THE CHALLENGES OF ACCESS TO URBAN SERVICES DURING ARMED CONFLICT

Regional WaSH Working Sub-Group, 11th November 2020
Urban population is highly reliant on services to meet their essential needs and therefore is highly vulnerable to a disruption in service delivery, which often occurs during armed conflict.

The scope of this presentation is to give a glimpse at the challenges of access to urban services during armed conflict, with a specific focus on the Near and Middle East region.

1. Urban Services
2. When War Comes To City
3. The Regional Context
4. ICRC Modus Operandi
5. Concluding Messages
1. WHAT URBAN SERVICES ARE
| Essential services are those that are vital to ensure the subsistence of civilian population. |

- Water supply service
- Wastewater supply service
- Electricity supply service
- Health service
- Roads
- Ports and Airports
- Education facilities
- Solid waste disposal service
- Other ...

**URBAN SERVICES: COMPLEX SYSTEMS**
URBAN SERVICES: COMPONENTS

- All Essential Services Depends On
  - People
  - Hardware
  - Consumables

- Operators
- Techniciens
- Admin & Management
- Infrastructure
- Equipment: pumps, motors, generators
- Heavy machinery
- Chlorine
- Fuel
- Filtres
- Spare parts, pipes, fittings...

- Provision of service is more than infrastructure
- No one component is sufficient on its own
• Urban services are interconnected

• “Urban” goes beyond “urban”, Consequences in one area/service goes beyond that area/service
2. WHEN **WAR COMES** TO CITY
URBAN SERVICES: (DIRECT) IMPACT
URBAN SERVICES: IMPACT

Direct impact

Indirect impact

Cumulative Impact
Lack of access to essential services

Damages to residential buildings

(Further) Displacement

Public Health Hazard
Deterioration of livelihoods
CHALLENGES

1. The **complexity**, the scale and fragility of the urban services

2. The **duration of the challenges** and the nature of the conflict

3. Shrinking humanitarian space – **Lack of safe access**

4. The diverse and complex urban environment, with different stakeholders (institutions, organizations, bodies, armed groups,...) and the importance of **working in partnership** with local service providers and the National Society, coordinating the efforts among all the actors.

5. The short-term/reactive response shall be able to **take into account the long-term consequences/needs**

6. **Lack of respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the weaponry used** in urban areas
   - The use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area should be avoided in densely populated areas due to the significant likelihood of indiscriminate effects.
   - Protection based dialogue on the conduct of hostilities in relation to civilian object is crucial (**Addressing root causes as well as the consequences**)
CHALLENGES

Traditional Emergency Response

Quick fix

Rehabilitation

Energy

Staff

Machinery

Access

Logistics
3. THE REGIONAL CONTEXT
• **Rapid population growth** (+ 20.9% in the last 10 year) and urbanization (+ 3%), 24% (2018) living in informal settlements

• In the last 10 years **high instability** (at country and regional level), several (highly destructive) armed conflicts.

• The **crucial Intersection** between cities and armed conflict

• **High displacement** (in 2019: 2.5 millions for conflict and 0.6 for disasters), very often urban displacement, loss of human capital

• **Unsustainable use of natural resources** (esp. water which is scarce and unequally distributed) and widespread **environmental degradation**, considerable vulnerability to **climate change**

• **Ageing infrastructure** with little preventive maintenance (high inefficiency, high non revenue water) and little room for planning/investments, in a highly politicized environment. Public services do not cover all the population, leaving room for private/informal sector

• **Little economic value** given to water (cost recovery not covered), a weak power sector, a neglected waste water treatment sector
4. ICRC MODUS OPERANDI
The approach serves the immediate needs of the population in terms of contributing to the prevention of a deterioration in WaSH conditions and health outcomes, but also works towards securing “development holds” against the development reversals of protracted conflict and displacement.
5. **CONCLUDING MESSAGES**
1. Urban population is highly reliant on services to meet their essential needs and therefore is highly vulnerable to a disruption in service delivery, which often occurs during armed conflict. An urban community resilient to shocks shall rely on a resilient infrastructure.

2. Urban services (water, wastewater, energy…) are not immune to the impact of armed conflict.
   • Urban essential services and the interdependencies between them must be carefully understood and in advance, if a prolonged disruption in service delivery is to be avoided.
   • To deal with the complexity, data and data management play an important role
   • An effective approach to urban services shall combine preventive/proactive, reactive and protection measures. Emergency preparedness is crucial.
   • Short-term and long-term are intertwined and shall be always considered at the same time.

3. In a degraded environment where climate risks play an increasingly important role, protection of natural environment, natural resources and essential services are of utmost importance, during war time (but also during peace). A more sustainable management and a more equitable sharing of natural resources – especially water – could contribute to conflict prevention and to mitigate humanitarian needs.


You can download the International Review of the Red Cross article at: https://www.icrc.org/en/international-review/article/impact-explosive-weapons-urban-services-direct-and-reverberating