

CITIES IN CRISIS CONSULTATIONS - Port au Prince, Haiti

MARCH 2016

Overview of Urban Consultations

By 2050 over 70% of the global population will live in urban areas. Accelerating urbanization is accompanied by increasing vulnerability, with cities becoming more likely to be affected by natural and man-made disasters. As a result, humanitarian actors are increasingly responding to crisis in urban areas, yet they are often badly equipped to understand and effectively engage with cities' complex socio-economic dynamics and governance structures. Recognizing these challenges, the World Humanitarian Summit mandated an Urban Expert Group to identify key recommendations for promoting better humanitarian response to urban crises.

To contribute to this discussion, IMPACT Initiatives and UCLG's Task Force on Local and Regional Government Disaster Response facilitated a series of consultations in six cities affected by natural or man-made disasters. In collaboration with local authorities and aid actors, each city identified key lessons and guidance to inform future responses, outlined in city-specific reports and compiled into a comprehensive report which will be presented in May 2016 at the World Humanitarian Summit, in partnership with the Urban Expert Group.

The Consultation Process:

- 1 Guiding questions for all cities agreed upon with the Urban Expert Group
- 2 Bilateral interviews held with city-level authorities and civil society, UN Agencies, NGOs and donors involved in the response
- 3 Final consultations hosted by local mayor(s) to identify lessons learned and develop recommendations for future response to urban crisis
- 4 Findings from interviews and consultations summarized in city-specific and overarching reports

INTRODUCTION

On 12 January 2010, Haiti was struck by a violent earthquake – the most violent in over 200 years. The epicentre of the earthquake, measuring 7 on the Richter scale, was located only 15 kilometres away from the capital, Port-au-Prince, with a population of almost 2.5 million people. The consequences of the earthquake were devastating, with over 220,000 deaths, 300,000 injured and 1.3 million displaced people, many of them scattered across the capital in some 1,350 camps. According to the Haitian government, 3 million people were directly or indirectly affected by the earthquake.

KEY FINDINGS

Consultation participants identified numerous challenges including: a) a lack of preparedness and response capacity among State institutions and local stakeholders to respond to a crisis of this scale; b) a lack of coordination and communication between national and international actors, which created a dichotomy in the response and hindered local response capacity for the reconstruction; and c) a lack of communication and sharing of information with affected populations.

The key recommendations emerging from the consultation process were as follows:

- Increase focus on activities to strengthen the capacity of local and national institutions on crisis management and prevention, and on the integration of local communities throughout the process;
- Improve coordination between international humanitarian actors and national and local stakeholders, including knowledge transfer and information sharing;
- Build the capacity to follow and manage displaced populations;
- Adopt a multi-sector, area-based approach to enable a more efficient response to urban crisis.

Crisis Overview

2010: First 15 days- Humanitarian emergency

In the first hours following the earthquake, the situation was chaotic: all public services, local actors and humanitarian actors were directly affected by the earthquake and overwhelmed. The fact that the crisis was happening in an urban setting complicated its management and understanding. During this first period, the main actors in the field included local civil society, national societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, UN agencies, NGOs, and State structures.

2010-2013: From emergency to recovery

Following the initial phase of the emergency, Haiti witnessed a massive influx of international actors, including UN Agencies and NGOs. Coordination between international humanitarian actors themselves and between international and local actors became a real challenge. The population, which initially dispersed spontaneously to unoccupied urban areas, was moved into camps outside the city by NGOs and UN Agencies as an interim solution. The provision of aid and basic services to people in camps acted as a pull factor for many more people, eventually becoming more permanent than initially planned.

2014-2016: A strategic reorientation marking the end of the emergency response

This third phase saw the number of humanitarian actors significantly decrease as a result of the end of the emergency phase and a decrease in funding. Remaining actors developed a strategy focusing on recovery and reconstruction, and on strengthening the capacity of national actors. Although 90% of camps are now closed, the relocation process is still not finalised, leaving around 10% of the earthquake victims in camps awaiting relocation, and little capacity to monitor the movements of the displaced population.

KEY CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED DURING THE EARTHQUAKE

1 Lack of preparedness among local and international actors to respond to an earthquake of such magnitude:

- Although some contingency planning had been conducted prior to the earthquake, nobody was prepared for an earthquake of such magnitude. As a result, estimations of the human and financial resources required were vastly inadequate and the capacity to respond was stretched.
- The absence of a land registry or land use plan also contributed to the lack of preparedness and response capacity. The poor construction standards of buildings in Port au Prince increased both the number of earthquake victims and the levels of damage, and made the most affected neighbourhoods of Port of Prince inaccessible (eg. rubble blocking roads, communications infrastructure, and access to airports and public buildings), further hindering the implementation of the response to the crisis.

2 Establishment of camps, population movement and humanitarian aid access:

- A large portion of the population was relocated into camps around Port au Prince, due to the inability to host the entire affected population in the city itself. Humanitarian aid was mainly delivered in these camps, creating a real pull-factor for affected populations. Coupled with no established return plan or strategy to help displaced populations return to their areas of origin, the presence of camps and has played a key role in the long-term displacement of affected communities.
- Victims displaced outside the cities were not included in the first phase of the humanitarian response. Aid remained focused on individuals remaining in the agglomeration of Port-au-Prince and residing in camps next to the city.
- The limited access to isolated areas, which are often the most vulnerable and are characterised by security and community tension issues, complicated the delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected communities in these areas.

3 Lack of cooperation between different actors and a lack of local capacity-building:

- Coordination issues were identified at different levels: (i) between UN Agencies and NGOs, (ii) between UN/NGOs and state institutions, (iii) between the different state institutions, (iv) between state institutions and local authorities, (v) between UN/NGOs and local authorities.
- This lack of coordination led to the duplication of projects and of the selection of beneficiaries. Furthermore, this lack of coordination led to limited sharing of data, including registration records or lists of relocated households. Thus, some beneficiaries were able to register in several camps to receive aid from different organizations.

In conclusion, the response was unable to rely on, and to reinforce local response capacity, thus weakening reconstruction efforts.

4 Shortcomings in communication and information sharing to affected population:

Messages to affected populations were sometimes poorly defined and as a result, information was not effectively shared with the local population, resulting in several misunderstandings:

- With regards to reconstruction, people believed that most aid would be distributed in Port-au-Prince, which caused a wave of returns towards the city of people who had found refuge with their families outside the city. This accentuated the phenomenon of camps and slums development.
- Coordination efforts did not sufficiently integrate feedback mechanisms to allow local populations to influence the response.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

1 Improving collaboration between international actors and local and national institutions:

- Strengthening the state, and through it, the local authorities, was defined as a priority in order to improve decision making and coordination among all actors. The state should be able to ensure coordination and that the work of international, national and local actors fits into national and local public policies. It is therefore essential to ensure a continuous transfer of knowledge between different actors, including civil protection.
- Actors involved in the response should have a good comprehension of local level response mechanisms, in order to better integrate local responders as key actor in the global response to a crisis.
- Local authorities should have an active role in defining the needs, capacities and the on-going response in their territory.

2 Prevention improvement, preparedness and urban disaster response:

- There is still a lack of contingency planning related to the risk of earthquakes in urban areas. Partnerships need to be established between local, national and international actors in order to anticipate and prepare for another large-scale disaster.
- A natural risk prevention policy should be developed in parallel to preparedness activities, which would provide Haiti with tools to better understand and monitor natural phenomena and their impacts, in order to reduce their vulnerabilities.
- Through local and municipal civil protection committees within every neighbourhood, identify areas to which populations could evacuate safely in case of emergency and last resort, as well as possible areas of relocation. People should also be informed of the existence of these locations and ways to get there. Finally, raising awareness of natural hazards among the population as a whole should be an essential part of good preparation.

3 Better community integration in crisis prevention and response:

- Future crisis response should favour a holistic, multi-sector approach, instead of a pre-determined response based on clusters or sectors of intervention. Such approaches should be defined and put into place in continuous interaction with local communities, in order to create a stronger mobilisation of local resources and to ensure integration of all relevant stakeholders.
- Local stakeholders should directly be involved in the preparation and response to a crisis – particularly in the management of certain issues. This could be particularly important in the implementation of plans at the local level (through practical exercises and simulations), population awareness, defining temporary and longer-term relocation centres, supporting and supervising population in case of disaster, and establishing urban planning frameworks and plans.
- Crisis planning and response should be clearly organised around a local geographic unit understood by everyone, and favour an area or neighbourhood based approach which allows populations to relate and to take part in the preparation for and response to a crisis.

Best practice: Developing a methodological guide for natural disaster risk reduction in urban areas in Haiti

**Who: The United Nations Development Programme
Funded by DFID and ECHO**

For the past three year, Haitian national institutions, partners and local and international experts, with the support of UNDP, developed a methodological guide which aims to coordinate different actions of prevention, protection, warning, preparation and management during a crisis, as well as, the actions taken during the reconstruction process by promoting and supporting partnerships between different risk management actors. These guidelines outline the plan of action in the case of a natural disaster in an urban setting.

Best practice: First aid training for community leaders

Who: The Civil Protection Department and the Haitian Red Cross

After realizing that first aid was provided by civil society and HRC volunteers in the first few days, the government, through the CPD, and with the HRC and other NGOs assistance, decided to train community leaders and emergency response teams (ERT) on first aid and shelter management. The newly formed ERT are equipped and working under the direction of the CPD, at community level.

Best practice: Participatory and integrated approach to reconstruction, according to a neighbourhood approach

**Who: Global Communities and Project Concern International
Funded by OFDA/USAID**

The Katye Programme (“neighbourhood” in creole) allowed for the reconstruction of the Ravine Pintade neighbourhood, in central Port-au-Prince, which was completely destroyed by the earthquake. This complete and multi-sectoral programme implemented the demolition of damaged infrastructures, the evacuation of debris, the construction of shelters and community healthcare and water supply infrastructures, as well as the amelioration of drainage system, street planning and their equipment. The programme’s success was largely due to its innovative approach, which enabled communities to actively contribute to the programme planning and to the definition of priority needs. The objective was to create a safer, cleaner and more liveable environment for communities affected by the earthquake. Officially ended in May 2012, the “Katye” programme helped residents, who had been forcibly displaced, to return to their homes, in a neighbourhood they themselves transformed through their efforts.

Best practice: Setting up a flat-sharing system to relocate earthquake victims

Who: The housing construction and public buildings unit (HCPBU)

Created following the 2010 earthquake, the HCPBU coordinates and implements public construction and housing projects in the country. It also encourages private investments in reconstruction of urban areas destroyed by the earthquake. The HCPBU launched, through its reconstruction programme, a flat-sharing system among earthquake victims. The HCPBU is rebuilding housing with an extra room for victims, who in exchange have to host displaced people free of charge during a given time. Other organisations - such as CARE, the Haitian Red Cross or UNOPS - began to replicate this model.

IMPACT Initiatives is a Geneva-based international association, aiming to shape practices and influence policies in humanitarian and development settings in order to improve efficiency of aid responses and positively impact lives of people and their communities. IMPACT implements assessment, monitoring, evaluation and organizational capacity-building programmes and has established field-presence in over 15 countries.

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is a global network of cities and local, metropolitan and regional governments. UCLG has established a Task Force on Local and Regional Government Disaster Response, in order to provide a platform for local governments to exchange knowledge and expertise on disaster management.

Cités Unies France, a federation of French local and regional governments involved in international relations and, in particular, in decentralized co-operation, is responsible for the Secretariat of UCLG’s Task Force and has been directly supporting this consultation process.