14th UK Shelter Forum

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Hosted by Save the Children and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

Extended Note: Humanitarian Response to Urban Crises
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Over the past 18 months, the humanitarian teams in DFID have been considering how we can improve our own response to humanitarian crises in urban areas, and how we can support our partners, and the humanitarian system more generally, to tailor responses more effectively to urban contexts. As part of this process DFID is currently running a series of stakeholder consultationson the following four topics:

1. How to work with Governments: They may be more visible and active in urban areas, and different levels of government may be represented (national, provincial, municipal)
2. Built environment in urban areas: housing, infrastructure, systems and networks
3. Complex communities: communities in urban areas are often side-by-side but very different (poor next to affluent) and there is often fluidity and high turnover.
4. Markets: studies show that people living in cities are more dependent on markets. Looking specifically at cash based market and the private sector and what they have to offer. Overlaps with some of the work RedR is doing.

The stimulus to investigate humanitarian responses to urban crises came out of the Humanitarian Emergency Response Review, March 2011 chaired by Lord (Paddy) Ashdown. The review looked at what the humanitarian network does in a crisis. The review recognised that, "the concentration of populations in urban areas will change the nature of many humanitarian disasters. More people will be

living on marginal land, in overcrowded and poorly planned housing, lacking access to adequate water and sanitation, healthcare and education". With the various recent crises in urban areas, it seems this expectation is being confirmed, presenting both challenges and opportunities for the Shelter Sector.

Lizzie split the room into four groups to continue discussions on this topic. Two groups discussed examples of 'strong governments' in 'formal environments,' where there are adequate resources, efficient organization, and disaster risk management experience. The other two groups considered 'weak governments' in 'informal environments.' In looking for examples of best practice, each group answered the following questions:

- What works well and why does it work well?
- What needs to change?

Notes from Group 1 (Joseph Ashmore): Strong government, formal environment

1. Chile 2010 earthquake
   a. What worked and why?
      i. Efficient coordination
      ii. Recognized need for international support
      iii. Strong built environment, including building codes and seismically resilient design and construction
      iv. Response plan and building codes updated from lessons learned
   b. What didn't work?
      i. Initially did not accept international aid
      ii. Security was the main issue
      iii. EWS communication breakdown
      iv. Continuity in governance for response and recovery (both political and departmental)
      v. Overly politicized (there was a national election at the same time as the earthquake)
      vi. Disaster response plan/contingency plan absent
2. Philippines
   a. What worked and why?
      i. DSWD has plenty of experience
      ii. Local administrative structured well and integrated with international system
      iii. Cluster system institutionalized
      iv. EWS
   b. What didn't work well?
      i. International response focused on informal areas
      ii. Lack of individual support for civil servants and families
      iii. Political tension between local and national government

Notes from Group 2 (Jake Zarins): **Strong government, formal environment**

1. Gujarat, India
   a. Acknowledged it would take time to respond to the crisis
   b. There was a system to approve designs.
   c. A national NGO ran coordination so local expertise was used, and gaps were clear
   d. Gap: There was a lack of innovation in the design, planning, and reconstruction process.
2. Iquitos, Peru
   a. Focus on advice and advocacy to make the right decision
   b. Provided planning and oversight from government.
   c. Leadership was strong and practical.
   d. There were systems in place (legal, building codes, etc.).
   e. There was predictability regarding where agencies needed to link in, especially with different / unclear ministries.
3. Christchurch , New Zealand and Kobe, Japan
   a. Legislation in place.
   b. Gaps in process only became clear during event.
4. If government is too strong then military and line ministries can make it difficult.
5. Baghdad, Iraq (NRC / UN-Habitat)
   a. Approach of building relationships at different scales, levels (ie beneficiaries and government) and interventions (ie NFIs and advocacy)
   b. In Kobe, Japanese government learned from issues.
6. What needs to change?
   a. Need more time to think about what we're doing and then more time to do it; time constraints are often driven by the media.
   b. Multi-pronged decisions: what is your NGO good at? May be good at initial NFI distribution but then later may be able to help with policy and planning.
   c. Sharing information: Humanitarian Agencies, governments, and the private sector need better understanding of who needs what from humanitarian agencies. What they can / cannot provide and should / should not provide.

Notes from Group 3 (Richard Luff): **Weak government, informal environment**

1. Tacloban, Philippines
   a. Gov't left the city and the Global Shelter Cluster came in and filled the gap
   b. Gap: Community level structures could be built up stronger
2. Haiti
   a. PASSA tool was used and worked well to engage communities on shelter awareness. It likely would not work in conflict areas though.
3. What needs to change?
   • Issue of land tenure and land management. For example, in Haiti there was a lack of land management; where do people build?
   • In Philippines there was 40m no build zone that was not properly enforced.
   • In Goma there was no shelter cluster for 2 years which led to uncertainty on how to identify IDPs in the city. Lack of planning and strategy development

- Price control on commodities (inflation) can be better controlled if there is a strong government.

Notes from Group 4 (Mario Flores): Weak government, informal environment

1. Positive examples from Haiti:
   a. Logistics worked well with regard to imports to the country, i.e. they quickly established an alternative route into the country through the Dominican Republic. Shelter items had also been pre-positioned well.
   b. The focus on neighbourhoods and issues like infrastructure worked well. Not necessarily specific housing reconstruction but things that go beyond that and affect the entire community.
   c. Mapping went well and many databases were created around urban assets.
   d. The Safety Assessment under ACT20 was helpful to identify structurally unsafe houses and to provide assurance to families who could go back home to safe houses.
   e. Skills building worked well in a number of situations where crisis served to bring new knowledge to areas.
2. Where do we need to change?
   a. Should not use the individual household as the unit of analysis, but rather the neighbourhood or section of the city. This will enhance understanding relationships between areas to clarify how one intervention will affect another.
   b. Change assessment methodology by connecting to people who actually know what's going on. Increase local inputs.
   c. Integrated Neighbourhood Approach could start earlier. In Haiti it took 10 months to start anything at the neighbourhood level. It is clear now that there's value in that approach and we will start earlier in the future.
   d. Land tenure – same points as Group 3
   e. Technical Assistance needs to be more comprehensive both in countries with weak governance and strong governance. For example, in the Philippines there were a lot of materials being distributed but little knowledge / training on how to build back better. Looks like it is causing affected households to build back weaker.

The major conclusions of the four groups were:

- The importance of considering how we engage with governments.
- Working with government entities whilst remaining neutral requires more thought about entry points and ways of engaging.
- The need for time to analyse the context with an assessment of existing capacity, how the city as a system works and how that affects where to intervene.
- Not looking at things on a house by house basis but on a neighbourhood, network, or regional level and what that means for programming.
- The need for additional expertise to get from response to recovery.