Guest Column: by Robert Glasser
Towards implementation of the 2030 agenda at local level

The New Urban Agenda to be adopted at Habitat III, along with its sister agreements that form the 2030 Development Agenda – the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate change – set out the ambition needed to meet the challenges of our world. The issues addressed are deeply inter-related. Without disaster risk reduction, sustainable development is impossible, just as climate change must be addressed through actions that are synchronized with disaster risk reduction, so as not to undermine the achievement of mutual goals.

Implementation of the Paris Agreement cannot come soon enough. We are repeatedly witnessing record-breaking temperatures, and other tangible impacts of increasingly frequent and intense hazards. Recorded disaster events in the past decade, of which 90% have been climate-related, have affected almost two billion people and cost the global economy trillions of dollars. The world has learned the hard way that assumptions about what creates hazard have to be constantly assessed and revised in line with the pace of social and economic development. We must become transformative in our approaches in order to reduce the increasingly complex disaster risks of today. These approaches also need to consider the strain placed on the humanitarian assistance system by conflicts which have cost countries lives and triggered the largest forced displacement of people since the end of the Second World War.

If it is to be done well, disaster risk reduction requires coordination and the full engagement of all state institutions at national and local levels. A key target of the Sendai Framework is therefore to increase the number of countries with local and national disaster risk management plans, in order to avoid the creation of new risk by promoting compliance with building codes, proper land use, environmental protection and poverty reduction. Local government is on the sharp end of disaster risk, and has key knowledge which needs to be shared.

With that in mind, the extension of UNISDR’s Making Cities Resilient Campaign to 2020 is key to achieving the targets of the Sendai Framework. Launched in 2010, the campaign has grown into a network of over 3,300 cities, towns and local governments, making it the globe’s largest association of local government partnerships. Members are committed to implementing the Ten Essentials for making cities resilient, based upon the Sendai Framework, as well as indicators of many other parts of the 2030 Agenda, most notably Sustainable Development Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities.

The ambition now is to increase the membership to 5,000 by 2020, and to have at least 500 local strategies developed. The campaign, and its Steering Committee now chaired by UN Habitat’s Urban Resilience team, together with its partners will assist these cities in formulating their local strategies through application of the Ten Essentials, thereby boosting the implementation of the Sendai Framework, but also the entire 2030 Agenda, given that all 17 Sustainable Development Goals are affected by disaster risk. The reduction of risks posed by natural and man-made hazards will be critical to keep cities around the globe on a sustainable development track.

The Sendai Framework was endorsed in March, 2015, by all UN Member States. It aims to reduce mortality, numbers of people affected, economic losses and damage to critical infrastructure from environmental, biological and technological hazards, through to 2030 and beyond. The world needs to embrace the Sendai Framework. More than anything, this means continuing to shift the emphasis from managing disasters to managing the risks that are driving them. Lives and economic assets saved and protected prove that investment in disaster risk reduction is cost-effective as well as having many quality of life co-benefits thanks to its implementation.

The sheer depth and breadth of the 2030 Agenda presents various challenges, notably to local governments in their understanding and implementation of the various agreements. The New Urban Agenda, being the last to be adopted, marks a unique opportunity to build meaningful coherence between them. Their common goals lessen the challenge and allow for mutual implementation to be more easily manageable at the local level. If we are successful, we can expect to see a new wave of momentum to implement the 2030 Agenda by countries at all levels.
UN-Habitat and the City Resilience Profiling Programme (CRPP)

The CRPP goes beyond conventional approaches to promote urban resilience and addresses multi-scale, multi-sectoral, multi-hazard, multi-stakeholder model for building resilience that recognizes human settlements and urban areas as the ‘emerging systems of cities and the inherent interdependencies of each component’ (UN-Habitat and ICLEI, 2014). During the HABITAT III conference, UN-Habitat’s global Urban Resilience Programme included the CRPP as its analytic approach to transforming urban planning, development and governance to build resilient human settlements, as well as its normative work on: network stewardship, including as recently announced the Charter of the UN-Habitat Making Cities Resilience Campaign Steering Committee; standards development with UN and ISO partners; an applied research platform embedding the Urban Resilience Research Network and other operational projects with partner cities and countries.

As the main UN agency responsible for ensuring the sustainable development of human settlements, UN-Habitat is strategically placed to coordinate the humanitarian and development efforts of multiple actors and policy makers at all levels in the common pursuit of urban resilience. This is strengthened this year with the launching of the 2014 – 2016 Urban Resilience Institute (URI) - “A global centre of excellence to advance the resilience agenda.” The URI will further improve the capacity of local authorities to: deliver preparedness and response in the face of shocks; develop skills, knowledge and competencies required to lead urban resilience; and promote urban resilience in policy making and city planning.

Global Alliance for Urban Crisis launched during the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul

The Global Alliance for Urban Crisis was launched during the World Humanitarian Summit in a Special Session convened by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the Mayor of Medellín, Colombia, Oscar M. Duarte, who prompted participants with the question: “How do we achieve urban resilience?” David Murrell, President and CEO of the International Rescue Committee, responded with: “We need a different kind of aid system. 60% of refugees are now in urban areas, creating new challenges in how to protect vulnerable people and providing opportunities for new partnerships and strategies.”

During the World Humanitarian Summit Special Session for the Global Alliance for Urban Crisis, cities, actors and humanitarian leaders discussed the following:

- Tailoring humanitarian response to the urban context by developing shared assessment and profiling tools, promoting joint analysis, and adapting coordination mechanisms;
- Developing or working with existing global, regional and national rosters to facilitate the deployment of urban leaders, managers and technical experts;
- Building the evidence base on the specific characteristics of protracted displacement in urban areas, and contributing to the design of appropriate and cost-effective responses, with particular regard to protection of vulnerable people, shelter, basic services and infrastructure, and;
- Ensuring that initiatives focused on building urban resilience incorporate components on resilient response and recovery from crises, and that they leverage greatest impact in cities most at risk of humanitarian emergencies.

Initiatives towards these areas are currently underway, as the Alliance is formalized. For more information on the Alliance, please visit: urbanresilience.org

UN-Habitat and UfM join forces to promote sustainable urban development in the Mediterranean

UN-Habitat Executive Director Dr Joan Clos and UfM Deputy Secretary-General for Transport and Urban Development Ambassador Yigit Alapogan signed a Memorandum of Understanding to undertake joint actions for an integrated approach to socially and environmentally sustainable urban development.

Both parties agreed to find common responses to the pressing challenges facing urban areas in the Mediterranean region and have identified several areas of cooperation with special regard to water management, risk reduction and resilience.

The effects of climate change and the phenomenal shift towards urbanisation – 6 out of every 10 people in the world are expected to reside in urban areas by 2030 – are already being felt and are bound to intensify in the coming years. There is thus a need to mobilise all actors, national governments, local authorities, academia, businesses and citizens, to ensure that the growth of cities and urban areas is turned into opportunities, said UfM Secretary-General Ambassador Yigit Alapogan.

“Urbanization presents a unique opportunity, but also a critical challenge,” said UN-Habitat Executive Director Dr Joan Clos. “The UfM has a critical role in furthering these goals in the Mediterranean region.”

UN Residence Department Secretary General Alapogan said: “The Mediterranean region is in the middle of a long transformation linked to population growth, widespread urbanisation and deep changes in its political, social and economic model. This transformation is particularly felt in its cities, which are also confronted with new environmental impacts. In response to these challenges, and with the ultimate aim of improving the livelihood of Mediterranean urban populations, the Alliance has committed to promoting sustainable urban development in the region following an integrated and cooperative approach, as well as regionally-applicable solutions, focusing on youth as a key driver for stability in the region.”

Smart City Expo World congress

From 15-17 November the sixth edition of the Smart City Expo World Congress (SC EXPO) will take place. It is considered to be one of the most important global meetings on urban innovation and CRPP once again will be contributing to developing and engaging city representatives and private sector companies interested in the UfM’s work on urban resilience.

As agreed in previous meetings, UN-Habitat, through its City Resilience Profiling Programme (CRPP), teamed up with the organizers of the SC EXPO to ensure that a focus on resilient and sustainable human settlements will also be included in this edition.

In this regard, CRPP will gather together panellists to discuss urban innovation, Smart Cities, Risk Reduction and Resilience, UN-Habitat under the SDGs Technology infrastructure, UN-Habitat early this year joined the RESCCUE project

The RESCCUE project launched in May 2016 (‘Resilience in Cities and Urban Areas — a multi-sectoral approach focusing on water’) aims to provide practical and innovative models and tools to end-users facing climate change challenges to build more resilient cities.

Funded through the EC Horizon 2020 programme, the project will provide tools to assess urban resilience from a multi-sectoral approach, for current and future climate scenarios and including multiple hazards.

This holistic approach to urban resilience will enable city managers and urban systems operators to decide the optimal investments to cope with future shocks and stresses.

RESCCUE is a 48-month duration project built around three research sites Barcelona, Lisbon, Bristol, and led by a consortium of 16 partners led by Anagrow, Swed Water Advanced Solutions.

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During the World Humanitarian Summit Special Session for the Global Alliance for Urban Crisis, actor and humanitarian Sean Penn stressed the importance of preparedness towards resilience in crisis response. “It’s always too late in a disaster,” he said, “but our job is to better prepare, further iterating the importance of including local authorities in crises and preparedness.” Penn emphasized, “It’s all in the way things are discussed ahead of time…to get the job done and responded to.”

Toward the Urban Resilience Institute: aligning theories and practices for a more sustainable and resilient urban future

City resilience and its practices have been emerging from disaster recovery, responses and climate adaptations through local, regional and international actions. Built on a range of existing expertise and knowledge from engineering to risk management, urban resilience is increasingly fed by different disciplines and theories in order to provide an integrated view of urban challenges. The need of a more comprehensive and multi-disciplinary framing of urban resilience, in the whole defined by practices, is becoming a necessary governance mindset for advancing toward a more resilient and sustainable urban future.

UN CRPP has been working on this necessary alignment challenge with partners (Cornell, National University of Singapore, RMET, TU-Darmstadt, Gran Sasso Science Institute, Polytechnic of Catalonia and International University of Catalunya) and international networks like RESURBE and the Urban Resilience Research Network. The common effort is leading to a forthcoming global platform to be named Urban Resilience Institute (URI), which mission will be to strengthen the nexus among urban resilience research, practices and policies. In the light of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda call for integrating resilience, sustainability and a more equitable pattern of urban development, the URI will support the integration of different multifaceted frameworks and urban management guiding principles, bridging the need of decoupling urban and people vulnerability to disasters (Sendai Risk Reduction 2015-2030) while enhancing urban sustainability and infrastructures retrofitting (City-Level Deepening). City Resilience Profiling Programme (CRPP) achievements were presented and the pathway to the official launching of URI in early 2017 will be illustrated during the HABITAT III Conference.

Highlights from the Barcelona Resilience Week 16 and next edition

From 14-18 March 2016-UN-Habitat’s City Resilience Profiling Programme, the City Council of Barcelona and ICRU Urban Resilience Partnership hosted the Barcelona Resilience Week, a global platform for discussion and learning between leading cities and companies working to build more resilient communities all over the world.

More than 370 registrations, over 100 speakers and over 50 cities attended and were represented with the aim to give voice to and connect cities, while providing the opportunity to learn about ground-breaking resilience topics, share and exchange experiences and best practices and gain practical knowledge.

Moreover last year’s event was organized in High-level panels discussions, parallel sessions, side events, side visits and networking space which offered attendees opportunities to create new contacts.

Additionally to that major current affairs related to resilience such as the topic of migration was analysed in different sessions with the highlight of the participation of the Mayor of Barcelona and the Mayor of Athens. Stayed tune to City Resilience and Facebook.com/cityresilience for more details of the next edition.

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