



Working Paper

January 2016

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The magnitude of urban disasters in high population densities – combined with complex social, political, economic and institutional environments – has challenged the manner in which humanitarian agencies are used to working. Humanitarian agencies are now grappling with how to change their approaches to this reality. This desk review aims to provide an audit and analysis of existing context analysis tools along the themes of governance and power analysis; vulnerability, social and conflict analysis; and urban systems analysis. The lack of contextual understanding by urban humanitarian response has often been cited. This review finds that there are strong context analysis methodologies but the application and existence of tools specifically designed for urban humanitarian response remains limited. The tools that are available often require substantial time to conduct data collection and analysis. They are also frequently narrow in analytical focus, fail to address the multi-scalar nature of a city, and lack specificity in tool selection and methodology. The review suggests that the advancement of an urban context analysis tool for humanitarian response is needed and should

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACF	Action Contre la Faim (Action Against Hunger)
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
ARC	American Red Cross
CSA	Conflict sensitivity analysis
DCA	Dividers and connectors analysis
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DNH	Do no harm analysis
EMMA	Emergency market mapping and analysis
HEA	Household economic approach
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LMA	Labour market analysis
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PCMA	Pre-crisis market analysis
PEA	Political economy analysis
PRA	Participatory rural appraisal
PVA	Pre-crisis market analysis

Acknowledgements

This desk review was produced by the Stronger Cities Initiative Consortium, which is part of the Urban Crises Learning Fund. The consortium is funded by DFID and managed by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and was established to:

- (i) Improve how stakeholders in urban crises engage with each other to form new partnerships and make better decisions, and
- (ii) Improve mitigation of disasters, preparedness and response by developing, testing and disseminating new approaches to forming relationships and systems.

Two consortia have been developed to undertake the work. The first consortium includes Habitat for Humanity Great Britain (HFHGB), Oxfam GB, University College London (UCL) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). It aims to research urban responses to natural hazards in urban areas. The second consortium is the Stronger Cities Initiative Consortium led by the IRC, the NRC and WVI. It is leading on research and developing tools and guidance on urban response in conflict, displacement, and natural hazard settings.

The authors are pleased to present this review on existing context analysis tools used by humanitarian actors in urban areas to IIED, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) department.

The authors would like to thank the policymakers and practitioners engaged in urban humanitarian programming that have generously shared their time and

input into this review in the form of documents, sharing key contacts and guidance. This includes contributionsn nput i-1.c

A lack of contextual understanding is consistently cited in the literature as one of the key limitations for humanitarian interventions in urban settings (Creti 2010; Kyazze *a.* 2012; Earle 2014; Grünewald *a.* 2011; Brown *a.* 2015). To be effective and appropriate in these environments, the assessments of humanitarian agencies need to go beyond only identifying the needs of the displaced population. In rural contexts, the displaced may outnumber the host community, so the logic is that if the displaced population's needs are understood, then humanitarian actors have the authority and space to respond. However, in urban areas, the displaced are just one part of a bigger picture that

municipal authorities have to worry about. Humanitarian actors responding to urban crises and displacement

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Methodology

The purpose of this desk review is to take stock of context analysis tools that focus on structural and systemic issues as opposed to specific individual/households needs. This is to inform the development of an urban context analysis tool.⁷ The review includes an overview of the strengths, weaknesses and gaps in existing tools, frameworks and approaches. The desk review is not meant to be an exhaustive literature review of urban contexts or context analysis. Rather, the review is meant to be a synthesis of the existing knowledge base on context analysis and its explanatory power for understanding urban forced-displacement crises and for identifying entry points for intervention. As such, the review focuses on synthesis reports, literature reviews and case-study reports where possible, and has relied on individual key informants where further investigation was needed.

The key research questions guiding the review were:

- What existing tools can provide a nuanced understanding of political, economic, social and spatial factors that can be adapted in urban contexts?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each tool for informing effective responses to urban forced displacement crises?
- What is the most appropriate tool for piloting in an urban context and what adaptations are needed for that tool?

The review primarily focuses on analyses tailored to protracted and slow-onset forced displacement situations. It focuses on published approaches, guidance and frameworks as opposed to methodologies used in a particular setting that are a hybrid of a number of approaches.

The search approach to the desk review has comprised of (a) database and website searches using key words and phrases to identify tools and other supporting literature and (b) key informant interviews with people who have experience in applying context analysis tools in urban settings. A full list of contacts is shown in Annex 1.

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Justification of tool selection

The categories of tools in this section were selected as they constitute the standard approaches used in understanding contextual dynamics and underlying systemic issues in a given context. The tools are divided between three key emerging themes from the review

and Zimbabwe (see Box 1). The purpose of conducting the PEA on forced displacement was to inform policy dialogue and operations so that the interests of vulnerable forcibly displaced populations and their hosts were effectively accommodated in resource allocation decision making and in poverty alleviation initiatives.

Depending on the specific purpose for which these tools are designed and utilised, they could take between a few weeks to months to complete. For humanitarian actors, power analysis or political economy analysis are often conducted as a complement to a needs assessment (see Box 2 for an example from NRC in Iraq). For instance, some agencies have developed sectoral frameworks that incorporate elements of these analyses to create clear conceptual linkages between

3.1.2 Governance and power analysis: strengths, weaknesses and gaps

The following section focuses on the strengths, weaknesses and gaps of the tools in Table 3 as it relates to their utility in understanding the context of urban forced displacement crises:

Strengths

- **A good understanding of local power dynamics** helps practitioners to systematically unpack the reality behind who holds power, influence and decision-making authority, which may not reflect official positions. Such understanding:
 - Contributes to a shared understanding of local power dynamics and its impact on programme/project outcomes
 - Gets beneath the formal and visible structures to revealing the underlying incentives, capacities and accountability mechanisms that affects outcomes, and
 - Supports risk-management and scenario planning by helping to identify the critical factors that are likely to drive or impede significant, positive change.

- **Adaptable analytical framework and**

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- There is **not a standard approach to ensuring the analysis is kept up to date** such as identification of indicators for monitoring changes or unintended impacts of the intervention.¹³ This limitation may be especially e

3.2 Vulnerability, conflict and social analysis

3.2.1 Audit of existing vulnerability, conflict and social analysis tools

Urban displacement can intensify inequality, resource scarcity and competition for livelihoods, social conflict, and protection challenges in communities (Guay 2015). Vulnerability, conflict and social analyses tools generally aim to understand risks, resilience, conflict dynamics and social networks between actors, organisations and institutions in a given setting. These sets of analyses are differentiated from the prior tools discussed in that the focus is on relationships and the characteristics of these relationships, including social capital,¹⁵ rather than the actors alone. These sets of tools when applied to urban displacement most often relate to the concept of social cohesion¹⁶ and resilience.¹⁷ The review focused on participatory vulnerability analysis (PVA), conflict sensitivity analysis (CSA) and social network analysis (SNA). All of the above also have content that overlaps with governance and power analysis. For example, they all include a form of stakeholder analysis albeit tailored to different purposes.

PVA utilise participatory methods to assist field workers and communities to analyse people's vulnerability, create action plans, mobilise resources and enact appropriate policies, laws and strategies to reduce their vulnerability to disaster. There are a range of different types of analyses (see Table 4) but they all generally apply participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods to assess vulnerability, often associatey

Similarly, there are several macro-level planning processes for resilience that have incorporated social analysis. For example, regional and national frameworks relevant for Lebanon and Jordan have aimed to set goals and indicators for social cohesion. However, the operationalisation at project-level to undertake social analysis has yet to be fully realised. As Guay (2015: 29) notes, 'humanitarians have yet to (as an industry) articulate or agree on what social cohesion is, how best to measure it, what causes it or how it impacts communities in conflict-affected urban emergencies'.

An approach to social analysis that is gaining traction is social network analysis (SNA). This entails the process of mapping relationships and analysing the structure of a network of relationship as they relate to trust, conflicts and the influence of different actors. SNA first emerged as a research tool in humanitarian work, but recently implementing agencies have tried to operationalise it in their programmes, most notably by Net-Map in 2007

in the Net-Map toolbox (ODI 2009). It can be applied to look at both the vertical dimensions of a crisis such as service provision/governance actors along with the horizontal dimension of a crisis in terms of intra- and inter-community relations (see Box 3 for an example from Mozambique). IRC recently launched its Context Adaptability Initiative and has piloted SNA in Sierra Leone, Myanmar and the United States. Social networks and social capital are heavily related to the issues or factors that may promote connection – through bridging or bonding – or division within and between communities. The Do No Harm framework's dividers and connectors analysis (DCA) has been widely adopted by humanitarian organisations to understand what factors may connect or divide people impacting the nature of social networks/relations and levels of social capital. At present, there is a lack of existing case-study information to assess the strengths and weaknesses of DCA in an urban environment.



Table 4. Vulnerability, conflict and social analysis tools applied in urban humanitarian response

				*urban adaptations or references in guidance +revisions underway for urban adaptations
Participatory vulnerability analyses	No, but some tools/guidance have been applied or adapted for urban settings	Participatory vulnerability assessments are typically based on PRA methods specialised to assess vulnerability. These tools have most often been applied in response to natural disasters to gain a more nuanced understanding of how vulnerability is experienced locally and the way community assets are impacted by a crisis.	Response, recovery, and development	IFRC: Vulnerability and capacity assessment (VCA) (IFRC undated)+ ²⁰ Action Aid: Participatory vulnerability analysis (PVA) (Chiwaka and Yates 2004) Oxfam: Participatory capacity and vulnerability analysis (PCVA) (Turnbull and Turvill 2012)* Christian Aid: Participatory vulnerability and capacity assessment (PVCA) (Christian Aid 2009) ACF: Participatory risk, capacity & vulnerability analysis (ACF 2012)*
Conflict sensitivity analysis Including: Dividers and connectors analysis ²¹	No, but has been applied in urban settings	Conflict analysis is a structured process of analysis to better understand a conflict. It aims to shed light on the following key aspects: •		

3.2.2 Vulnerability, conflict and social analysis: strengths, weaknesses and gaps

The following section focuses on the strengths, weaknesses and gaps of the tools in Table 4 as it relates to their utility in understanding the context of urban forced-displacement crises:

Strengths

- Participatory vulnerability analysis
 - **Engages vulnerable communities and households** using their local expertise and knowledge. This effort can also help to bring diverse communities together around common

- In an urban displacement context, it may be challenging to bring together inclusive community groups for PVAs due to social tensions that may inhibit cooperation or protection concerns for displaced people that may lack legal status (IFRC 2014).
- Conflict sensitivity analysis/dividers and connectors analysis
 - DCA is primarily focused on the micro situation and less suitable for an in-depth analysis of macro-level conflict. If used without consideration of the macro context, the tool may create a false sense of security for staff. It may also not give a full picture

3.3 Urban systems

3.3.1 Audit of existing approaches to urban systems

Urban systems are complex and interconnected. They include infrastructure, economic systems, and social structures. Understanding these systems is crucial for effective humanitarian response.

(Brown et al. 2015)

The following section investigates tools for key urban systems pertaining to service delivery (including infrastructure systems), economic systems/livelihoods, and the urban spatial environment. In addition, it looks at synthesis approaches that aim to holistically understand an urban environment in crisis. For displaced and vulnerable populations in a city, access to services and livelihoods may differ substantially. Displaced populations often join already marginalised areas of the city, which has a direct impact on their struggle to secure jobs, education for their children or access to healthcare and basic services such as water, sanitation, and electricity (Haysom 2013). Responders to urban crises must both understand an urban system in isolation and its interaction with other urban systems.

Service delivery systems: Access to quality services is often one of the biggest challenges to meeting

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spatial access and barriers to mobility (Crawford and Killing 2011).²⁴ However, the use of spatial analysis to enhance analyses has been increasing. For example, Caerus conducted a conflict spatial analysis in Aleppo, Syria from September 2013 to January 2014. It conducted monthly surveys of 561 residents that helped international organisations to understand the Syrian conflict, urban public safety, and the humanitarian dynamics of the civil war.²⁵

Synthesis approaches: Recently, there have been several new tools that aim to operationalise a system understanding of a city and integrate resilience thinking in urban crisis response by connecting political, social, economic, environmental and infrastructural systems. None of the following methodologies are publicly available yet, but draft versions were shared for the purposes of this review.

- UN-Habitat has developed a methodology for city profiling and neighbourhood profiling²⁶ that has been applied in Syria. In this process, they holistically and spatially map the needs of the displaced population in tandem with the impact of the conflict on the city's urban systems. Each profile varies slightly, but shares some key commonalities including a review of the city context and pre-crisis situation, city damage analysis, urban functionality analysis, and a mapping of the displacement and shelter conditions.
- World Vision developed a city-wide assessment for their urban area-based development programmes that analyses the dimensions of (i) healthy cities: children enjoy good health (ii) safer cities: children cared for and protected (iii) resilient cities: children care for their environment and others, and (iv) prosperous cities: educated for life, ready for economic opportunity.
- The American Red Cross (ARC) has developed a multi-scalar and spatial urban assessment process for disaster risk-reduction and resilience programming. It entails a vulnerability and opportunity analysis that combines spatial data and stakeholder information to determine community selection. After community selection, the ARC then conducts a vulnerability and capacity assessment aimed at the community level.
- Pamela Sitko, Oxford Brookes University Department of Planning and World Vision Global Urban Technical Advisor, developed the urban disaster resilience analytical framework based on complex adaptive systems and urban morphology theory. The conceptual framework aims to understand the multiple layers of an urban area along the dimensions of topography, roads, public open spaces, plots, buildings and services against the key systems of economic forces, governance networks and social dynamics.

The conceptual frameworks for urban resilience were also considered in this review. The most prominent framework, Arup's City Resilience Framework, has been adopted by the 100 Resilient Cities project (100 Resilient Cities). UN-Habitat is working to operationalise the framework as part of the City Resilience Profiling Programme to develop a 'comprehensive and integrated urban planning and management approach for profiling and monitoring the resilience of any city to all plausible hazards' (UN-Habitat). The resilience frameworks go beyond the scope of a humanitarian actor to respond to a crisis and are thus considered outside the scope of a context analysis. Moreover, they primarily focus on monitoring trends and changes in context rather than assessing a context to lead to a particular response or intervention.

urban displacement contexts, except for UN-Habitat's city profiling.

3.3.3 Urban systems: a reflection

- Mapping services provided by public, private, and NGO institutions is an essential key step to understand the quality and accessibility to services for displaced populations, host communities, and the most vulnerable people within those groups such as women, girls, LGBT, or the disabled.
- An initial context analysis might not be able to incorporate a detailed market or livelihoods assessment but, given the importance of self-reliance, it should aim to shed light on the underlying factors that may enable or prohibit self-reliance.
- The analysis of geospatial information, where available, can inform understanding of A.) where target populations live, B.) what resources are present and accessible to them, and C.) what are the risks and vulnerabilities associated with the places they frequent most often. Maps also may help to strengthen the humanitarian and development continuum by providing a common understanding of the context.

- Primary collection of geospatial context data and spatial mapping to reveal underlying factors that may be causing a particular situation remains limited. Examples such as Caerus's mapping in Aleppo demonstrate that key contextual features can be mapped and can reveal systemic patterns in an urban crisis. However, the application of primary data collection must be balanced with required time-needed and technical capacity.
- The urban disaster-resilience analytical tool presents a complex view of the city in a simple framework that is human-centred. Such an approach would be beneficial for the context analysis tool to adopt to ensure ease of analysis and interpretation for making programmatic decisions.

3.4 Urban context analysis tools: work in progress

On the basis of key informant communications, ALNAP's *D* (ALNAP) and IASC's *R* (IASC 2016) several projects are underway (Table 6).³⁰

Table 6. Context analysis tools: work in progress

Area-based context analysis	Macro-level analysis tool for area-based contextual understanding	Starts Summer 2016	IMPACT Initiatives
City resilience profiling tool	Macro-level analysis of physical, functional, spatial, organisational, and temporal attributes of a resilient city. For more information see: www.urban-response.org/directory/25	On-going	UN-Habitat
Toolkit for assessment, analysis and monitoring in protracted displacement crises	Toolkit of assessment, analysis and monitoring tools for responding to protracted displacement crises involving		

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- **Analysis is only one part of the process.** First, a context analysis can be part of a process of building common understanding, trust and engagement between actors in an urban setting. This is critical for building coordination. Second, for context analysis to have an impact on the design and planning of programmes, it needs to be embedded and occur more than once. Analysis needs to be refreshed to reflect changes in the context.
- Connected to the prior point, the context analysis tool should aim to engage multiple stakeholders in a process of **joint analysis**. While certain findings in the context analysis may be sensitive, other findings may be critical to other humanitarian actors and government actors. The context analysis should as much as possible aim to be jointly conducted or in partnership with other o0.85 83(p)-8.7(r)-6.3(o)-7.8(g)-7.1(59) jcins•irsucrrte7(p)-8.7(n)-4.2(o(e c2m)-10.92.5(ns)-9.2(i)-9(s s)-9.5(h)-7.7()-102t)1s5.3(e)tbteless o4 p22.001 -4.2(e-6

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Annex 1

List of stakeholders contacted and websites researched

Stakeholders



Knowledge
Products