.

(g) Cities in war magnify all the humanitarian needs of affected populations and complicate responses in terms of security and access issues, as is currently being experienced in the Syrian, CAR and South Sudan crises.

(h) Displacement between and into urban areas complicates beneficiary targeting because populations of concern do not always want to be identified for various reasons.

(i) Engagement of communities in urban areas requires understanding the genesis/reason for the settlement’s creation and the characteristics of its population. Profiles of rural populations cannot be taken for granted as reflective of urban communities in the same country or region.

**Action Point**: Groupe-URD to make available evaluation reports to RG.

IV. **AOB**

1. **‘Durable Solutions for IDPs in Urban Settings’**: Ms. Harriet Hirst of OHCHR reviewed the concept for this major report to the United Nations General Assembly to be developed by the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons. The SR requests input from IASC RG member agencies to this report and is looking for practical, concrete suggestions how to improve performance on the durable solutions of IDPs agenda. Agencies are highly encouraged to contribute to the report as the SR, as an IASC Principal, can be a strong advocate for the urban humanitarian agenda. Im re-sending the concept paper herewith for your reference.

**Action Point:** Agencies are invited to contact Harriet Hirst directly to set-up a bilateral meeting at Spbgasconsultant2@ohchr.org

**2. Seventh World Urban Forum:** An urban humanitarian networking event took place at the Seventh World Urban Forum, 5-10 April 2014 in Medellin, Colombia that brought together OCHA, IFRC, DFID, UNDP, USAID/OFDA and chaired by RG Deikun (UN-Habitat) to work toward improving the effectiveness of urban humanitarian responses and potential linkages between the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit and Habitat III Conference in 2016, particularly as Secretariats for both have been established now. Some of the conclusions from the event include: (a) the need to better understand how cities function and their dynamic nature when responding to humanitarian crises; (b) need to bring the right urban expertise (eg, urban planners) on board to ensure that the humanitarian response results in more lives saved, providing immediate relief effectively and setting the first steps toward restoring urban systems and strengthening urban resilience; (c) need to develop approaches that are more enabling and put local authorities and communities to the fore and building capacities, including of markets, and people’s coping capacity; (d) the need to better link current sectoral responses with more spatial/area-based approaches; and (e) the World Humanitarian Summit and Habitat III offer unique opportunities to better align humanitarian, development and private sector actors in humanitarian responses and recovery.

**Action Point:** DFID, USAID and UN-Habitat agreed that these themes form the basis for a sustained dialogue among key partners and should be taken to its next step as a side event at ECOSOC 2014 in New York in July.

3**. Post-2015/Sustainable Development Goals**: RG MHCUA Chair, George Deikun, announced that the Open Working Group of member states over the past year of negotiations has reduced the proposals for post-MDG, sustainable development goals from 150 to 16. Among the 16 draft SDGs is an urban goal ‘to build safe, inclusive, productive and resilient cities and human settlements’. Of particular interest to humanitarians in this goal is a proposed target to increase the number of cities with resilience plans to adapt to climate change and to enhance disaster risk reduction. Goals and targets are still under discussion by the OWG.

4. The **World Humanitarian Summit website** has initiated a number of blogs to support 8 regional consultations for agenda-setting of the Summit. RG members are encouraged to register and participate at: [www.worldhumanitariansummit.org](http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/)