



COVID-19 Response and Recovery Strategy for sub-Saharan Africa

(10 April 2020)

A. Contextualisation and justification

Sub-Saharan Africa is the fastest urbanizing region in the world. Most of its urbanization is happening in an unplanned manner as a result of rural-to-urban permanent or seasonal migration of poor populations looking for income opportunities and better access to services, as well as the natural growth of African cities. The COVID-19, which started in Egypt in February 2020, is now affecting 52 out of 55 countries in Africa. This health crisis will most significantly impact on slums and informal settlements in urban areas of Sub Saharan Africa, where the poorest and most vulnerable live. These areas typically feature conditions of overcrowding, limited access to water, sanitation and health facilities, overall lack of hygiene, poor access to reliable electricity, and high dependency on daily income with no or very limited saving capacity.

There is an urgent need to understand that the urban poor of sub-Saharan Africa, representing approx. 70% of the urban population, is already living in fragile and precarious conditions. This health crisis, if not adequately managed, might just trigger an uncontrolled release of accumulated social tensions in major African cities. There is a need to promote mutual understanding and solidarity, leading to improvement of current conditions and social cohesion to reduce or prevent the spread of the COVID 19.

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) has a role to play in this crisis as it has a comprehensive knowledge and expertise on most issues related to urbanisation, and on slums and informal settlements in particular. In this strategy, UN-Habitat proposes actions that can be carried out in the short (1-3 months), medium (4-12 months) and long (after 1 year) term, at three geographical scales: national/central level, city/municipal level and neighbourhood level. This strategy for Africa is aligned with the broader UN-Habitat COVID-19 policy and programmatic framework and the African Joint Continental Strategy for COVID 19 and is anchored to the UN-Habitat Regional Office for Africa. Most proposed actions in this strategy are already integrated in different countries and UNCTs' preparedness and response plans and are planned to be implemented in full collaboration with other UN Agencies, so that UN-Habitat can add its value to on-going initiatives.

B. Country prioritisation

The following criteria were applied to select the focus countries where to implement this strategy:

1. Focus on countries where UN-Habitat has already a presence and on-going projects and that are strategically located vis-à-vis the different regions of the continent, i.e. Eastern, Western, Central and Southern Africa.

2. Focus on countries with on-going crisis (conflict, displacement, etc.) showing various types of vulnerabilities (climate change, financial default, etc.) and high number of slums and informal settlements in urban areas.
3. Focus on countries prioritised in the Global Humanitarian appeal launched on 25 March 2020.
4. Consider countries with higher levels of confirmed cases.

C. General principles and strategic approach

- In line with its global strategy for Covid-19, **positioning UN-Habitat** by supporting a **broader COVID-19 approach to urban areas**, including emergency response to outbreaks in **informal settlements, slums and crowded marketplaces (short-term)**, while looking ahead at recovery (**medium-term**) and developing durable solutions for **longer-term** impact at the different scales (i.e. national, city and neighbourhood scales); **thematic issues** of focus are, among others: awareness raising, access to WASH/health facilities, waste management, mobility and connectivity, food security, sustaining a basic income, energy, data and information management, policy/strategy advice, spatial planning, social cohesion, housing, etc.
- Re-orienting or scaling **existing programmes and projects** and investing **seed funds** in countries where potential arises.
- **Supporting city governments/municipalities** and the **urban poor** as frontline responders and leaders for recovery that builds future resilience, without losing the importance of the **national/central government** dimension especially in terms of policy advice.
- **Coordinating** with central government **as part of the UN system at the country level**, making a clear linkage between the outbreak and the overall urbanisation process.
- Establishing or strengthening **key partnerships** with the national governments, the donors, the academia, the private sector, civil society organisations, implementers, etc.

D. Proposed actions per scale of intervention and timeframe

In the short-term (Month 0 – Month 3): Preparedness and Emergency Response Phase

- At national level
 - Coordination with the UN Country/Humanitarian Team and integration of UN-Habitat activities in proposed emergency plans lead by key UN Agencies (WHO, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, OCHA, etc.)
 - Provision of technical recommendations on how to integrate the urban dimension into emergency response/preparedness instructions issued by central governments, with special focus on informal settlements, WASH, urban mobility and connectivity, energy, food security and marketplaces to curb the spread of the virus (in collaboration with WHO, UNICEF and others).
- At city level
 - Online provision of technical advice to local governments in their lead role in managing and dealing with crisis preparedness and response, e.g. support to continuity of basic services (especially WASH, waste management and energy), health care, food distribution and other critical operations.
 - Provision of online tools (e.g. data collection through network of smartphones/tablets distributed in the city) for mapping the spatial spread of the virus in the city in real time.

- Establishment of early warning/alert systems to timely reach the population through SMS/WhatsApp messages.
 - Identification of critical areas in the city where to work with water and sanitation operators to provide free water and handwashing facilities and disseminate key awareness raising messages, e.g. bus terminals, markets, churches/mosques, etc., to boost hygiene and sanitation.
 - Identification of buildings that can be repurposed for emergency care or self-isolation.
- At informal settlement level
- Under the leadership of city authorities, assignment of clear responsibilities at community level and establishment of communication channels/mechanisms with local authorities; this will include the appointment of responsible community members to identify the most vulnerable, promote local solidarity, supervise the implementation of control measures, ensure two-way communication with communities, etc.
 - Working with civil society organizations and community leaders to organise for water distribution, mobile toilets, waste collection and cleaning campaigns, improvement of hygiene conditions e.g. soap distribution, disinfection, etc. (in collaboration with UNICEF, WHO, SDI, WaterAid, etc.).
 - Organisation of mini-cash transfer (e.g. through mobile money systems like Mpesa) and food distribution in times of crisis/forced confinement (in collaboration with WFP).
 - Radio and megaphone distribution for improving community communication and ensure local & regular awareness-raising while being confined; this will include the dissemination of preparedness, response and solidarity messages (in collaboration with UNICEF, WHO, SDI, WaterAid, etc.).
 - Coordination of waste collection groups and provision of personal protective equipment along with guidelines to safely support municipal waste collection services.

In the medium-term (Month 4 – Month 12): Resilient Recovery Phase

- At national level
- Secondment of experts to key central government institutions for policy advice on urban-related aspects of COVID-19; particular attention needs to be paid to the price stability of food items and basic goods in times of crisis (in collaboration with other UN Agencies).
 - Preparation of a comprehensive socio-economic analysis of the impacts of COVID 19 and development of policy measures to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19 on mortgage and rent payments and the risks of evictions (in collaboration with other UN Agencies).
 - Work with national local government associations for enhancing communication between municipalities, dissemination of key messages/measures and city-to-city support/exchange of lessons learned/best practices.
- At city level
- Secondment of experts to city governments to support crisis response and resilient recovery, including set up of proper mapping and monitoring systems in the city.
 - Rapid urban profiling and action planning for resilient recovery and preparedness enhancement, promoting an area-based/neighbourhood approach.

- Development of bankable projects for implementing key priority investments/actions and support to resource mobilisation through community contributions/assets, private sector involvement, financing institutions, central government, donors or other partners.
 - Support to public transport operators for enabling sanitised/hygienic transport services, dissemination of awareness messages, social distancing measures, etc.
 - Identification of alternatives to public transit through opening streets up to pedestrians and cyclists.
 - Promotion of urban agriculture initiatives to increase food security/supply in the city (in collaboration with FAO).
 - Provision of critical recommendations for waste management (including using digital technology) and energy savings/efficiency in buildings.
- At informal settlement level
- Through participatory planning approach, design of a basic street layout to improve the connectivity within the neighbourhood to create “minimum distancing” between the different parts of the targeted informal settlement and to lay down the main infrastructure (water pipes, electricity network, etc.).
 - Improvement of access to clean water through installation of water standpipes and/or establishment of water distribution systems (in collaboration with UNICEF, WaterAid, etc.).
 - Organisation of regular waste collection and neighbourhood cleaning activities; improvement of overall hygiene conditions e.g. soap distribution, disinfection, etc. (in collaboration with UNICEF, WaterAid, etc.).
 - Access to better health care services in targeted informal settlements (in collaboration with WHO).
 - Piloting urban agriculture in suitable sites, as well as rotational systems to access marketplaces to avoid overcrowding (in collaboration with FAO and WFP).
 - Construction of public toilets/lavatories with strict management rules to ensure proper use and adequate hygienic conditions at all times, including social distancing (in collaboration with UNICEF, WaterAid, etc.).
 - Construction of well-designed and managed public spaces, including natural ventilation systems in the neighbourhood.
 - Provision of alternative energy systems/solutions, including off-grid (solar, etc.), to ensure continuity of energy supply, clean energy systems for lighting, cooking and productive uses, and possibility to charge phones, radios, etc.
 - Development of on-line educational materials for school children, with emphasis on public health (in collaboration with ILO, UNESCO and UNICEF).
 - Distribution of smart phones in targeted/vulnerable household to improve access to internet; support access to data bundles.
 - On-line vocational training and support for job seekers and advice for alternative income-generation activities, with focus on youth and women (in collaboration with ILO).
 - Continuing on-site/on-line awareness raising on public health, including implementation of specific activities for addressing gender issues, including home-based violence (SOS hotline), social activities for women, spaces for children’s dialogues & activities (in collaboration with UNICEF, UN-Women, UNFPA, etc.).

In the longer-term (Year 2 and Year 3): Sustainability Phase – ensuring durable change to prevent/mitigate future health crisis

- Development of policy measures to decentralise further essential services/functions at city and even neighbourhood level, to avoid excessive dependency from national institutions.
- Development of national guidelines/norms on urban planning & design as well as construction standards (incl. green building/urban development strategies) to support an all-risk approach that can mitigate the impact of future pandemics alongside existing risk management approaches and strategies.
- Development of national strategies to protect natural ecosystems in and around cities to avoid the repetition of viruses migrating from animals to humans in the future and support local implementation through pilot initiatives. This can also be seen from a food security perspective to reduce dependency on external/global supply chains.
- Development of integrated research on urban health systems and solutions, as well as data analysis to identify new ways of living, working & consuming in African cities. Basic data on health surveillance, on the impact of everyday and large disasters from traffic accidents to flooding. Consider integrating health surveillance, natural hazard early warning and social vulnerability (from population census, community-based data collection or remotely sensed data)
- Re-thinking of municipal finance in times of crisis (municipal tax breaks or delays in payments for local businesses, mini-cash transfers to vulnerable populations, etc.).
- Design of air quality monitoring systems to collect data on air pollution, sound and CO₂ emissions for timely intervention.
- Dissemination of social and technological innovations aimed at reducing the spread of COVID 19