



## **The “Neighborhood Approach”, a Means of Improving the Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance in Urban Areas**

Neighborhoods are geographic areas of cities typically defined by social, economic, and physical features, which often serve as the basis for administrative and political recognition within larger jurisdictions. Neighborhoods provide their residents with an identity and foothold in the larger urban arena, thereby providing some measure of security, safety, and familiarity in an often chaotic urban world. Neighborhoods become even more valuable to their residents in the wake of humanitarian crises and natural disasters precisely because of these valued social and economic features.

An emerging means of improving humanitarian assistance in urban areas can be found in basing interventions on neighborhoods, to enhance clarity and understanding of how best to coherently provide multi-sectoral assistance amidst the multi-faceted conditions of urban areas. Thus, a “Neighborhood Approach” is an area-based means of responding to multi-sector needs that is informed by a community-based decision-making process reflective of the social, economic, and physical features of the delimited area. This approach is shelter-led, but settlement-focused, based on the notion that the short-term recovery of neighborhoods can be best achieved through adoption of a long-term view of configuring and reconfiguring land to best accommodate shelter and related services, disaster risk reduction, livelihoods, social connections, and the health and security of the disaster-affected population. While addressing short-term humanitarian needs, this approach can also pave the way for post-crisis recovery, i.e., neighborhoods can also serve as platforms for recovery. When linked together, neighborhoods can become the unit of analysis in city-wide response and recovery efforts.

The Neighborhood Approach holds significant relevance to the design and implementation of large-scale disaster responses, particularly those oriented to shelter in densely populated settings. The approach permits a move away from conventional “four walls and a roof” efforts focused on households, and towards a more synergistic and complementary focus on communities in defined spatial contexts -- neighborhoods. The approach enables an understanding of available local resources, emergent opportunities, and potential constraints regarding the sheltering of people, the recovery of affected economies, and the reduction of risks associated with vulnerability to natural hazards. It provides a framework for coordinated, integrative efforts towards sustainable reconstruction and improvement of communities by defining the framework within which housing, infrastructure, transport, environmental management, and future growth occur.

Finally, although the Neighborhood Approach holds much promise as a means of area-based programming in urban areas, success is dependent on the active involvement of community stakeholders in a highly consultative planning process that takes into account their needs, tastes and expectations. In addition, this process must be complemented by the provision of structured technical assistance and rapid capacity building targeting local authorities, and linked to larger, urban-scale recovery planning initiatives. These requirements currently pose a significant challenge to humanitarian community agencies, which must be addressed in an urgent manner if future assistance efforts in urban settings are to be meaningful to those in need.