**Background:**

In the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit report by UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon stated that humanitarians must, “move beyond traditional silos, work across mandates, sectors and institutional boundaries.” The value of a multi-sectoral integrated approach has been particularly recognized in urban contexts. The IASC has called for a “paradigm shift…. based [on] area-based or community-based approaches.” In addition, for several years now USAID/OFDA has been advocating a settlements approach: integrated, multi-sector programming in socially defined space. ECHO’s 2017 thematic policy document on Shelter and Settlements states that “Shelter and the larger concept of settlement are inextricably linked and should be addressed as a whole rather than separately.” UNHCR, in its Settlements and Shelter strategy, has also emphasized the relevance of this approach in refugee and displacement contexts and argued that it contributes to positive protection and gender outcomes.

Over the past decade, a growing consensus has emerged within the humanitarian community that the humanitarian response requires a paradigm shift. Too often, humanitarian actors have been challenged and slow to adapt to the changing needs of affected communities, diverse contexts, and dwindling resources, and have been unable to effectively and consistently adopt integrated and multi-sectoral approaches. Several previous discussions, roundtables and conferences were held on this topic but primarily limited to shelter and settlements stakeholders.

This WG aims to identify best practices and lessons learnt on settlements/Area-based approaches, particularly in urban responses, and link with other practitioners and clusters to promote an inter-cluster, inter-sector approaches in humanitarian assistance.

This review of terminology has been undertaken to bring some clarity and understanding on the usage of terminologies. This paper is not an attempt to promote the use of one terminology over the other. It must be also noted that many of the authors and papers have used these terminologies more broadly to apply to a particular context, but the meanings could have different associations in different contexts.

Below is a short review of several pertinent pieces of literature[[1]](#footnote-1) focusing on this usage. The terms are limited to ***Area-based***, ***Settlements***, and ***Neighborhoods***.

1. **AREA-BASED**

**Definitions:**

An ***area*** is a geographically defined space. The boundaries of an area can be administrative or defined by natural geography (such as cliff lines or waterways) or social geography (such as socially defined neighborhoods).

***Area-based*** defines interventions by area rather by sector. It involves working with the population in need in a geographic area (including displaced, refugee and host populations) and with all sectors (including international humanitarian sectors/clusters, national humanitarian service providers, and national and local institutions/authorities/municipalities) to provide a holistic response that reduces gaps in services.

***Area-based approaches*** ***(ABAs)*** also represent a coordination mechanism for humanitarian and other stakeholders, and that perhaps in ‘urban contexts this kind of multisector geographical coordination could replace the “compartmentalized” cluster system’ (**Document 1**, p.13).

***Area-based approaches*** focus on problems at local level – engaging communities, local government and other organizations working or located in the vicinity. The responsibility to address the problems linked to their area shifts to the local actors (**Document 1**, p.15).

**Characteristics:**

In an urban context, ***area-based approaches*** have three defining characteristics: they

are geographically targeted, multi-sectoral and adopt a participatory approach. (**Document 1**, p.3)

Across the policy literature, the single most defining characteristic was that an area-based approach ‘defines an area, rather than a sector or target group as the main entry point’ (IRC 2015 as cited in **Document 1**, p.5). As such, ***area-based approaches*** have a strong ‘focus on communities in defined spatial contexts’ (**Document 4**) and the response seeks to address the problems associated within that defined area (**Document 1**, p. 8).

***Area-based approaches*** are a way of ‘responding to multi-sector needs’ (**Document 4**). ‘Depending on the character of local problems and opportunities available, [an area-based approach] typically embraces a range of social, economic and physical development objectives cutting across … fields such as education, housing, transport and economic development’ (**Document 1**, p.10).

For the CCCM cluster, an ***area-based*** ***approach*** is used in Mobile Site Management, for which mobile teams cover a number of sites in a specified area to coordinate and monitor the services provided by different agencies in a variety of sectors. This approach is used when a single site does not warrant full time management and is applicable in both urban and non-urban contexts (**Collective Centre Guidelines**, p. 15). Mobile Site Management can focus particularly on building the capacity of participatory community structures to engage in the care and maintenance of their sites, to coordinate and interact with service providers, and to ensure protection of the most vulnerable.

The Global CCCM Cluster’s Urban Displacement and Outside of Camp (UDOC) desk review suggests a community-centred or ***area-based*** ***approach*** within a defined geographical area that ‘facilitate[s] exchanges between service providers, communities, local authorities and other actors’ (**UDOC** p. 76). Specifically, a resource centre model can respond to needs of both the displaced and host populations within an area and can be designed for handover in order to support local governance structures for long-term sustainability. The area(s) of intervention is/are selected from among the most vulnerable areas, where there is a large ratio of displaced persons to host community. As ***area-based approaches*** provide a method of assisting vulnerable populations alongside those affected by the crises, they can ‘contribute to improving social cohesion’ (IDMC et al. 2015 as cited in **Document 1**, p. 13).

***Area-based approaches*** have also long been adopted in international urban development programs to target geographical areas of deprivation and promote investment in key socio-economic infrastructure. (**Document 1**, p.11).

1. **SETTLEMENTS**

**Definitions:**

A ***settlement*** derives from the structured landscape of a territory and must address the needs of the community at large and be designed with the active involvement of affected populations, partners, and all sectors (**Document 6**, p.16). ***Settlements*** should not be understood simply as safe physical spaces containing shelters and other basic services, but as socially acceptable and socioeconomically viable living environments (**Document 5,** p.2).

***Settlement(s) approaches*** are area-based in that they focus on a specific geographical area and adopt a participatory, multi-sectoral approach that includes various informal or formal (governance or social) structures in addition to buildings and local infrastructure. This approach includes the living environments and human settlements such as neighborhoods and is often approached from a holistic, multi-sector/stakeholder perspective. Settlements can be formal or informal and can exist in rural or urban environments.

**Characteristics:**

The implementation of ***settlements approaches*** in urban areas requires effective identification of target communities and the delineation of the territory that they inhabit (their ***settlement***). In urban settings this will typically consist of a set of neighborhoods; such an approach is holistic and multi-sectorial, with understanding of needs and response capacity on which humanitarian and development actors can leverage; and the identification of effective community counterparts, with which exogenous humanitarian actors can engage to support the implementation of response (**Document 3**).

In many contexts, ***settlements*** do not correspond to existing administrative and service-catchment boundaries and are rather reflective of informal community-based relationship and decision-making networks (**Document 3**). Therefore, informal or formal community cohesion is key aspect of a settlement.

The *settlement approach* offers a framework of support to communities providing housing and essential infrastructure integrating not only sectors such as water sanitation and education but also livelihoods responses in order to quickly re-establish better economic conditions for communities (Document 2, p. 54).

***Settlement approaches*** promote multi-sector and multi-stakeholder action in a given territory and are ‘informed by community-decision making mechanisms reflective of the social, economic and physical features of the defined area’ (**Document 4**).

1. **NEIGHBORHOOD**

**Definitions:**

A ***neighborhood*** is a specific geographical area of a limited size that is defined not only by the area it encompasses but by social, economic, and physical features. A ***neighborhood*** is much less defined by governance structures than by community links, but can often serve as the basis for administrative and political recognition within larger jurisdictions. In some humanitarian examples, a ***neighborhood*** can be defined by geographical or infrastructure features (for example, the “Katye Neighborhood Improvement Program in Ravine Pintade was bounded by three main roads and sloped very steeply towards the ravine” (**Document 1**, p.10).

***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 (**Document 4**).

***Neighborhood approaches***, can be used to describe an area-based approach at a certain scale (e.g. the neighborhood is the ‘unit’ of intervention) (**Document 1**, p. 11). Though the term is sometimes used interchangeably with settlements approaches, they are also sometimes considered a smaller unit of invention than settlements.

**Characteristics:**

Since 2011 the US Agency for International Development – Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA), has advocated for a ‘***neighborhood approach***’ – which it describes as ‘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 defined area’ (**Document 4**). USAID/ OFDA have identified the ‘***neighborhood approach***’ as an ‘effective operational means of guiding the recovery of disaster-affected communities’ that ‘enhance[s] clarity and understanding of how best to coherently provide multi-sectoral assistance amidst the multi-faceted conditions of urban areas’ (USAID/OFDA 2012 as cited in **Document 1**, p.6).

The ***neighborhoods approach*** 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 (**Document 4**).

When defining a geographical area for humanitarian intervention, the question of scale is also key. However, the literature reviewed, including the case studies, typically describe programs at a ‘***neighborhood***’ level, often in informal areas with estimates of around 1,400–6000+ households impacted by the project (**Document 1**, p. 10).

1. **Relationships among the terms:**

The terms explored in this paper are all linked to humanitarian interventions based on geographic rather than sector-based criteria. ***Area-based***, ***settlements***, and ***neighborhoods*** can be thought of as largest to the smallest interventions and with decreasing complexities.

***Area-based*** is the overarching term to describe interventions defined in geographic terms with participatory and multi-sectoral characteristics, and often involves broader entities including the (national or hub) Cluster coordination and information management, engagement with local authorities and institutions and outside links such as private sector and markets etc. However, many aspects of these are context specific and cross boundaries.

***Settlements approaches*** are area-based interventions that consider local level integration. In the humanitarian architecture, settlements are often associated with the Global Shelter Cluster, due to its association with terms such as shelter and settlements. However, the literature review suggests otherwise and does not distinguish or associate settlements with shelters or housing alone. It often relates to broader socio-economic contexts.

***Neighborhood approaches*** are also area-based and link to additional sectors, but the target is relatively smaller units of intervention than settlements approaches.

Please note that some documents/authors do not distinguish between neighborhood, settlements and/or area-based approaches.

**Annex**

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| **ANNEX: Documents Surveyed** |
| * **Document 1:** Maynard, V. & Parker, E. 2015. “Humanitarian response to urban crises: a review of area-based approaches”. International Institute for Environment and Development. <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/10742IIED.pdf> * **Document 2**: IFRC and Skat. 2012. “Sustainable Reconstruction in Urban Areas: A Handbook”. <https://www.humanitarianlibrary.org/sites/default/files/2014/02/urban_reconstruction_handbook_ifrc-skat.pdf> * **Document 3**: Impact Initiatives. n.d. “Strengthening Humanitarian Action by Promoting Settlement Approaches and Effective Engagement with Local Stakeholders Factsheet 2”. * **Document 4**: USAID-OFDA. 2011. “The “Neighborhood Approach”, a Means of Improving the Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance in Urban Areas”. <https://humanitarianlibrary.org/sites/default/files/2014/01/USAID-OFDA%20Neighborhood%20Approach%20One-Pager%20%2711%20Sept%2023.pdf> * **Document 5**: European Commission. 2017. “DG ECHO: Thematic Policy Document Shelter and Settlements”. <http://ec.europa.eu/echo/sites/echo-site/files/ss_consolidated_guidelines_final_version.pdf> * **Document 6**: UNHCR. 2014. “Global Strategy for Settlement and Shelter: A UNHCR Strategy 2014-2018”. <http://www.unhcr.org/530f13aa9.pdf> * **Document 7**: Sanderson, D. & Sitko, P. 2017. “Urban area-based approaches in post-disaster contexts: Guidance Note for Humanitarian Practitioners”. International Institute for Environment and Development. <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/10825IIED.pdf> * Document 8: The Global CCCM Cluster. 2014. Desk Review: Urban Displacement & Outside of Camp. <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/489lzpo8ojtvdyg/AAAlShfRXOciJOQE_ydc7UpFa?dl=0&preview=UDOC+Desk+Review_Digital+publishing.pdf> |

1. See annex. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)