From Refugee Camps to Urban Slums:  
Tackling Humanitarian Crises in Urban Areas

UN-Habitat/Concern Kenya/World Bank

Background

More than half of the world’s internally displaced people (IDPs) live outside of camps – many of these people have found refuge in existing urban communities alongside the urban poor, refugees and migrants. The majority of these are women and children, who often stay in makeshift shelters, are exposed to violence, and struggle to access basic services, education and employment, notably due to their lack of personal documentation. In addition, the increasing urban population living in fragile states, characterized by political instability and social inequality, and often of protracted nature, is outpacing communities’ and institutions’ capacity to provide basic services and protect people from major shocks and chronic stresses they face.

Today some 15 per cent of the world population lives in fragile and conflict-affected countries. By 2050, it is expected that more than half (56%) of those living in fragile states will reside in cities. The urban growth rate in these areas is exacerbating vulnerabilities and bringing more pressure to bear on urban basic services, social cohesion, and the capacity of public institutions to respond to people's needs. The impacts of natural and man-made shocks, including climate change, could likely lead to further displacement and instability in these areas, inhibiting development gains and perpetuating the crisis-response-crisis cycle.

As such, there is increasing recognition from development and humanitarian actors alike to reshape action and assistance in urban areas so that it takes into account these shifting dynamics alongside the complexity of cities (spatial, social, political, cultural, environmental, economic), maximises the effectiveness of interventions, and builds on the capabilities and opportunities present in cities (including through the use of technology), to prevent the rebuilding of vulnerability and secure sustainable urban development.
Reflecting on urban development patterns around the world, this session will include an emphasis on local/national examples of the increasing humanitarian challenge in urban areas. A practical 'case study' will be given by local and national government representatives from Kenya. As of 2013, Kenya hosted approximately 600,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. As of January 2013, 56,000 asylum seekers and refugees were registered with UNHCR in Nairobi and other urban centres in Kenya.

Many refugees arriving from their country of origin decide to settle directly in urban areas without stopping in any the refugee camp. Due to the high living costs in the inner city of Nairobi, refugees are increasingly moving to the peripheral areas of the city living in informal settlements.

**Purpose**

This event is critically linked to the core mandate of UN-Habitat to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. UN-Habitat's work in this area is further led by the poverty reduction and access to basic services targets set by the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

The 2015 Sustainable Development Goals will give more impetus to scaling up efforts that consider new challenges, such as the growing populations of urban refugees and IDPs. In this way, this event is fully in line with the theme of the 25th session of the Governing Council, Leading Sustainable Development.

**Organizers**

This event will be presented in conjunction with organisations such as Concern Kenya, World Food Programme, World Bank, IRC, and USAID.

**Contact**

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