

CITIES IN CRISIS CONSULTATIONS - Mafraq, Jordan

MARCH 2016

Overview of Urban Consultations

By 2050 over 70% of the global population will live in urban areas. This accelerating urbanization trend is accompanied by an increasing vulnerability of cities to both natural and man-made disasters. More and more, humanitarian actors are responding to urban crisis. They are however often badly equipped to understand and effectively engage with cities' complex socio-economic dynamics and governance structures. Recognizing these challenges, the World Humanitarian Summit has mandated an Urban Expert Group to identify key recommendations for promoting better humanitarian response to urban crisis.

With a view of contributing 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

Located in Jordan's Mafraq Governorate, adjacent to the border with Syria, Mafraq city has seen a **substantial population increase since the start of the Syria crisis**. As of March 2016, Mafraq city and surrounding communities host 77,215 refugees from Syria, while an additional 79,648 reside in Za'atari refugee camp, 10km to the east. This report draws upon key findings from the consultation in Mafraq to provide an overview of the crisis response and key challenges, and to offer recommendations for future responses to urban crises.

KEY FINDINGS

The rapid increase in Mafraq's population exacerbated existing strain on municipal services, including infrastructure, solid waste management, water and sanitation, health and education. The large volume of new arrivals also increased competition for jobs and contributed to higher rents, causing tension among refugees and the host population. In the face of these challenges, municipal institutions and local authorities were required to adapt and respond quickly to the shifting situation.

In parallel, an increasing number of humanitarian organizations began working in Mafraq. What began as a rapid humanitarian response to refugee needs has become more comprehensive and development focused over time, involving a wider range of local and international actors. **Stakeholders at the Mafraq consultation acknowledged these improvements but stressed that concerted efforts are still needed to adequately address needs of refugees and vulnerable Jordanians.** The following recommendations could further strengthen the resilience of populations and governing bodies, reduce social tensions and contribute to an effective response:

- **More inclusive coordination mechanisms** should actively involve local and municipal governments;
- **Longer-term planning**, inclusive of displaced and host communities, is needed from the onset of a crisis;
- Humanitarian organizations should **support and leverage on local response capacities.**

Crisis Overview

2011-2012: Syrian refugees begin to arrive in Jordan

Syrian refugees began to arrive in 2011, rising to 117,321 registered refugees in Jordan by the end of 2012. International aid agencies provided emergency assistance to refugees, focusing mainly on camps.

2013-2014: Shifting the focus to address the needs of host communities

As conflict continued, the impact of large scale displacement to Jordanian communities began to receive more attention. The Jordanian Government introduced several measures, including requiring that at least 30% of all aid should reach Jordanian beneficiaries. The Jordan Response Plan 2015, presented in late 2014, sought to consolidate the response into one national planning and coordination framework and promote sustainable, resilience-based programming that combines refugee needs with development goals.

2015-2016: Moving towards resilience planning

The past year has seen a more concrete shift towards more sustainable, development-based programming, incorporating both Jordanians and Syrians. 2015 also saw improved coordination and cooperation among aid actors and between humanitarian responders and local government bodies. Positive steps were taken to empower municipalities and ensure all relevant stakeholders can inform decision-making.

KEY CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN MAFRAQ

- 1 In the early stages of the crisis the response was hindered by a general lack of preparedness and by the resource and capacity constraints of municipal stakeholders:**
 - Lack of contingency planning at all levels resulted in an ad-hoc approach to humanitarian response in the early stages of the crisis. This delayed the development of more comprehensive plans and contributed to challenges in coordination and targeting.
 - Due to limited resources and capacity, municipal stakeholders initially relied on external support to meet the needs resulting from the refugee influx. The resulting lack of ownership and oversight of the response contributed to suboptimal targeting of aid, and in turn local community tensions.
- 2 The initial response by humanitarian organizations was driven by short-term funding:**
 - A proliferation of short-term, refugee-focused funding opportunities made it difficult for humanitarian responders to look beyond lifesaving needs and meant that more comprehensive, longer-term resilience programming was more difficult to prioritize at the start of the crisis.
 - The initial focus on refugee needs led to perceptions that aid was being unfairly distributed and excluding vulnerable Jordanians, raising the potential for tensions between Jordanians and Syrian refugees.
- 3 Limited coordination at the beginning of the crisis led to inefficient targeting of assistance and poor communication between aid actors and local and national government counterparts:**
 - Challenges in coordination between responders at the beginning of the crisis led to duplication of activities in some cases, and contributed to inefficient targeting of aid.
 - Humanitarian actors faced difficulties identifying which government counterparts to engage with at various stages of the planning process, often causing confusion and delays in project implementation. In some circumstances, limited understanding of local structures left aid actors navigating multiple official procedures simultaneously, increasing the potential for coordination problems and misunderstandings.
 - Local actors, including municipal and governorate-level administration and community-based organisations (CBOs), were not sufficiently included in humanitarian coordination mechanisms, which are concentrated in Amman. This has limited the ability of local actors to identify and confirm needs in their own communities, and further contributed to duplication of some activities in the response.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE URBAN RESPONSES

1 **Implement common tools to identify and prioritise vulnerabilities among both refugees and the host community:**

Standardized tools can provide comprehensive information about refugee and host community vulnerability across sectors. Tools should be collaboratively developed and utilised throughout crisis response to mitigate challenges posed by the use of different vulnerability criteria by various actors. This can contribute to efficient management of limited resources and help prioritize vulnerable people and communities.

2 **Establish coordination structures and processes at the onset of a crisis between local authorities and humanitarian actors:**

National and subnational coordination structures and processes should be identified from the onset of a crisis and institutionalised quickly to enable rapid and efficient coordination among humanitarian actors and with government bodies.

Clear processes should offer ongoing, tracking of activities at national and subnational level and be easily accessible to all involved in the response. This would help avoid duplication of activities, identify response gaps, and enable government institutions to provide oversight of programming relevant to their mandates.

3 **Ensure that humanitarian action does not exacerbate community tensions by assessing the impact on host communities from the outset and adjusting programming accordingly:**

Assessments of host communities should be conducted at the outset of a crisis to identify vulnerabilities and potential triggers for tension between local populations and new arrivals. Assessments establish a baseline for monitoring impact on host communities and provide information crucial to area-based and development-focused programming. They also enable actors to better anticipate and respond to host community needs that may be exacerbated as a crisis becomes more protracted.

4 **Crisis responders should advocate together for necessary funding and priorities:**

Humanitarian actors on the ground should collaborate to send unified and clear messages regarding funding needs, priorities and desired timeframes to donors. Donors, in turn, should engage in this process and jointly develop a coherent approach to funding the humanitarian response, in line with communicated needs.

5 **Humanitarian responders should leverage and support local institutions:**

Humanitarian actors should engage with local institutions and invest in municipal capacities from the onset of a crisis. Consultation with local government actors should be a consistent part of planning and implementation to ensure ownership, identify priority needs on the ground, avoid duplication and promote more complimentary and effective action. Training municipal actors on humanitarian response mechanisms can further ensure productive consultation, strengthen resilience, and promote sustainability.

Best practice: Assessing Vulnerability

What: The Vulnerability Assessment Framework

The Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF), developed under the leadership of UNHCR, is a tool for tracking and identifying needs of refugees, thereby providing an opportunity for streamlined targeting.

Despite its utility for targeting refugees, INGO stakeholders mentioned that they are not always able to effectively use the VAF for other needs assessments, due to varying mandates and organizational needs, and because it does not include Jordanians.

Best practice: Collecting and sharing information on host communities

Who: The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD)

Since the start of the crisis, humanitarian actors have been able to access the MoSD vulnerability database on Jordanian households. This has been used by a number of humanitarian responders to inform their targeting, although many also reported not being aware of the database's existence.

6 Crisis response plans should be forward-looking and informed by multiple stakeholders:

Humanitarian actors, under the leadership of response coordinators and relevant government bodies, should develop multi-year comprehensive plans for crisis response that streamline and consolidate activities nationwide from the onset of a crisis. Development of these plans should be inclusive of donors, UN agencies, local and national NGOs, and government representatives from all levels, to ensure that all parties are able to express needs, to encourage involvement in ongoing coordination mechanisms, and to prepare for efficient allocation of activities and funding that may exist within the plan.

7 Understand local response capacity and how to engage with it:

Stakeholder mapping of government institutions and processes at local and national level should be conducted at the onset of a crisis and disseminated widely among responders. Mapping should identify key actors within ministries, institutions and other structures that engage with the humanitarian response. This can help to establish productive communication channels between international actors and host government bodies, bolster efficient needs identification, and encourage ongoing government involvement. Stakeholder mapping can also pinpoint key areas of weakness in existing structures, helping to identify capacity building needs.

8 Ensure that the response is based on holistic contextual understanding rather than sectoral or project based planning:

Ongoing consultation with community members and their governmental representatives can help humanitarian actors to identify priority needs, target the most vulnerable populations, and successfully implement projects, as well as easing the potential for social tensions and improving resilience.

Best practice: Longer-term planning

What: The Jordan Response Plan (JRP)

JRP seeks to consolidate the response and promote resilience-based programming. It was established in 2014 under the leadership of MoPIC and involves task forces composed of government representatives, donors, UN agencies, and INGOs. While stakeholders suggested that awareness of JRP content and implementation may be limited at the local level, they noted that a plan like the JRP might have mitigated some of the coordination and programming challenges at the start of the crisis, had it been developed at that time.

Best practice: Engaging communities in area-based response

Who: USAID Community Engagement Project

The USAID Community Engagement Project implemented by Global Communities aims to strengthen community organizations and the response efforts of local government in three Jordanian governorates, including Mafraq. By gathering community members, NGOs, CBOs, and local government, the project has identified activities to improve resilience, strengthen social cohesion, and improve quality of life for all community residents.

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.