

Comments from Cités Unies France

The role of local governance in crisis-stricken areas and fragile States

Global Task Force meeting, Barcelona, 9-10 February, 2016.

Cités Unies France, the French federation of local and regional governments involved in international cooperation, has been working on the role of local governance in crisis-stricken and fragile States for several years. We are convinced that the work on urban governance, conducted by the Global Task Force within the framework of Habitat III preparation, must **include the importance of reinforcing local governments capacities in crisis prevention and management processes.**

The need for a local governance in crisis situation

In Fragile states, regular crisis (due to natural disasters or conflict) undermine the development process. Cities are particularly affected because crisis leads to massive displacement of populations from rural to urban areas. Therefore, the urbanization rate rises fast in fragile states leading to a major challenge for the New Urban Agenda. Local authorities, by their proximity and legitimacy, are on the front line when a crisis breaks out, yet the humanitarian system that intervenes often ignores and bypasses them in the crisis management process.

The exclusion of local authorities, yet recognized as major actors to achieve sustainable development goals, causes long-term negative impacts. Local authorities lose their means to take their responsibilities for their population and territory, to take appropriate actions, and to oversee the reconstruction-planning phase, which we know cannot be separated from development planning. Besides, the transition phase is often neglected, and when the humanitarian actors leave the affected territories, the local authorities are left behind without the technical, financial and operational means to takeover the implemented actions. Therefore, the sustainability and the local appropriation of the projects are not guaranteed. What's more, this situation can create a loss of confidence and a public distrust of local leaders, leading to the increase of tensions and risks of social conflict. Finally this can also have an impact on municipal finances given that the citizens refuse to pay local taxes.

The role of local governments in crisis management is a key factor if we want fragile cities and States to put back themselves on the path of sustainable development. There is a growing awareness that a fast urbanizing world is resulting in fast accumulating risk, making crisis more prone to occur, and calling for crisis responses to take into account the

complexities of urban settings. A fundamental shift needs to be achieved by reinforcing rather than replacing local governments and by overcoming the humanitarian-development divide and working towards collective outcomes. Crisis needs to be seen as opportunities to put cities back on a more resilient and sustainable urban development.

Reinforcing local governments' role in all of the stages of crisis management will enable a continuum between emergency relief and reconstruction planning toward sustainable development. It will facilitate the reconciliation process in countries facing regular conflicts; ensure the sustainability of the urban planning; help to assess and plan to reduce vulnerability; foster the development of resilient territories etc.

What can be done within the framework of the New Urban Agenda ?

Within this framework, CUF argues for the reinforcement of local authorities' capacities in all crisis management phases (prevention, preparation, emergency and reconstruction).

This can be achieved by a specific capacity-building plan in fragile states and crisis-stricken countries:

- Implementation of local governments training cycles on risk reduction, crisis preparation, reconstruction planning etc.;
- Creation of crisis management tools (risk monitoring department, alert mechanisms, first need assessment tools, specific risks and crisis management department within the local authorities etc.) ;
- Improvement of the coordination mechanism between all of the humanitarian actors and public authorities (international, national and local levels);
- Reinforcement of peer-to-peer cooperation: decentralized cooperation has already proven its worth for local authorities to exchange good practice and experiences: crisis management could be a new priority within the framework of these cooperation partnerships;
- Creation of a specific legal and financial framework on crisis management enabling local authorities to have access to financial and technical support from the international community to pursue basic services delivery when a crisis occurs and to supervise the middle and long term planning.

Pilot experiments

Cités Unies France has been working on this subject for more than fifteen years. Each time a crisis occurs the association opens a solidarity fund, topped up by the French local authorities, aiming at developing reconstruction project with one or several affected local authorities. The implemented projects generally try to include two components: reconstruction of public infrastructure(s) and/or reinforcement of local authorities capacities. The last projects have been (or are being) implemented in Vanuatu, Nepal, Haiti, Lebanon, and Philippines.



Cités Unies France is also leading a pilot project funded by the European Union in the Central African Republic. This project, implemented in coordination with several French local authorities and associations, aims at reinforcing Bangui municipality's capacities in the reconstruction phase by restoring the service delivery in two key sectors: city's local markets and garbage collection. In the long run, the project goals are to restore confidence and hope among Bangui's citizen, increase local tax collection, and support the municipality to work on long-term reconstruction planning of the city.

Linking the new urban agenda and the new urban crisis agenda

For years, Cités Unies France has been advocating and bringing these ideas and work in competent global bodies, such as the World Humanitarian Summit that will take place in Istanbul in May 2016. **The preparatory discussions of the WHS include the close link between the new urban agenda and the new humanitarian agenda:** a global alliance for urban crisis will be launched at the World Humanitarian Summit. Its members will commit to different principles and policy changes in order to strengthen humanitarian response. These commitments include the reinforcement of local governments' role in urban crisis response. They identified as a priority that this urban crisis agenda discussed at the WHS be incorporated into the New urban agenda to be agreed at Habitat III.

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