Briefing

iied · **URBAN** CRISES

Policy pointers

Inclusive integrated planning approaches, coordinated between state and non-state agencies, can respond to the basic needs of host and displaced communities and lay the foundations for urban planning that can respond effectively to future crises.

State and non-state agencies engaged in humanitarian and stabilisation efforts in cities could incrementally improve access to water and other basic services by actively engaging with the informal sector.

Where crises are overlapping and prolonged, service provision and other urban planning is hindered by lack of data. State and non-state agencies can work together to support sensitive disaggregated data collection and build capacity for future collection.

Non-state agencies should work to build capacity in decentralised utilities, enabling them to deliver better services and collect revenue effectively. National government can complement these efforts by gradually devolving decision-making powers and resources to utilities.

Making Lebanon's water flow: delivering better basic urban services

Lebanon's urban spaces have been shaped by regional and national conflict. Basic services, including water provision, have long suffered from fractured urban planning and extensive informal urbanisation. Vulnerable urban residents rely on vendors, informal services and markets, when state provision and camp-focused humanitarian responses fail to meet their needs. The arrival of 1.5 million Syrian refugees has added to the pressure: UN-Habitat estimates that national demand on water services has increased by 28 per cent since the Syrian crisis began in 2011. Reflecting on water-focused interventions in urban Lebanon over a six-year period, we identify approaches that could increase the efficacy, flexibility and sustainability of responses: inclusive integrated planning; recognising the positive and disruptive power of data; partnership between state and non-state agencies to support autonomous utilities and local institutions; and engagement with the informal sector.

Modern Lebanon (see Box 1) has been shaped by regional crises since the 1940s: an extended civil war, waves of unplanned migration, the 2006 conflict with Israel, and the conversion of Palestinian refugee camps into militarised non-state zones. In this charged region, state—citizen relationships and civil society are weak, while ethnic and religious allegiances are strong, often splintering towns and cities. In urban Lebanon, overlapping crises, conflict and lack of social cohesion have decimated urban planning processes and basic services, as well as fuelling unplanned urbanisation (further driven by developers and informal economies). The result is large numbers of vulnerable city-dwellers who struggle to access basic services such as clean water.

More than a million refugees fleeing war in Syria have joined the vulnerable host populations in poorly planned and ill-served towns, cites and settlements, further increasing the pressure on urban service delivery. As the Lebanese government is unwilling to sanction the expansion of Syrian camps or settlements with permanent infrastructure, most displaced Syrians are living in cities or informal settlements, with no collective rights to land, to homes or to remain.[1] This is this reality in which state and non-state actors (nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), and humanitarian and development agencies) must respond to basic service needs.

Why isn't the water flowing?

While it is a water-rich nation compared to other countries in the Middle East (see Box 2), water and other basic services fail to flow to many displaced people and the poorest families in urban Lebanon. To find out why, and what might

Overlapping crises, conflict and lack of social cohesion have decimated urban planning processes and basic services

help, between 2016 and 2017 we interviewed key state and non-state actors involved in basic service provision and response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Our research showed the challenges to establishing consistent, clean water provision in cities, towns and urban settlements include:

Mistrust of the state. Decades of civil unrest and episodes of conflict have undermined urban planning processes, trust in public institutions like water utilities, availability of data (see below), and capacity across the water and sanitation sector and supporting sectors.

Current refugee crisis. Humanitarian agencies' traditional, camp-focused responses cannot respond to the scale of the Syrian refugee crisis when beneficiaries are in complex urban settings. The current crisis also presents non-state actors with a politically charged landscape to negotiate.

A crisis-by-crisis response. International development agencies tend to work on shorter-term water service improvement, such as upgrading, improving and extending infrastructure for service delivery and wastewater treatment. They also strengthen local capacity to recover cost and build most sustainable water services in the short to medium term. While these are helpful, in contexts characterised by multiple crises, funding and interventions must be flexible enough to anticipate more long-term future need. The average length of a humanitarian crisis is now 17 years,[2] meaning that migration can be protracted, dynamic and long term, and can bring refugees from across the socioeconomic spectrum to cities and towns.

Charged political atmosphere. Many governments perceive urban refugees to be potential political threats and are unwilling to support their presence. At the same time, it is more difficult for humanitarian agencies to directly target displaced people living in cities. This often encourages displaced people to live in informal urban settlements where they are less

visible to authorities, and to rely on informal markets, services and livelihood opportunities.

Lack of data. Planning to improve water and sanitation services in Lebanon is held back by the lack of accurate demographic[3] and household data, or data on water resource availability and quantity. Without consolidated public data, decision making is challenging and there is greater scope for it to be politicised.

Prevalence of informal markets and services. Informal rental markets, for example, respond to the unmet needs of low-income urban groups, but can also make them vulnerable to abuse by unscrupulous landlords and entrepreneurs.[1] Urban water availability can be limited, particularly in sub-divided houses, and its quality — particularly from boreholes and vendors — is often unknowable. This challenge is part of a wider urban crisis and is not exclusive to Lebanon's urban poor.

Working towards water: local planning and capacity building

Against the backdrop of Lebanon's many challenges, it is, as one interviewee said, "a miracle that *any* water comes out of the taps here". But two initiatives have managed to go some way towards putting in place the local urban planning and utility capacity and infrastructure that are needed to underpin safe, reliable water provision in urban Lebanon.

Nationally led and coordinated local planning. International development and humanitarian agencies have been funding and influencing Lebanon's water infrastructure and the institutions that deliver water services for decades. However, their interventions have not always been coordinated with each other or with the state, limiting effectiveness. In response to several years of ad hoc responses to the Syrian crisis, the *Lebanese Crisis Response Plan* (LCRP)[4] was developed in 2015. Under the plan, ten key sectors have response plans coordinated by the relevant Lebanese ministry and a UN body (see Figure 1). The LRCP's water and sanitation sector is overseen by the Ministry of Environment and Water (MoEW) and supported by UNICEF; together they work directly with the decentralised water establishments that channel strategic and financial support to improve water services (see below).

The LCRP allows the government to play a leading role in channelling international NGO (INGO) finance and coordinating the efforts of state and non-state agencies engaged in responding to the needs of host populations *and* the displaced; it currently identifies 3.3 million people who are 'in need'. National ministries responsible for certain

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Box 1. Lebanon: a snapshot

Lebanon is a small country, bordered by Syria, Israel and the Mediterranean Sea, with a population of 5.9 million. In cities and towns, the poorest host and displaced populations live in subdivided houses and unplanned settlements. These urban spaces are home to:

- 90 per cent of the population, and

- 85 per cent of the 1.5 million Syrian refugees to arrive since 2011.

Beirut alone is home to 350,000 Syrian refugees.

humanitarian and development challenges coordinate the efforts of local NGOs, INGOs, development and humanitarian agencies, the private sector and academic institutions. The LCRP embodies a strategic shift towards interventions that deliver longer-term *stabilisation*. The 'ministry plus INGO' structure is also able to support the efforts of municipalities in areas where they have jurisdiction (such as education, energy, identifying local health and social needs, housing and informal settlements, social stability and mitigating social tensions, and some wastewater treatment).

There is an additional advantage to coordination in terms of data collection. Since 2015, the supporting humanitarian agencies have undertaken a range of integrated urban planning processes that collect and centralise data on all ten sectors, in order to prioritise and harmonise responses by non-state actors. Agencies such as UN-HABITAT have worked directly with local municipalities to develop neighbourhood profiles and strategies that can be adopted, used and developed for integrated inclusive urban planning in the medium to long term.[5] This takes the politics out of data collection and provides information that can help plan for the future, not just for the current crisis.

In the water and sanitation sector, UNICEF has been working with the MoEW on data collection. Improved data on water resources, potential groundwater recharge points and the impact of inadequate wastewater treatment means the MoEW can work with water establishments, agencies and donors to make more strategic targeted investments in the water sector. The Sustainable Development Goals have brought more detailed indicators, enabling agencies and

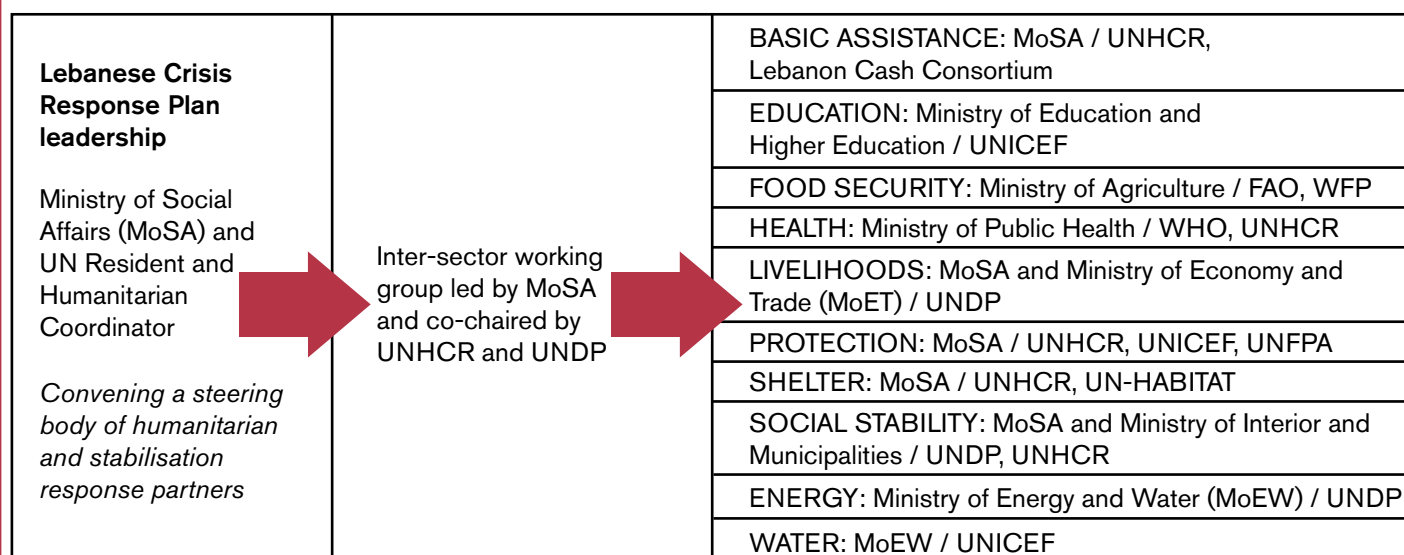## Box 2. Natural riches don't trickle down

Lebanon's geology and topography means that the country is relatively water rich for the Middle East, with significant freshwater stored in mountain snowcaps and aquifers. Yet the amount of renewable freshwater resources available per head suggests that the country experiences water scarcity. This is largely due to the institutional challenges that undermine reliable water storage, management and distribution.[7] While informal groundwater use for agricultural and household use is widespread, only 7 per cent of wastewater is treated, which has serious implications for water quality. Given the shortages that effect the main network, households tend to store water in tanks and might mix sources, which makes it difficult to identify the source of any contamination.

Although Millennium Development Goal 7c — which aimed to halve the number of people without access to an improved water source[6] — was officially achieved in Lebanon, in reality provision is intermittent. Electricity outages affect supply and during the dry season 78 per cent of the population have limited access. All households — rich and poor — supplement their supply with water from wells or vendors to varying degrees over the course of the year, also depending on where they live.

government to consider issues such as water quality (although Millennium Development Goal reporting suggested that 97.7 per cent of people in Lebanon had access to an 'improved' water source, recent data collection[6] has revealed a domestic water supply far below water drinking standards, particularly in informal settlements).

Developing decentralised utilities and infrastructure. In 2000, responsibility for water service provision was decentralised to four newly created regional *water establishments* (WEs).[8] While planning and policy responsibility remained with MoEW, the WEs focused on extending provision in their regions sufficiently so that citizens with decent access to the network would pay water bills, which in turn could fund further service extension. However, capacity and institutional constraints meant that WEs were not able to

Figure 1. Current structure and management of Lebanese Crisis Response Plan sectors

Lebanese Crisis Response Plan leadership Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) and UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator *Convening a steering body of humanitarian and stabilisation response partners*	Inter-sector working group led by MoSA and co-chaired by UNHCR and UNDP	BASIC ASSISTANCE: MoSA / UNHCR, Lebanon Cash Consortium
		EDUCATION: Ministry of Education and Higher Education / UNICEF
		FOOD SECURITY: Ministry of Agriculture / FAO, WFP
		HEALTH: Ministry of Public Health / WHO, UNHCR
		LIVELIHOODS: MoSA and Ministry of Economy and Trade (MoET) / UNDP
		PROTECTION: MoSA / UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA
		SHELTER: MoSA / UNHCR, UN-HABITAT
		SOCIAL STABILITY: MoSA and Ministry of Interior and Municipalities / UNDP, UNHCR
		ENERGY: Ministry of Energy and Water (MoEW) / UNDP
		WATER: MoEW / UNICEF

achieve this quickly.[9] This failure, together with the Syrian crisis, exacerbated national water scarcity.

To overcome the issues holding back the WEs, the MoEW has been working with UNICEF and other international agencies to build the establishments' institutional capacity and to improve urban water infrastructure (a formal partnership between the MoEW and UNICEF began 2015). This has had only limited effect to date; the WEs still struggle to collect revenue and provide a consistent service. They are most successful in regions where the majority of municipalities (local governments) work with them or have handed over water provision responsibilities completely. So far, only the Beirut and Mount Lebanon Water Establishment is financially autonomous. UNICEF reports it is by far the best performing utility in Lebanon in term of revenue collection, with 80 per cent of users paying for the service. The collection rate then drops to 65 per cent for the South Lebanon Water Establishment.[10]

The situation is very different in the Bekaa Valley and North Lebanon. Here, more than half of the 200 municipalities continue to provide water services in parts of the region that the WEs have yet to consolidate. The WEs in charge — Bekka Valley Water Establishment and North Lebanon Water Establishment — have revenue collection rates of only 37 per cent and 58 per cent, respectively.[11] Poor coverage and poor revenue collection create a cycle of non-delivery and frustration; a recent survey estimated that three-quarters of North Bekaa's residents are unsatisfied with public network water services.[11] While the Syrian crisis could have been an opportunity to empower the WEs and consolidate the sector, progress has been slow.[7]

One source of support could be a shift in the nature of INGO support from emergency response to policy change. When the first Syrian refugees arrived in 2011, most international agencies were exiting from programmes developed in response to the 2006 Israeli conflict. But USAID was somewhat unusual as its presence and budget for intervention in Lebanon bridged the crises. This more consistent presence enabled its water infrastructure work with the MoEW to develop

from straightforward reconstruction projects into collaboration with WEs on revenue collection and improved service delivery.

Basic services for all: building on what we know

State and non-state agencies have made a start on exploring how to deliver an improved water supply to Lebanon's diverse urban populations. Looking at the progress of the LCRP and WEs helps us to identify some approaches that will enable strong and resilient urban planning and service infrastructures to develop:

Inclusive working. The LCRP shows us that inclusive integrated planning approaches, driven jointly by state and non-state agencies, can both begin to respond to the needs of host and displaced communities and lay the foundations for urban service planning that can respond effectively to future crises.

Better data. Data can drive strategic and disruptive change in a crisis context. If humanitarian agencies play a support role in collecting and mediating the handover of data to public institutions, they can enable strategic, evidence-based planning for water supply and other basic services.

Support decentralisation. State and non-state support for decentralised utilities, through capacity building and improved infrastructure, would enable the cycle of better provision and better payment collection to grow, leading to reinvestment.

Engage with informal markets and services. When the informal sector is providing a service as vital as water, state and non-state agencies need to engage with it.[12] Municipalities can be key entry points for agencies wishing to deliver humanitarian support; agencies must in turn support local authorities without subverting local structures, and find willing mayors who can work with them to respond to local needs.

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Notes

[1] Norwegian Refugee Council (2017) Security of tenure in urban areas. Guidance note for humanitarian practitioners. IIED, London. http://pubs.iied.org/10827IIED / [2] Earle, L (2016) Urban crises and the new urban agenda. *Environment and Urbanization* 28(1) 77–86. / [3] There has not been an official census since 1932 given concerns that the data might enflame social tensions. / [4] See www.un.org.lb/english/lcrp / [5] See http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=1386 / [6] Improved drinking water sources are those which by nature of their design and construction have the potential to deliver safe water. See WHO and UNICEF (2017) *Progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene: 2017 update and SDG baselines.* Geneva. www.unwater.org/new-publication-whounicef-joint-monitoring-programme-2017-report / [7] Diep, L, Hayward, T, Walnycki, A, Husseiki, M and Karlsson, L (2017) Water, crises and conflict in MENA: how can water service providers improve their resilience? IIED, London. / [8] Mandated by Water Law 221/2000. / [9] Machayekhi, D, Pierpaoli, M, Cancelliere, G (2017) Domestic water in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon: demand, access and institutional aspects. IIED, London. / [10] Interview 60, 20 November 2016. See: Diep, L, Hayward, T, Walnycki, A, Husseiki, M and Karlsson, L (2017) Water, crises and conflict in MENA: how can water service providers improve their resilience? IIED, London. http://pubs.iied.org/10846IIED / [11] Gruppo di Volontariato Civile 2016; Interview 52, 17 November 2016. / [12] There continue to be examples of municipalities who will not engage with humanitarian agencies given their political affiliations, or who do not tolerate refugees by implementing strict curfews and operating forced evictions.

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