

3.2 Area-based approaches

Area-based approaches (ABAs) have become popular in recent years as an urban-derived approach to post-crisis recovery. They are first and foremost about supporting neighbourhoods to recover. In practice, they resemble more a developmental approach than perhaps a traditional humanitarian one.

There are a number of different definitions for ABAs,¹⁶ as well as a number of different names, including settlements approach, place-based approach and neighbourhoods

16 See for instance E. Parker and V. Maynard, *Humanitarian Response to Urban Crises: A Review of Area-based Approaches*, IIED Working Paper (London: IIED, 2015) (<http://pubs.iied.org/10742IIED>).

approach.¹⁷ All, however, encapsulate the importance of being based in a defined location (such as a neighbourhood). The aim is to strengthen local ownership and the engagement of affected populations by working in a participatory way and taking a multi-sectoral approach.

This section provides a definition for ABAs and outlines ten principles for implementing ABAs according to the broad steps of the project management cycle (assessment and design, implementation and evaluation and learning). Given the cross-cutting and multi-sectoral nature of ABAs, this section relates closely to a large number of others in this GPR, including assessments and profiling (Section 3.7), design and management (3.9) and monitoring and evaluation (Section 3.10).

This section draws on research into ABAs as part of the Stronger Cities Initiative.¹⁸ The full report, which contains further information and guidance, is D. Sanderson and P. Sitko, *Urban Area-based Approaches in Post-disaster Contexts* (London: IIED, 2017) (<http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/10825IIED.pdf>).

3.2.1 Defining ABAs

One definition is that an ABA ‘supports people after a disaster in a specific location to transition effectively from relief to recovery; it works with existing structures and can be scaled up’. The Global Shelter Cluster Working Group identifies the following commonalities across 30 case studies:

- Understanding the community – context is key.
- Engagement with multiple actors.
- Supporting alignment of humanitarian and development priorities.
- Capacity strengthening of local actors.
- Strong engagement with local authorities.
- Significant resource requirements and time investment.
- Scaling up beyond a specific context is challenging.

¹⁷ For further discussion, see Global Shelter Cluster, *Settlements Approaches in Urban Areas Working Group*, 2018 (www.sheltercluster.org/settlements-approaches-urban-areas-wg/documents/settlements-terminology-paper-draftapr2018).

¹⁸ The Stronger Cities Initiative was a consortium initiative comprising the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), World Vision International (WVI) and the University of New South Wales (UNSW). The purpose of the Initiative was to produce practical, field-tested guidance for humanitarian organisations working in urban conflict, displacement and natural hazard settings.

- Established humanitarian coordination mechanisms remain structured around a sectoral or cluster approach.
- The Housing, Land and Property context is complex.
- The relationship with and impact on nearby settlements can be difficult: ‘Challenges and tensions can arise when balancing the needs and priorities of affected populations within the specific settlement in relation to neighboring settlements and overall city level planning’.¹⁹

As noted in the introduction, ABAs are one form of a wider approach to post-disaster recovery programmes that embodies neighbourhood-based, place-based and settlements-based approaches. For a discussion, see C. Setchell, ‘The Emerging Importance of the Settlements Approach’, in Global Shelter Cluster, *The State of Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements*. For a summary of the developmental roots of ABAs, see D. Sanderson, ‘Implementing Area-based Approaches (ABAs) in Urban Post-disaster Contexts’, *Environment and Urbanization* 29(2), October 2017 (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956247817717422>).

ABAs are complex to manage, and involve negotiation and dialogue with local residents, government figures and other stakeholders (see the example from Haiti in Box 3.1). The effective coordination of sectoral inputs, such as WASH, shelter, protection and livelihoods, also takes a lot of effort. This complexity mirrors the reality of city recovery, and the evidence indicates that this is what is required if investments in recovery programmes are to have positive and lasting results.

3.2.2 Implementing ABAs in the project management cycle

Figure 3.1 presents ten principles for implementing ABAs according to the project management cycle (assessment and design, implementation and evaluation and learning).

¹⁹ Global Shelter Cluster, *Settlement Approaches in Urban Areas: Compendium of Case Studies* (Geneva: IFRC and UNHCR, 2018) (www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/urbansettlementcompendium_uswg_july2018.pdf).

Box 3.1 Implementing an ABA: Delmas 19, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

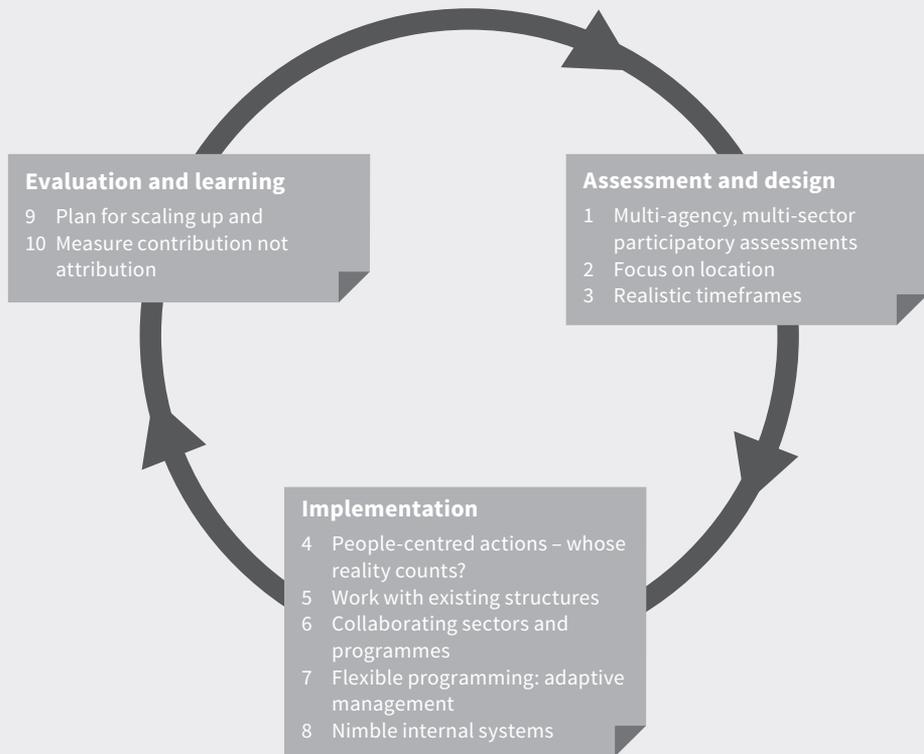
The Haiti Urban Regeneration and Reconstruction Programme (URRP) was instigated by the British Red Cross (BRC) in Port-au-Prince following the Haiti earthquake as an urban ABA programme. Activities covered a range of coordinated interventions, including cash (small business loans and microfinance), reconstruction of infrastructure and housing repairs. The final evaluation report documents some of the programming challenges involved in working in ‘the densely populated Delmas 19, which was characterised by endemic urban violence and a lack of community cohesion, and [the neighbourhood] was also extremely vulnerable as a result of underlying poverty as well as the effects of the earthquake ... the social, political and economic networks of any densely populated, urban environment are incredibly complex and ceaselessly changing.

‘At the time, BRC took the risky decision to locate its entire Community Mobilisation Team in the heart of the community, investing heavily to develop a “Community Mobilisation Team” in an effort to foster greater links, transparency and accountability with the community it was seeking to support. While the relationships and tensions between BRC and the community ebbed and flowed, it is important to highlight that BRC was able to work with the entire community to plan and design the URRP’.

The evaluation also discusses challenges relating to timeframes. ‘BRC intentionally pursued a participatory approach in the design and delivery of the URRP, which increased levels of engagement and transparency. However, it also led directly to delays in programme delivery, as it took time to consult and engage with the multitude of participants with vested interests, from single individuals to local unelected committees up to Mayoral elected authorities. The Community Mobilisation Team was central to the URRP delivery, convening the community and programme team, communicating information and mitigating challenges from pre-design to post-exit phases ... reaching consensus amongst stakeholders in an urban environment, let alone a dense urban slum such as Delmas 19, is incredibly difficult ... due to the scale of the beneficiary assessment process, which ensured accurate and triangulated vulnerability data, but also involved negotiating with a large community of residents to determine the most appropriate programme option’.

Source: Advisem Services, *British Red Cross’ Haiti Urban Regeneration and Reconstruction Programme (URRP). Final Evaluation* (Ottawa: Advisem Services, 2016) (www.alnap.org/help-library/british-red-cross-haiti-urban-regeneration-and-reconstruction-programme-urrrp).

Figure 3.1 Ten principles for implementing ABAs in the project management cycle



Source: Sanderson and Sitko, *Urban Area-based Approaches in Post-disaster Contexts*.

The ten principles are as follows:

1. Multi-agency, multi-sector participatory assessments

Assessments above all need to be participatory, with mutual learning between agencies, local government and neighbourhood members reinforced wherever possible. Assessment approaches are discussed at length in the following sections: Section 3.5 (context analysis), Section 3.6 (assessments and profiling), Section 3.7 (targeting) and Section 3.8 (response analysis).

2. Focus on location

The intent behind focusing on location is to reinforce the importance of people's identity (in belonging to a specific part of the city), and of rebuilding people's everyday lives. Focusing on location also forces implementing agencies to take account of the complex, interconnected nature of real life. For example, looking at what people live in (shelter; see Section 4.2) also ties into safety (protection; see Section 4.7), access to services (WASH; see Section 4.4), the work people might do in or immediately outside their homes (livelihoods; see Section 4.5), and so on. Focusing on place has been a long-established approach in recovery. For example, after Typhoon Haiyan IFRC found that one benefit of focusing on location is that it 'involves the consideration of other aspects of community life beyond shelter and how these aspects all fit together physically and functionally'.²⁰ Location, often referred to as 'the neighbourhood approach', is discussed in Section 4.2 on shelter and settlements.

3. Realistic timeframes

Perhaps one of the most significant challenges of ABAs is that they may take longer than traditional recovery efforts by external agencies. When this is the case, ensuring local ownership of activities is vital so that (as well as for other reasons) programmes do not stall when agencies withdraw.

It is worth noting here that, beyond immediate life-saving actions following a disaster, such as search and rescue, emergency medicine and meeting basic needs (food, water and shelter), the belief that aid needs to be hurried is largely a myth. A study of the experiences of some 6,000 people in humanitarian relief and recovery operations in a number of disasters found that what people needed was less speed, and more consideration. The study found that 'many feel that "too much" is given "too fast"'. The study also found that 'very few people call for more aid: virtually everyone says they want "smarter aid"'.²¹ It takes time to ensure the right programmes are designed, conceived and implemented in collaboration with local power structures.

20 V. Stodart, 'Regulatory Barriers and the Provision of Shelter in Post-disaster Situations: Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Issues in the Recovery of Tacloban after 2013 Typhoon Haiyan', in D. Sanderson, J. Kayden and J. Leis, *Urban Disaster Resilience: New Dimensions from International Practice in the Built Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 108.

21 M. Anderson, D. Brown and J. Isabella, *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid* (Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2012) (<http://cdacollaborative.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Time-to-Listen-Hearing-People-on-the-Receiving-End-of-International-Aid.pdf>), p. 2.

4. People-centred actions – whose reality counts?

Adherence to what are commonly known as people-centred approaches or actions (as introduced in Section 1.1, ways of seeing the city) involves:²²

- supporting affected populations in their own recovery;
- adopting a consultative, facilitative approach;
- taking the time to listen (through participatory assessments); and
- using tools such as those common in action planning (see principle seven below).

The importance of such an approach is identified in the 2014 Core Humanitarian Standard, namely Standard Four, that response is based on participation (see Section 3.1 on frameworks, standards and alliances). Further tools on participatory assessment (such as participatory rapid appraisal) are described in Section 3.6. See also D. Archer and S. Boonyabanha, 'Seeing a Disaster as an Opportunity – Harnessing the Energy of Disaster Survivors for Change', *Environment and Urbanization* 23(2) (London: IIED, 2011) (<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0956247811410011>).

5. Work with existing structures

A key point about cities is that structures for almost everything already exist: the job of humanitarian assistance and recovery is to engage with them. Structures here are taken to mean services provided by government, utilities such as water supply, electricity and sewage and community-organised structures such as water committees. For interventions to be effective after the life of a programme, activities must engage with existing structures, even if these are weak – otherwise, such structures may be weakened even further.²³ Working with existing structures is explored further in Section 2.1 on coordination.

6. Collaboration between sectors and programmes

Collaboration between sectors is essential in order to deliver a more coherent and unified response. As the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) notes: 'no single humanitarian agency can cover all humanitarian needs; collaboration is not an

²² 'Whose reality counts?' is a question for successful neighbourhood interventions coined by participation expert Robert Chambers. The question relates to interventions undertaken by external agencies on behalf of local populations, and is intended to challenge their assumptions and approaches. Asking 'whose reality counts?' compels intervening agencies to consider the aims, desires and aspirations of affected people first (and to question their own assumptions), and from that, to implement programmes that are relevant first and foremost to the people they are intended to help.

²³ P. Knox Clarke and L. Campbell, *Exploring Coordination in Humanitarian Clusters*, ALNAP Study (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2016) (www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/update-exploring-coordination-in-humanitarian-clusters.pdf).

Box 3.2 Settlement-based response and recovery in Bangui

Following the easing of conflict in the Central African Republic in 2016–17, a pilot project, AGORA, assisted the return of some 20,000 people to the capital city, Bangui. The initiative piloted a settlements-based approach in four neighbourhoods, following extensive consultation and agreement between local neighbourhood groups, mayors, civil society representatives, informal community leaders, UN agencies and NGOs. The project's five steps comprised:

1. Setting up an institutional framework and Urban Working Group.
2. Multi-sectoral settlement-based assessments, involving collecting primary data and consultations with local actors.
3. Settlement-based response planning 'reflecting priorities jointly agreed by local and international actors and response actions in the short, mid and long term'. Progress was posted on a shared website.
4. Coordination and implementation of response plans, chaired jointly by the mayor and OCHA.
5. Capacity-building of local authorities.

Challenges included: coordination ('A lot of time was required to clarify the link between existing Clusters and inter-cluster systems and the Urban working group, causing delay in project implementation'²⁴); limited local capacities and resources; and limited resources, preventing project replication in other neighbourhoods.

Source: Global Shelter Cluster, *Settlement Approaches in Urban Areas: Compendium of Case Studies* (Geneva: IFRC and UNHCR, 2018) (www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/urbansettlementcompendium_uswg_july2018.pdf).

option, it is a necessity'.²⁵ In urban areas, with overlapping and complex needs, collaboration is especially important. Collaboration is discussed in Section 2.1 on coordination. See also T. Alcanya and F. Al-Murani, *Urban Humanitarian Response: Why Local and International Collaboration Matters*, Briefing, (London: IIED, 2016) (<https://pubs.iied.org/17378IIED/>).

²⁴ Global Shelter Cluster, *Settlement Approaches in Urban Areas: Compendium of Case Studies* (Geneva: IFRC and UNHCR, 2018) (www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/urbansettlementcompendium_uswg_july2018.pdf).

²⁵ OCHA, 'The Four Pillars of Humanitarian Reform', 2005 (www.odi.org/our-work/adaptive-development).

7. Flexible programming and adaptive management

A long-recognised hindrance to effective programming in aid responses relates to tools, funding flows and administrative requirements that are insufficiently flexible.²⁶ The recent development and piloting of new tools, such as adaptive management, may be suited to grappling with the uncertainties and complexities of urban programming. Adaptive management, along with other approaches, is discussed further in Section 3.9 on design and management.

8. Nimble internal systems

For an urban ABA to have the best chance of success, agencies' internal systems, such as human resources (HR) and finance, need to be aligned to the purpose and overall goal of the programme. Involving HR and finance staff at the earliest stages of the design of an ABA can help support services function more smoothly in the subsequent implementation of a programme, with agreed clarity (between programme and non-programme staff) on the overall aim.

9. Plan for scaling up

Successful ABAs need to consider scale-up – one-off, isolated projects do little to assist with the wider requirements a city may need for recovery. Activities for ensuring scale-up include:

- Ensure local ownership as far as possible (see Principle 4).
- Work within local structures and municipal planning processes (see Principle 5).
- Coordinate with other organisations to ensure a more even spread of effort.
- Ensure the area-based project does not work against wider municipal urban planning and development by coordinating with the local government (see Section 2.1 on coordination).

Given the projectised approach of most humanitarian aid responses, there are challenges to scaling up. They include:²⁷

- Insufficient analysis of social, cultural and economic conditions and relationships, leading to projects with a narrow focus that are hard to replicate.
- Project duration, which may be short and not aligned to the timetables of other organisations.

²⁶ L. Wild, D. Booth and C. Valters, *Putting Theory into Practice: How DFID Is Doing Development Differently* (London: ODI, 2017) (www.odi.org/publications/10729-putting-theory-practice-how-dfid-doing-developmentdifferently).

²⁷ UNDP, *Guidance Note: Scaling Up for Development Programmes*, January 2013 (www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/participatory_localdevelopment/guidance-note--scaling-up-development-programmes.html).

- Short-term and/or unpredictable funding.
- Lack of local ownership.

Further guidance on scaling up can be found in World Health Organisation (WHO), *Nine Steps for a Scaling Up Strategy* (Geneva: WHO, 2010) (www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/strategic_approach/9789241500319/en/) and UNDP, *Guidance Note: Scaling Up for Development Programmes*, January 2013 (www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/participatory_localdevelopment/guidance-note--scaling-up-development-programmes.html).

10. Measure contribution not attribution

Evaluations of agency activities almost always seek to measure attribution, i.e. correlating the activities of one project to community benefits. ABAs however are intended to be cross-sectoral, holistic and oriented towards engaging in processes and people. To these ends, there is an opportunity to measure an initiative's contribution to wider outcomes, not only those constrained by a particular project. This suits ABAs, since 'the activities of an individual agency, and the effects of those activities, will not normally occur in isolation but rather as part of a multi-layered, complex response by both local and external actors'.²⁸ Two approaches to this are measuring 'contribution to change' and neighbourhood-level changes in assets. Both these approaches are discussed further in Section 3.10 on monitoring, evaluation and learning.

²⁸ R. Few et al., *Contribution to Change: An Approach to Evaluating the Role of Intervention in Disaster Recovery* (Rugby: IT Publications, 2014) (www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/bk-contribution-change-intervention-disaster-recovery-221113-en_0.pdf), p. 8.