

The Settlements Approach and Urban Response

Friday 6th July 2018, Geneva

On 6 July 2018, [Shelter Centre](#), in partnership with the [Global Shelter Cluster's \(GSC\) Urban Settlements Working Group \(USWG\)](#) and [IMPACT Initiatives](#) convened [Shelter Meeting 18](#). Made possible with the support of OFDA/USAID and DG-ECHO, the event discussed the application of the **settlements approach in relation to urban response**. Discussions over the course of the morning were framed around four overall questions:

- *What are recent experiences and lessons identified from applying settlement approaches in both rural contexts and cities in crises?*
- *What opportunities exist in these approaches to contribute to the humanitarian-development nexus?*
- *What is the relationship between settlement approaches and traditional humanitarian sectoral interventions? Are they complementary?*
- *What is the way forward with these approaches?*

The following narrative summarises key points as discussed throughout the morning's panel discussions, plenary Q&A and small group discussions, however please note it does not reflect any agency point of view. The outcome of discussions captured here is intended to assist in progressing conversations surround this topic and will practically be informing GSC's USWG work plan.

Settlement Approaches: What is it?

Settlement Approaches, characterised as **socially based, geographically bound, inclusive and multi-sectoral**, have gained traction in recent years among humanitarian aid agencies seeking to provide better responses to crises and conflict and pave the way for recovery.

The increasing application of Settlement Approaches builds on experiences of urban and regional planners working on community renewal through 'area-based initiatives' in poor and vulnerable locations since the 1960s and 1970s. This was reinforced by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's call in 2010 for a "*paradigm shift in humanitarian assistance in urban areas, based on a community-based - rather than - an individual beneficiary approach*". More recently, the Habitat III summit, the Global Alliance for Urban Crises, and strategy papers by OFDA, ECHO, and UNHCR have acknowledged and promoted the application of settlement approaches.

The USWG case study compendium, also launched at the event, collated and analysed over 30 projects utilising the Settlements / Area Based Approach, and demonstrated how these approaches continue to be applied in humanitarian and development initiatives across the globe, often by individual agencies or in relatively isolated pockets of inter-agency initiatives.

What was discussed?

Over the course of the day and through dedicated plenary and small group discussions, various themes arose, as summarised below:

- **Settlement Approaches and traditional humanitarian sectoral interventions:** Applying a settlement approach to response and recovery should be seen to augment the cluster system. Much has been achieved in the past decade and the strengths of the cluster system, with technical sectoral solutions linked directly to operational response is hugely acknowledged. The Settlement approach can and does already exist in complementarity to the cluster system, often at a more localised level. Advocates for this approach are therefore not calling for the end of the cluster system, but rather for the settlement approach to be more readily accepted and applied – to become 'a tool in a toolbox' to be used when appropriate and fit-for-purpose in the given context.



- **Various Area Based coordination modalities:** Noting that area based coordination – when applicable and necessary, has been occurring complementary to traditional cluster or sector coordination, it can take various forms, often operating at a localised level, such as at the ‘sub-hub’ level within the established cluster system. In recent urban crises, Area Based coordination has occurred through:
 - › Assigning a ‘**responsibilised NGO**’ within a given territory to undertake multi-sectoral, ‘socially based and geographically bound’ coordination responsibilities.
 - › **Establishing a multi-cluster initiative** by merging multiple clusters active in a given location to promote more integrated and coordinated multi-sectoral response.
 - › The establishment of, or support to an **area-coordination mechanism, co-convened by municipal authorities and an international aid actor** and actively engaging both national and international partners.
- **The added value of applying a settlements approach:** Participants discussed the various benefits of applying the settlements approach, including:
 - › **The relevance of the settlements approach in urban areas:** Applying a settlements approach, through its principles of socially based, geographically bound, inclusive and multi-sectoral, remains especially applicable in urban contexts, often associated with a strong presence of local authorities and the existence of complex relationships, and whereby specific external interventions have strong impacts on other sectors. As such, interventions must be developed through applying an integrated lens.
 - › **Promoting partnerships between humanitarian actors and local authorities:** Applying a settlements approach in urban contexts often implies (or requires), a strong relationship with counterpart municipal authorities. The settlements approach can act as a catalyst and provide a framework to promote joint leadership between humanitarian/development actors and local authorities.
 - › **Supporting alignment of humanitarian and development priorities:** Wherever possible, through working in close partnership with Local Authorities who are mandated to support those residing within their territory for both immediate needs and long term priorities, applying the settlement approach can provide a useful framework to align both humanitarian and development priorities. For example, this could involve providing humanitarian shelter assistance to IDPs within a given city, whilst working towards the ‘legalization’ of housing of an additional 100,000 long-term IDPs and their integration into municipal services.
- **What are the changes or implications of applying the settlements approach in a humanitarian program? What does this mean for practitioners?** Participants discussed how applying the approach in implementing humanitarian programs could impact how they work, including:
 - › **Understanding that we are intervening in a complex heterogeneous system:** In applying a settlement approach to assessment and profiling in urban contexts, there is a need to shift from *a sole reliance on needs based assessments; identifying who needs what; what do we give to whom?*, to also understand that we are intervening in a complex system, that at the moment you do something, you are changing a dynamic system, the market, the housing market, the way the city operates. Interventions at a city level may also bring impacts at provincial or national levels which also must be considered.
 - › **Design and implement integrated programming:** This conversation should not just be amongst shelter actors. Humanitarians must understand the impacts of single-sector interventions across the entire settlement. Programs should therefore be developed with this understanding, moving away from a ‘siloed’ approach to humanitarian action.
 - › **Significant resource requirements and time investment:** Settlement approach programming, often involving neighbourhood renewal or revitalization, can require significant financial investment at household and broader community levels. Settlement revitalization initiatives also require a significant time investment – ensuring partnership, community governance, contracting and ongoing engagement is created and maintained. Securing relatively large – and securing long term funding remains a difficult task, but also required dedicated advocacy efforts to spectrum of donors.



- › **Utilising urban planning expertise:** Applying this approach requires specific urban planning expertise to ensure humanitarian interventions are designed to meet both immediate needs to contribute to longer term municipal planning strategies and priorities. Expertise needn't be predominantly sourced internationally, but wherever possible utilised through partnerships with local authorities and built environment professionals.

The way forward:

Discussions over the course of the day reaffirmed the relevance of the settlement and area based approach as a useful modality in urban humanitarian response. Ensuring the approach is not forcefully applied - it can add value on the assumption it remains contextually driven. A number of key areas for further work were identified and discussed, including:

- **Demystify and disseminate the settlements approach:** There is a need to demystify and disseminate the approach through clearly articulating the implications of applying a settlements approach to assessment/profiling, coordination and programming. Specifically in relation to coordination, the various modalities and experiences of area based coordination also need to be unpacked. This information needs to be simple, accessible and targeted to humanitarian actors in crises including HCs/RCs, HCTs, clusters and operational entities (UN, NGOs, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement).
- **Support to operationalising the settlements approach:** Leveraging experiences and lessons identified to date, there is a need to support the roll-out of settlement approaches overall.
- **Suggesting this approach as one option within a system wide coordination tool box.** Supporting and championing to mature Area-Based coordination can be achieved through continuing to gather case studies, analysing and disseminating good practice; and through creating a body of experts and community of practice to provide operational support as settlement approaches and where area based coordination is underway.

Over the coming year, the above actions will be taken forward by the GSC Urban Settlements WG, aligning to its 5-year activity plan. Agencies and individuals involved in the WG are welcome to participate in the development and implementation of these actions.

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