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Humanitarian challenges of urbanization

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Abstract

More than one billion people nowadays live as slum-dwellers in informal settlements characterized by vulnerability and poverty. The 'normal' situation in slums can, in several ways, be classified as a 'crisis', and violence levels often contribute to situations akin to 'armed conflict'. The plight of these people should be the concern of humanitarian organizations, which should consequently widen their spectrum and address vulnerability to disasters and to violence as mutually reinforcing. Applying the 'human security' framework and 'livelihoods' approach can enable them to take a proactive role. However, particularly for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, a greater involvement also poses several challenges.

An urban world

About three years ago, sometime during 2007, the world passed a largely unnoticed yet significant tipping point: since that time, and for the first time in history, more than half of the world's population has been living in urban areas.[1] Rural-to-urban migration, together with the natural population growth of cities, constitutes an

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urbanization trend that has since accelerated its pace. City growth is mainly driven by economic development and is characterized by a shift away from a predominantly agrarian-oriented economy to one that is dominated by the industrial and service sector in terms of the country's GDP and workforce.

Cities are sites of great progress and prosperity in many areas, bringing wealth and opportunities to many of their citizens. However, they are also home to less advantaged groups, whose lives are characterized by poverty and a near absence of opportunities for improvement. Their vulnerability is generally greater, as they are more exposed to and affected by (the risk of) natural disasters and forms of urban violence than the more affluent sections of the cities. Moreover, these vulnerabilities are chronic and increasingly severe. As such, they are a concern for humanitarian organizations as well as for development organizations.

The dual face of cities

According to the United Nations, it is expected that in two decades from now the percentage of the world urban population will have reached 60%, representing almost five billion people.[2] This huge rise in the level of urbanization is most visible in the growth of the biggest cities. In 1950, only one city – New York – could be classified as a 'mega-city', with more than ten million inhabitants. The scene has now changed dramatically. In 1975, the world had three mega-cities, in 2000 the number had risen to seventeen, and in 2025 there are expected to be twenty-six, some of them attaining the status of 'meta-city' with more than twenty million inhabitants. The geographical distribution of this increase has been uneven: a closer look reveals that the growth in number and size is concentrated almost entirely in the 'global south'. At present (2010), there are nineteen mega-cities, of which thirteen are situated in the global south, in countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.[3] Staggering though the figures may be, these large cities are home to only 4% of the world's population.[4] Small and intermediate cities, with up to five million inhabitants, will continue to absorb most of the global urban population over the coming decades.[5]

The opportunities and progress that cities provide act as a magnet for many who aspire to reap the benefits. Millions of people are drawn by the prospect of a better life, in which they can share in the opportunities that the city offers. Economic prospects are the most important factor underlying urban

1 UN-HABITAT, *State of the World's Cities 2006/2007 – The Millennium Development Goals and Urban Sustainability: 30 Years of Shaping the Habitat Agenda*, UN-HABITAT/Earthscan, Nairobi, 2006, p. iv.
2 UN-HABITAT, *Global Report on Human Settlements 2007: Enhancing Urban Safety and Security*, UN-HABITAT/Earthscan, Nairobi, 2007, Table B2, p. 348.
3 These thirteen include cities in China (Beijing and Shanghai). See UN-HABITAT, *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011: Cities for All: Bridging the Urban Divide*, UN-HABITAT/Earthscan, Nairobi, 2010, pp. 166–176.
4 UN-HABITAT, *State of the World's Cities 2006/2007*, above note 1, p. 6.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

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influx.[6] In many cases the rural-to-urban flow is stimulated by the dire situation in rural areas, where poverty and lack of progress drive people out of their habitat. As it is often the younger people who look for new opportunities, these push-and-pull trends in many cases create a vicious circle that leads to even greater rural deprivation. At the same time many city dwellers, in their struggle to seize urban opportunities, become and remain trapped in a vicious circle of poverty and vulnerability, and their deprivation can in fact be worse than in rural areas.[7] The contrast between wealth and poverty in cities is generally considerable, and, as such, an indication of the fact that cities are sites of progress as well as destitution.

Cities as sites of progress

What all cities have in common is the fact that they concentrate power. First, economic power: in comparison to their share of the country's total population and the built-up area, the contribution of cities to the national GDP is usually disproportionately large. In Thailand, for example, the city of Bangkok contributes more than one-third (36.3%) to the country's GDP while containing only 10% of the country's population.[8] Fifteen of the nineteen current mega-cities in the world are situated in coastal areas or along rivers that facilitate trade and transportation.[9] The great number of people in cities also provides a large and concentrated consumer market to cater for, with considerable opportunities of scale. Secondly, cities provide financial power, holding banks, insurance companies, and stock exchanges. Supported by communication networks, these cities are indispensable nodes in international financial flows. Thirdly, cities hold political power: capital cities are the residence of the state's central government in practically every country, while other major cities often serve as the location for sub-state governments. Large-scale protests and revolutionary uprisings therefore often originate and culminate in major cities. Finally, cities are the locus of social and cultural change. Within the social domain, the opportunity for relative anonymity and the presence of people with similar attitudes and opinions outside people's kinship groups and traditional social networks give rise to dynamics that stimulate new and modern thinking and expression. Artists and intellectuals, and also gay communities, usually emerge and flourish in cities. For social and economical development, the presence of strong, vibrant cities is crucial.

6 David Satterthwaite, *The Transition to a Predominantly Urban World and its Underpinnings*, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London, 2007, p. 28.

7 James Rice and Julie Steinkopf Rice, 'The concentration of disadvantage and the rise of urban penalty: urban slum prevalence and the social production of health inequalities in the developing countries', in *International Journal of Health Services*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 2009, pp. 749–770.

8 Shahid Yusuf, Kaoru Nabeshima, *Post-industrial East Asian Cities: Innovation for Growth*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2006, p. 75.

9 UN-HABITAT, *State of the World's Cities 2010/2011*, above note 3, pp. 166–176.

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Cities as sites of destitution

Within most cities, the image of progression is offset by the presence and growth of areas with a high concentration of poverty and destitution. The rural-to-urban migration is largely made up of people with low education and limited financial means. They therefore usually have no other option than to live in informal settlements, characterized by a lack of basic infrastructure and absence of services. These urban areas are conspicuous in many cities around the world, as the various references to them indicate – the Brazilian *favelas*, the American 'ghetto', the Indian *shawls*, the Turkish *gacekondu*. What all these areas have in common is that they are the locus for concentrated poverty and corresponding vulnerability, and that their inhabitants are exposed to multiple hazards and violence. A generally applied label is 'slum', particularly when referring to the destitute face of these areas.

As a manifestation of the spectacular growth of slums, it is important to notice that, around the same time as the world turned urban, another milestone was reached: in 2007, it was estimated by the United Nations that the number of people living in slums had passed the one billion mark. More than 90% of slums are located in the global south, where urbanization has become virtually synonymous with slum growth. This is also expected to accelerate: in ten years from now, cities will be home to 1.4 billion slum-dwellers.[10] The presence and rapid growth of slums underlines that they cannot be considered an unfortunate by-product of urbanization that will disappear as cities develop and the incomes of their inhabitants improve. Instead, it needs to be addressed as a development issue. This view is echoed by the Millennium Development Goals, of which Goal 7, Target 4, is stated as being: 'by 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers'.[11]

The growth figures should, however, be regarded with some caution. The United Nations defines a slum household as a group of individuals living under the same roof in an urban area who lack one or more of the following conditions: durable housing, sufficient living area, access to improved water and to sanitation, and secure tenure.[12] Although these conditions provide general indications, culturally and normatively they may be interpreted differently across countries and populations. The classification of an urban flood can vary widely: a few inches of water may be considered a nuisance in a developing country (even though it may have an impact on socio-economic activities) but a disaster in a developed country – hence the notion of 'hazardous area' has multiple interpretations.

Yet it is clear that slum-dwellers make up the poorer parts of cities, where their vulnerabilities and capacities are exposed to disaster risk both more frequently and to a greater degree of intensity, and where they experience more violence and insecurity than in the cities' more affluent parts. As sites of increased

10 UN-HABITAT, *State of the World's Cities 2006/2007*, above note 1, p. 13.
11 Millennium Development Goals, Goal 7, Target 4, available at: http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/environ.shtml (last visited 30 June 2010).
12 UN-HABITAT, *State of the World's Cities 2006/2007*, above note 1, p. 21.

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destitution, the slums of large cities of the global south deserve to be the focus of increased attention from both humanitarian and development organizations, for the line between them is blurring and allowing new insight into what constitutes a crisis. In view of the large concentration of people and the vicious circles of poverty, marginalization, and vulnerability, the fast-growing cities in the global south must be the focus if many of the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved.

The functions of slums

Despite the above-listed vulnerabilities, correlating and interlinked with poverty, the slum areas also perform important functions for cities and, moreover, for the economic progress and social stability of countries. They provide accommodation for low-cost labour – economic development and slum growth are mutually reinforcing. Furthermore, the make-up of slums, often reflecting the ethnic, religious, and/or cultural background of their inhabitants, provides a network that can in normal circumstances, as well as in times of crisis, absorb migrant influx[13] and mass movements of displaced people, for whom the city functions as a safe haven.[14] According to UNHCR, as many as 50% of the world's 10.5 million refugees under its mandate are now living in cities, and at least twice that number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees are believed to be in urban settings.[15]

Both the absence of power and the opportunities for mobilizing it can benefit (local or national) governments or political movements, either by allowing them to neglect protests in cases of evictions, or by rallying electoral support: for example, through slum-upgrading projects.[16] Finally, since the need of the rapidly increasing urban population for income outpaces the capacity of most urban economies in developing countries to meet more than a fraction of these needs, the informal sector is providing most of the new employment.[17] It contributes to productivity and income, and thereby also serves the formal sector.

13 Vedia Dökmeci, Gulsun Saglamer, Attila Dikbas, and Nevnihal Erdogan, 'Socioenvironmental determinants of social interactions in a squatter settlement in Istanbul', in *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1996, pp. 329–336.

14 Examples from Somalia (see UN-HABITAT, 'Emergency assistance for resettlement of returnees and IDPs', available at: http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?cid=7156&catid=334&typeid=13&subMenuId=0 (last visited 30 June 2010)) and Pakistan (see Adeel Pathan, 'Complete shutter down against IDPs influx into Sindh', in *The News International*, 24 May 2009, available at: http://www.thenews.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=179180 (last visited 30 June 2010)) indicate that an influx of IDPs can be so great that it even overwhelms a city's capacity to absorb and provide services, and consequently contributes to social tensions with traditional urban residents.

15 See Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Media advisory: half of the world's refugees now live in cities', 7 December 2009, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/4b1cda0e9.html (last visited 30 June 2010).

16 Ann Varley, 'The political uses of illegality: evidence from urban Mexico', in Edésio Fernandes and Ann Varley (eds), *Illegal Cities: Law and Urban Change in Developing Countries*, Zed Books, London, 1998, pp. 172–190.

17 While industrialization in Latin America during the era of import substitution (1940s–1970s) has led to a decrease in informal employment (from 29% in 1940 to 21% in 1970) (see Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*,

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Characterizing urban areas in the global south: human security

Disasters, violence, and development in a Red Cross/Red Crescent approach to urbanization

When assessing needs, opportunities, and threats in urban centres, different agencies choose different aspects to focus on according to their own special interests, such as poverty reduction, political empowerment, or health promotion. The course adopted by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, particularly in times of emergencies or armed conflict, is based on protecting life and health and strengthening the resilience of people.[18] In addition, National Societies seek to promote human dignity and peace by helping to reduce violence and bring about a peaceful reconciliation of social differences.[19] A Red Cross/Red Crescent approach to urbanization should therefore take these considerations into account.

The two central elements – exposure to disaster risk and to violence – are treated as separate threats: *disasters* are generally regarded as extraneous events which are to be dealt with largely by means of pre-determined and pre-described actions based on standard approaches and mainly of a technocratic nature. Trained staff and volunteers, pre-positioned stocks and equipment, standardized vulnerability checklists and response manuals underpin this approach. *Violence*, on the other hand, is assessed in terms of sociological processes impacting on individual behaviour and group dynamics, which require flexible, tailor-made interventions largely of a sociological nature. However, a closer look at the underlying factors and the particular dynamics that constitute and shape vulnerability to disasters and to violence reveals that both areas are more closely (inter)related than is often assumed, particularly in an urban context. As will be explained in the section

Verso, London, 2006, p. 176), the informal economy currently employs 57% of the workforce and supplies four out of five new jobs (see UN-HABITAT, *Global Report on Human Settlements 2009: Planning Sustainable Cities*, UN-HABITAT/Earthscan, Nairobi, 2009, p. 6). In most sub-Saharan cities, formal job creation has virtually ceased to exist: informal employment will have to absorb 90% of urban Africa's new workers over the next decade (UN-HABITAT, *Global Report on Human Settlements 2003: The Challenge of Slums*, UN-HABITAT/Earthscan, Nairobi, 2003, p. 104).

18 Mission as stated in the *Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*, adopted by the 25th International Conference of the Red Cross at Geneva in 1986, amended in 1995 and 2006, Preamble, available at: http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/statutes-movement–220506?opendocument (last visited 30 June 2010): '… to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, to protect life and health and ensure respect for the human being, in particular in times of armed conflict and other emergencies, to work for the prevention of disease and for the promotion of health and social welfare, to encourage voluntary service and a constant readiness to give help by the members of the Movement, and a universal sense of solidarity towards all those in need of its protection and assistance'.

19 See International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), *Strategy 2020: … saving lives, changing minds*, adopted by the 17th session of the General Assembly, Nairobi, 18–21 November 2009, pp. 7–8, vision statement, based on Article 4 of its Constitution: 'To inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world'.

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'Enhancing human security to reduce disaster risk and decrease violence' below, the concept of human security, while complementary to state security, places greater emphasis on the security of people. As such it provides a useful framework by linking disasters, violence and development.

Disaster risk and development

Hazard events like drought, excessive rain or earthquakes do not discriminate: apart from the fact that their occurrence may depend on geographical location, rich and poor communities are equally exposed. However, the spatial divide between the richer and poorer parts of a city usually correlates with their resilience. The poor inhabitants often live in areas that are more disaster-prone, and they usually have fewer means to protect themselves. Hence, slum areas are particularly vulnerable to disasters.

Unregulated urbanization creates and increases vulnerability. As migrants from outside move in to the already overcrowded city, this results in land pressures. Consequently, vast numbers of new arrivals have little alternative but to occupy unsafe land and construct unsafe houses. The inability to own property obstructs access to capital and thus the ability to generate income that can be applied to strengthen (physical and economic) resilience.[20] Slum-dwellers often engage in dangerous, dirty, and demanding work, particularly in the unregulated informal economy. Many factors further erode their resilience: lack of waste-disposal facilities contributes to unhealthy living conditions, while insufficient employment opportunities contribute to low income levels, malnutrition, and low education enrolment.[21] The density of the built environment makes slums often virtually inaccessible for disaster response equipment. The areas generally also lack the institutional and legal framework that guarantees co-ordination of speedy and efficient disaster response. In this respect, the Hyogo Framework for Action, which aims to build and strengthen national and local disaster resilience, addresses the need for appropriate land-use planning and technical measures in quickly urbanizing settlements, particularly in relation to informal or non-permanent

20 See Hernando de Soto, *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else*, Basic Books, New York, 2000, pp. 5–6, advocating land titling as a solution to create assets for the poor. The desire of the poor to upgrade their houses contributes to the property's economic value, making it more attractive for renting or selling, and consequently strengthens people's economic resilience (besides the fact that more robust houses also decrease vulnerability to disaster risk). Homeowners become eligible for small-scale loans, and capital is supplied to micro-entrepreneurs, who create jobs and contribute to economic growth. For researchers questioning the economic benefit of land titling, see, for instance, M. Davis, above note 17, pp. 79–81, who points out that titling is also a way for governments to incorporate slum-dwellers into the tax base, which counterbalances the benefits of ownership. As most slum-dwellers are tenants, they will be confronted with rising rents so that the landowners can pay these taxes. It thus effectively contributes to vertical social differentiation and undermines solidarity.

21 Ben Wisner, Piers Blaikie, Terry Cannon, and Ian Davis, *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters*, 2nd edn, Routledge, London, 2004, p. 70.

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housing.[22] Furthermore, the International Federation's initiative to promote a new branch of law, International Disaster Response Law (IDRL), aims to increase awareness among governments and other stakeholders to improve, where necessary, the underdeveloped legal framework and institutional basis for disaster response. Although it primarily focuses on provisions for international assistance, it also provides guidelines for governments to develop an appropriate legal framework for disaster situations, which is inclusive of domestic civil society and empowers communities to enhance their own safety and resilience.[23]

Although poverty is not synonymous with vulnerability to disasters, it is clear that the two are closely related: vulnerability is greatest in places where people lack the means to protect themselves against the impacts of disasters that in turn affect people's ability to sustain their livelihoods and consequently keep them poor. Therefore, in terms of disaster risk, vulnerability sustains poverty and poverty breeds vulnerability. At the same time, poverty is also the outcome of failing development: people are poor because they suffer from specific relationships of exploitation, unequal bargaining, and discrimination within their society, and there may also be historical reasons why their homes and sources of livelihood are located in resource-poor areas. In addition, irresponsible economic development creates hazards such as pollution, land degradation, and dangerous living and working conditions. It thus accentuates vulnerability to disasters and contributes to poverty. Finally, the increase in frequency and intensity of extreme weather as a result of climate change, as well as its negative impacts on ecosystems, further contributes to increased exposure of people's livelihoods to disaster risk.

Violence and development

The spatial divide of many large cities is characterized not only by exposure to disaster risk but also by exposure to violence. In this regard, too, the poorer sections are the most vulnerable. It is argued, however, that rather than poverty breeding violence, violence promotes poverty by driving out capital and hampering investment and economic growth. Inequality, as perceived in the poorer

22 United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters*, UNISDR, Geneva, 2005, p. 12, available at: http://www.unisdr.org/eng/hfa/docs/Hyogo-framework-for-action-english.pdf (last visited 30 June 2010). The Framework was adopted by the states at the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan in 2005. Under the priorities for action, section 4(iii)(n) (on p. 12) states: 'Incorporate disaster risk assessments into the urban planning and management of disaster-prone human settlements, in particular highly populated areas and quickly urbanizing settlements. The issues of informal and non-permanent housing and the location of housing in high-risk areas should be addressed as priorities, including in the framework of urban poverty reduction and slum-upgrading programmes'.

23 IFRC, *Introduction to the Guidelines for the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance*, IFRC, Geneva, 2008, p. 13. Guideline 8 addresses the legal policy and institutional frameworks: '1. As an essential element of a larger disaster risk reduction programme, States should adopt comprehensive legal, policy, and institutional frameworks and planning for disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness, relief and recovery …'.

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communities, is cited as a more important underlying cause than poverty for the crime and violence that people experience.[24] This inequality is manifest in unequal access to education, health care, and employment opportunities and in the limited or absent infrastructure compared to other, more affluent, parts of the city. Financial constraints and political choices by governments, as well as economic rationality on the part of the private sector, inexorably generate and sustain inequality, with poverty being both its cause and (indirect) effect. This situation provides the circumstances in which people resort to violence and crime. Subsequently, the proneness to disaster risk, which likewise contributes to poverty and inequality, also comes in to play.

Violence can take place within and across various domains – political, institutional, economic, and social. Usually it not only inflicts physical harm but also generates fear and a feeling of insecurity in the society.[25] It can erode social networks within communities and undermine trust in formal institutions if they do not succeed in curbing it. Specific socio-economic, ethnic, and historical elements play a role in the incidence and prevalence of violence,[26] and generalizations should therefore be made with caution. However, although violence is not an exclusive feature of (large) cities, the scale and severity are usually greater in urban areas.[27] Much violence (be it, for example, intra-family, street robbery, or territorial-based gang wars) results in homicide, and data suggest that this correlates among other things with rapid rates of urbanization.[28] In many cities, urban crime is predominantly committed by young men – if not poverty-driven, their involvement in crime is certainly a means of obtaining status

24 See, for instance, Pablo Fajnzylber, Daniel Lederman, and Norman Loayza, 'Inequality and violent crime', in *Journal of Law and Economics*, Vol. 45, 2002, pp. 1–40; Ching-Chi Hsieh and M. D. Pugh, 'Poverty, income inequality, and violent crime: a meta-analysis of recent aggregate data studies', in *Criminal Justice Review*, 1993, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 182–202, referred to in UN-HABITAT, *Global Report on Human Settlements 2007*, above note 2, p. 67.

25 According to Johan Galtung, 'Violence, peace, and peace research', in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1969, pp. 167–191, violence, either manifest or latent, can target individuals or be of a more structural nature and can be of a physical or psychological nature (which are often closely related).

26 See Christiana Steenkamp, 'Xenophobia in South Africa: what does it say about trust?', in *The Round Table, Commonwealth Journal for International Affairs*, Vol. 98, 2009, pp. 439–447, discussing the pogroms of May 2008 in South Africa as a clear example of how socio-economic, ethnic, and historical elements are at play. The violence was remarkable since it was directed by black South Africans against black Africans on the basis of their nationality and is in stark contrast to their good relationship during apartheid. A constellation of various factors, including foreign policy, competition for scarce resources, official and media discourses, and the perpetuation of stereotypes provided fertile ground for the increasing mistrust vis-à-vis African migrants, while the political context offered an important explanation for the timing of the violence. The violence is explained as an erosion of social capital, i.e. low levels of trust in foreign migrants (the 'bonding' function of social capital) and in the state (the 'linking' social capital) to either stand up against the migrants or provide (overall) for better living conditions in the post-apartheid era, and even within the black South African community (the 'bonding' capital, manifested as the polarization within the ANC between Mbeki and Zuma supporters).

27 Caroline Moser, 'Urban violence and insecurity: an introductory roadmap', in *Environment and Urbanization*, 2004, Vol. 16, pp. 4–6.

28 Geneva Declaration Secretariat, *The Global Burden of Armed Violence*, Geneva Declaration Secretariat, Geneva, 2008, pp. 71–72, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/494a455d2.pdf (last visited 30 June 2010).

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and prestige.[29] Since the age brackets for young people (0–19 years) are disproportionately large in slum areas compared to non-slum areas,[30] the many young slum-dwellers make ideal recruits for street gangs.[31] In this respect, media coverage of crime, particularly by the 'tabloids' and sensational press, reinforces distrust and contributes to increased fear and a feeling of insecurity among the general public.[32]

Cultural and social values also play a role in the prevalence of violence: social networks can be powerful informal control mechanisms, with their normative structures tempering the perception of inequality. The social coherence of communities, however, is challenged by rapid urbanization, particularly in areas where marginalized groups tend to congregate[33] – a process that generally hampers the work of community-based organizations. Furthermore, the density of the built environment in cities also acts as an enabling factor in urban crime such as burglary, robbery, and theft.

Institutional crime becomes manifest, for instance, as corruption, extrajudicial killings, or social cleansing. Corruption in particular not only hampers equal treatment and the creation of a level playing field for economic investments but also undermines economic stability and confidence in the fairness of government and the rule of law.[34] The interwovenness of poverty, marginalization, and violence in the poor and neglected sections of the city fosters urban segregation ('fractured cities') and contributes to the emergence of 'no-go' areas, characterized by an 'unrule of law'. In the absence of legal authorities and representation of law and order, these areas in fact constitute a 'governance void', opening the way for a variety of armed contenders and violence-brokers, who exercise power

29 John Hagedorn, 'The global impact of gangs', in *Journal of Contemporary Justice*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2005, pp. 153–169.

30 UN-HABITAT, *State of the World's Cities 2006/2007*, above note 1, p. 31.

31 See UN-HABITAT, *Global Report on Human Settlements 2007*, above note 2, pp. 64–65, which states that: 'In sub-Saharan Africa, where the impacts of rapid urbanization and poverty have been particularly severe, many young men from marginalized communities join gangs who help to replace the extended family and who provide economic and social values not found in mainstream society. … Regional variations show that youth homicide rates were lowest in Western Europe and in the high-income countries of the Pacific. The highest rates are found in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa … This coincides with regions where there are large bulges in the youthful population'.

32 See Peter Dreier, 'How the media compound urban problems', in *Journal of Urban Affairs*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2005, pp. 193–201, stating in the abstract of his research on the role of media in reporting on urban news in the United States, that: 'Major news media coverage of cities reinforces an overwhelmingly negative and misleading view of urban America. The images … are an unrelenting story of social pathology … Moreover, this perspective on our cities is compounded by misleading news coverage of government efforts to address these problems. Government programs are typically covered as well-intentioned but misguided, plagued by mismanagement, inefficiency, and, in some cases, corruption. There is very little news coverage of collective efforts by unions, community organizations, and other grassroots groups to address problems. Only when such efforts include drama, conflict, and/or violence do the major media typically pay attention'.

33 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Eighth United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems*, UNODC, Vienna, 2006, p. 8.

34 See, for instance, UNODC, *Assessment of the Integrity and Capacity of the Justice System in Three Nigerian States: Technical Assessment Report*, UNODC, Vienna, January 2006, p. 125, revealing that in Lagos more than 40% of court users believed that political pressure completely dominates the justice system.

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in alternative, informal spheres. Both formal and informal institutions and organizations negotiate their operational space, with various degrees of adherence to and control by the *de facto* ruling powers.[35]

In contested areas where police and special police forces try to restore law and order, violence may involve political assassinations and can in fact turn into guerrilla and paramilitary conflict, in particular as a spill-over of economic and institutional crime when politicians resort to violence to pursue economic gains. In Colombia, for example, the political conflict has been intensified by drug-linked violence and local criminality. The fragility of the country is reproduced on a local scale, giving rise to fragile cities.[36]

Often, but not always or necessarily, these cities are located in fragile states in which armed conflict is prevalent – for instance, Lagos in Nigeria, Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or Baghdad in Iraq. At a national level, the military forces of these countries, whether or not supported by foreign military, are engaged in armed conflict, be it with other countries or with violent domestic factions, the latter in turn often also supported by foreign fighters who share an ethnic, cultural, or religious background. In these and other situations of armed conflict, cities are often the site of intense battles. The densely built and populated urban areas constitute a challenge to warring parties to uphold and respect obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL). A case in point is the Israeli–Palestinian armed conflict in Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009, of which the Goldstone Report lists several incidents where civilians in a densely built and populated area were believed to be used as human shields[37] and where Israeli forces stated that they regarded several situations as 'urban warfare',[38] which shaped their military actions. The situations cited mirror a general 'urban' challenge for parties under IHL to keep the risk of harm to the civilian population and civilian objects down to a minimum. The layout of the urban infrastructure forces the military to engage in door-to-door combat, with high risks of fatal casualties.

35 Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt, 'Fractured cities, second-class citizenship and urban violence', in Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt (eds), *Fractured Cities: Social Exclusion, Urban Violence and Contested Spaces in Latin America*, Zed Books, London, 2007, pp. 4–21.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

37 See UN General Assembly, *Human Rights in Palestine and Other Occupied Arab Territories: Report of the United Nations Fact-finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict*, UN Human Rights Council, Twelfth Session, Agenda Item 7, September 2009, available at: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/9/docs/UNFFMGC_Report.pdf (last visited 30 June 2010). Section VIII-E of the report discusses military activities of the Palestinian armed groups in Gaza in relation to their obligation to protect the civilian population, such as the alleged forcing of civilians to remain in an area for the specific purpose of sheltering that area or forces in that area from attack.

38 *Ibid.*, Section XI on the alleged deliberate attacks by the Israeli armed forces against the civilian population. Paragraph 804 of Section XI-C discusses information about the instructions given to the Israeli armed forces with regard to opening fire against civilians.

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Human security and international humanitarian law

The Geneva Conventions of 1949, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention,[39] can be regarded as a protection of human security in times of armed conflict.[40] Legally, the causes of an armed conflict (whether politically, socially, or economically motivated) are of no concern for the application of IHL. Central to its applicability, in light of the above, is the notion of 'armed conflict'. Although IHL originally related only to armed conflict between two or more states, its application – and thus the understanding of what constitutes an armed conflict – has been expanded to include non-international armed conflicts. Crucial for application of IHL, however, is the distinction between internal disturbances (such as riots or acts of banditry) and armed violence that actually reaches the threshold of a non-international armed conflict. IHL applies only to the latter: that is, when a minimum level of violence is displayed and when the parties involved in the conflict show a certain minimum of organization.[41] An important element is therefore that the violence should be carried out in an organized manner, which excludes, for instance, gun-related domestic violence from being classified as armed conflict. Conversely, drugs-related violence may well be labelled 'armed conflict'.

Enhancing human security to reduce disaster risk and decrease violence

The concept of 'human security' has gained prominence in recent years. Its basis lies in the 'Freedom from Fear' and 'Freedom from Want' notions that underpin the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[42] 'Human security' complements 'state security' by placing greater emphasis on the security of people. A 'narrow' application focuses exclusively on security in the light of violence, by encompassing only 'personal security' (protection from physical violence against a person's own state, another state, groups, or individuals), 'community security' (protection of communities from sectarian or ethnic violence), and 'political

39 The Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 are available at: http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/genevaconventions (last visited 30 June 2010).

40 Berma Klein Goldewijk, '"New wars" and the state: the nexus religion – human security', in Georg Frerks and Berma Klein Goldewijk (eds), *Human Security and International Insecurity*, Academic Publishers, Wageningen, 2007, p. 82.

41 See ICRC, *How is the Term 'Armed Conflict' Defined in International Humanitarian Law?*, ICRC Position Paper, Geneva, 2008, available at: http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/armed-conflict-article–170308/$file/Opinion-paper-armed-conflict.pdf (last visited 30 June 2010), pp. 3–5, stating that: 'First, the hostilities must reach a minimum level of intensity. This may be the case, for example, when the hostilities are of a collective character or when the government is obliged to use military force against the insurgents, instead of mere police forces. Second, non-governmental groups involved in the conflict must be considered as "parties to the conflict", meaning that they possess organized armed forces. This means for example that these forces have to be under a certain command structure and have the capacity to sustain military operations'.

42 United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 217 A(III), 10 December 1948, adopting the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, available at: http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/ (last visited 30 June 2010).

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security' (protection from human rights violations such as political repression or state control over ideas and information). All those elements reflect a human rights focus and are, to various degrees and in various circumstances, also relevant in the light of IHL. A 'broader' definition regards human security essentially as the protection of people against any life-threatening danger related to any kind of crisis; hence it adds elements of human development to the concept: 'economic security' (an individual's right to be able to earn an assured basic income), 'food security' (access to nutritious food that is economically affordable), 'health security' (a minimum protection from diseases and unhealthy lifestyles, and affordable and accessible health care), and 'environmental security' (protection from risks of disaster and environmental degradation).[43]

Based on the above, 'human security' (in the broad sense) is a useful concept for assessing crisis situations in an urban context. It addresses vulnerability to disasters as well as violence, which are prevalent and mutually reinforcing, particularly in an urban context. The inclusion of these two elements also renders the content very appropriate for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in its approach to urbanization, as indicated above. Application of the broad definition of 'human security' in fact stresses the need to address underlying issues (concerning the economic, health, and food situation of people) that are related to poverty and inequality and that also interact with violence. In that definition, the concept highlights the close relationship between vulnerability to disasters and vulnerability to violence. The notion that vulnerability to disasters and human security are closely linked is expressed by the United Nations, too, which cites it as a 'double jeopardy' for cities.[44] In its 2007 *Global Report on Human Settlements*, it focuses on the interrelationship between urban crime and violence, security of tenure, and natural and human-made disasters, applying vulnerability as the overarching term.[45]

Strengthening livelihoods as a way to enhance human security

A permanent humanitarian crisis

The security of people in slums is affected by violence as well as disaster risk, both of which hamper socio-economic development and consequently obstruct people's ability to strengthen their resilience. These vulnerabilities are shaped within the

43 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 1994: New Dimensions of Human Security*, UNDP/Oxford University Press, New York/Oxford, 1994, pp. 24–33.

44 UN-HABITAT, *State of the World's Cities 2006/2007*, above note 1, pp. 136–142.

45 See UN-HABITAT, *Global Report on Human Settlements 2007*, above note 2, pp. 4–5. Although using different terminology and labelling 'vulnerability' as the overarching term, the report essentially applies a human security approach, since it covers 'urban crime and violence' (the narrow definition of human security), 'vulnerability to natural disasters' (the added elements of the broad definition of human security), and 'security of tenure' (as a condition for economic development, contributing to reducing poverty).

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ecological, social, economic, and political domain by the factors (individually or interactively) discussed above, such as environmental degradation, unregulated economic development, marginality and exclusion, eroded social structures, violence, poverty, inequality, political structures, and access to power.

Health

All these factors, directly or indirectly, have a detrimental effect on people's health – through pollution, (risk of) disasters, lack of opportunities to improve the standard of living, and violence and inequality – in several instances to a degree that many would classify as 'crisis'. But although the word 'crisis' takes up a prominent place in the vocabulary of humanitarian organizations, definitions to underpin a common understanding of what constitutes a crisis are at best debated, but mostly absent, and are largely subject to inflation ('the worst crisis in years'). The *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*[46] lists elements that are to be addressed in humanitarian assistance (i.e. in crisis response) and that are thus an indication of a crisis: a state of calamity, loss of life, suffering and distress, and material damage. Obviously, important underlying conditions for possibly labelling a situation as a crisis are the erosion and destruction of people's livelihoods, which normally enable them to cope with traumatic events and other forms of adversity (as a manifestation of the aforementioned 'calamity' and 'distress'), and the interests of governments based on power relations in the socio-economic and political domain.

However, when focusing exclusively on key elements that ultimately determine life or death in crisis situations[47] – heat, cold, thirst, hunger, injury, or illness – a 'normal' situation in a slum can in several ways be classified as a 'crisis'. For example, when looking at mortality rates for infants and young children it becomes clear that data for slum areas are generally significantly higher than for the more affluent areas of the city.[48] The infant mortality rate in Manila's slums, for example, is about 72 per 1,000, compared to 24 for Metro Manila (and 36 nationwide). As a general rule, a doubling of the baseline mortality rate triggers humanitarian intervention,[49] so taking either the rate for Metro Manila or the nation as a whole as a baseline, the situation in Manila's slum would justify

46 IFRC, *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*, full text and definitions available at: http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct/index.asp (last visited 30 June 2010).

47 See Vinay Gupta, *Six Ways to Die*, available at: http://www.blip.tv/file/2710476 (last visited 30 June 2010).

48 Lawrence James Haddad, Marie T. Ruel, and James L. Garrett, 'Are urban poverty and undernutrition growing? Some newly assembled evidence', in *World Development*, Vol. 27, No. 11, 1999, pp. 1891–1904, as cited in UN-HABITAT, *Global Report on Human Settlements 2003*, above note 17, p. 74.

49 M. Michael, *Global Health Cluster: Rapid Health Assessment Guidelines*, 2007, p. 16, available at: http://www.wpro.who.int/internet/files/eha/toolkit/web/Health%20Cluster%20Approach/Resources%20and%20Tools/Global%20health%20cluster%20rapid%20health%20assessment%20guidelines.pdf (last visited 30 June 2010).

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humanitarian action. The World Health Organization considers a global acute malnutrition (GAM) rate of 10% as critical, and 15% as alarming. In Djibouti's slum areas, UNICEF has found malnutrition rates ranging from 17% to 25% of children under five[50] – rates that are normally found in countries in a complex emergency. Yet, while the situation in many slums in the global south could be classified as a 'permanent crisis' or 'silent disaster', interventions by humanitarian agencies targeting slum populations, and moreover the means allocated by donor governments and multilateral institutions to address urban vulnerability, remain relatively limited.[51]

Violence

As in the aforesaid health situation, in slums that can be characterized as sites of 'permanent crisis' based on the thresholds passed, violence levels in many slums seem to exceed (IHL-related) thresholds that would justify their classification as sites where a 'permanent armed-conflict-like situation' prevails. Obviously the notions of 'level of violence' and 'degree of organization', as presented above, are open to interpretation and depend on a case-by-case analysis of the situation concerned. Yet several examples could be interpreted as meeting those criteria, such as the drug-related violence in Brazil's Rio de Janeiro or Mexico's Juárez: in 2007, in Rio's mainly drugs-related police offensive against the gangs that rule many of the city's slums, 1,330 people were killed;[52] and in Juárez the fight against the cartels cost more than 1,300 lives.[53] In comparison, the conflict between the Colombian government and the FARC insurgents, generally recognized as a non-international armed conflict (in terms of the criteria cited above) caused approximately 1,000 casualties in that same year.[54] Those two cities provide examples of urban violence that could be classified as a non-international armed conflict to which IHL would apply and which would justify humanitarian assistance.

50 See IRIN, 'Djibouti: high malnutrition rates in slums "alarming"', 17 February 2009, available at: http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=82971 (last visited 30 June 2010).

51 D. Satterthwaite, above note 6, p. 54; Janice Perlman and Molly O'Meara Sheenan, 'Fighting poverty and environmental injustice in cities', in The Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World 2007: Our Urban Future*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 2007, pp. 176–177.

52 Human Rights Watch, *Police Violence and Public Security in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo*, New York, 2009, p. 1.

53 Alex Stevens and Dave Bewley-Taylor, *Drug Markets and Urban Violence: Can Tackling One Reduce the Other?*, Drug Policy Programme, Report 15, The Beckley Foundation, Oxford, 2009, p. 5.

54 In 2007, the FARC was allegedly responsible for 272 attacks, which led to 283 deaths and 100 kidnappings. See Stratfor Global Intelligence, 'Colombia: a militant merger?', 6 June 2008, available at: http://www.stratfor.com/memberships/117868/analysis/colombia_militant_merger; see also Project Ploughshares, *Armed Conflicts Report 2009: Colombia*, available at: http://www.ploughshares.ca/libraries/ACRText/ACR-TitlePage.html (last visited 30 June 2010), claiming a total of around 100 casualties due to combat; Carolina Forero and Sally Fishback, 'Human security in Colombia', in *Josef Korbel Journal of Advanced International Studies*, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 29, available at: http://www.du.edu/korbel/jais/journal/volume1/volume1_fishback_forero.pdf (last visited 30 June 2010), claiming 895 casualties from landmines, attributed to the conflict between the rebels and the Colombian government.

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Livelihoods and 'resilience' as the link between development and vulnerability

People need access to five vital resources for sustainable living. These resources, usually termed 'capital', together constitute their livelihood.[55] 'Human capital' can be labour, skills, or knowledge; 'natural capital' consists of land, water, forests, and so forth; 'physical capital' can be food stocks, livestock, equipment, and the like; 'financial capital' is money (savings, loans, credit); and finally 'social capital' concerns the quality of relations between people (help from neighbours, religious organizations, NGOs, political parties, etc. on the basis of common rules, norms, and sanctions). What is clear is that 'capital' can be privately or communally owned, and can be tangible as well as non-tangible. The sustainability of living is determined by secure and ongoing access to these forms of capital when and where needed, in such a way that people can use it to increase their chances of improving their lives both economically and socially. For this purpose, people apply different strategies, which they adapt to ecological, social, economic, and political perturbations (e.g. moving within or between various informal settlements on the basis of job opportunities or housing availability, or because forced to do so by evictions).

The livelihoods approach is usually applied in a development-oriented context, in which the main emphasis is on social and economic progress and disasters are regarded as a temporary disruption of this process. A close look at the livelihood capitals shows that they are closely related to the various elements that shape people's security: human and financial capital, for example, contribute to economic security, social capital helps to strengthen community security, and access to natural capital is a requisite for health security. In this way, the security elements can be enhanced by strengthening livelihood capitals.

Since 'human security', as indicated above, is an appropriate way to assess vulnerabilities (to disasters and to violence, areas on which the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement traditionally focuses), the livelihoods approach can also be applied by humanitarian organizations, particularly when their prime focus is on strengthening resilience rather than increasing socio-economic development *per se*. This is particularly useful in relation to urbanization and its ongoing slum formation, where corresponding vulnerabilities to disaster risk (accelerated by increasing external hazards such as extreme weather events) give rise to the notion that disasters are a constant feature of life in slums rather than an accidental disruption of the development there, and where inequality and violence witnessed in many slum areas also contribute to greater and more permanent vulnerability. The sustainable livelihoods approach is therefore appropriate to address the said 'permanent crisis' and 'permanent armed conflict' in many urban centres in the global south.

55 Ian Scoones, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: A Framework for Analysis*, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, 1998, pp. 7–8.

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INTERNATIONAL REVIEW of the Red Cross

A permanent humanitarian response: challenges for humanitarian organizations

The continuing vulnerabilities, particularly those within the mandate of humanitarian organizations such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the said 'permanent crisis' and 'permanent armed conflict' are a call for humanitarian organizations to become more engaged in urban centres, particularly in the global south. Given that vulnerabilities are a permanent feature of slums, this involvement should constitute a 'permanent response'. This will pose several challenges.

First, for many humanitarian organizations a permanent response seems a contradiction in terms. While development-oriented organizations concentrate on long-term processes to strengthen communities, humanitarian organizations in turn focus on the events that disrupt these processes and that constitute crises. Rather than being permanent, their interventions are by definition short-term and geared to restoring the status that existed prior to the event that triggered the crisis. However, where there is considerable and increasing vulnerability – accelerated by external trends such as climate change – their reactive response mechanisms should be complemented by proactive interventions that make people less vulnerable to disaster risk and violence. 'Climate change adaptation' and 'building back better' are emerging trends and initiatives where the Movement is already taking a proactive and risk-reducing approach. Rather than focusing on development *per se*, the proactive approach should concentrate mainly on strengthening resilience, particularly against disaster risk and violence.

A focus on greater resilience implies that a holistic approach should be applied, in which vulnerabilities need to be addressed in conjunction with their underlying causes. As pointed out above, these causes are often related to inequality and marginalization, not only in the socio-economic but also in the political domain. Appropriate housing locations, infrastructural facilities, and access to power supplies are examples of important issues that need to be considered. Advocacy vis-à-vis (local) government authorities on behalf of vulnerable people – which might be considered sensitive with regard to the principles of impartiality and neutrality to which the Movement adheres – should be an important element in any such approach. Similarly, the mandates assigned to the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in their role as auxiliaries to the public authorities may also be challenged if the Movement becomes involved in situations that stem from a context of informality and illegality.

Another implication of focusing on underlying causes is that it reveals the need for initiatives in areas far outside the mandate of the Movement and where its knowledge is consequently insufficient if not altogether lacking. The need to address these causes therefore implies a need for the Movement to establish and work in partnerships – viewed as a collective responsibility – with local communities, civil society organizations, the government, and the private sector in order to be able to connect to all relevant areas. Insofar as the vulnerabilities are permanent, so too should these partnerships be.

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A more active role for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in slums also implies the need to address vulnerabilities that have emerged partly or fully because of the incapability or unwillingness of (local) government to prevent or reduce them. While strengthening communities' resilience, the organization faces a risk of filling the 'governance void' by taking over government responsibilities, rendering the government's presence irrelevant and undermining its authority.

Furthermore, the holistic approach requires resilience to be increased, by tackling both disaster risk and violence more effectively. Underlying causes, as indicated in the previous paragraphs, may be similar in origin but fuel different vulnerabilities and must consequently also be addressed differently. In seeking to reduce vulnerability to disasters, humanitarian organizations should also actively take into account sociological processes in an urban context that give rise to poverty, inequality, and violence, and vice versa. This implies that instruments to assess vulnerabilities, such as vulnerability and capacity assessments, should be adjusted correspondingly.

Finally, challenges arise where governance in fragile urban areas is under strain, particularly in situations of protracted violence. The sliding scale from stability to fragility necessitates a corresponding increased focus on the relevance and application of IHL, particularly in the transition from internal disturbances and tensions to armed conflict. The roles of the various components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement may consequently shift according to their mandates.

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