Bathore, Albania, 2000 and 2014.

I2UD DIGITAL LIBRARY STUDY GUIDE:

THE ROLE OF URBAN PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT IN POST-CRISIS RECONCILIATION AND RECOVERY

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ABOUT THE I2UD DIGITAL LIBRARY

The Institute for International Urban Development (I2UD) is a not-for-profit institution dedicated to improving urban environments for vulnerable communities, by providing research on spatial development issues, advisory services to city leaders, and urban planning education programs.

The I2UD Digital Library is an educational database of 40+ years of urban planning research, designed to facilitate a global perspective of urban planning history for a broad, diverse public audience. The Library is coupled with an archival photography collection documenting urban development conditions in over 13 countries. The Library's curated Study Guides will provide a resource for engaging critical urban issues in classrooms, conferences, and development projects. Collectively, these resources offer comprehensive practical documentation and essential materials for understanding both successful and unsuccessful urban development practices, shedding light on the evolving approaches in this field over decades.

The Library opens a longitudinal knowledge bank of historical documentation to inform future research agendas for sustainable urban development. This project seeks to provide crucial historical resources for students, citizens, local governments, and young professionals to understand current issues threatening the environmental mosaic of our shared world. The I2UD Digital Library offers a comprehensive historical perspective on urban development initiatives in Global South cities, filling a notable research gap often skewed towards Western/Global North viewpoints.

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INTRODUCTION

As conflicts increasingly impact urban areas, the role of communities, cities, and regions in post-conflict recovery and reconciliation has become crucial. Urban centers, often at the core of social, economic, and political life, bear the brunt of conflict through damaged infrastructure, disrupted services, and fractured communities. Yet, these same cities also hold the potential to become hubs for recovery and resilience, fostering inclusive growth and stability through thoughtful planning and management. This study guide explores the evolution of post-crisis recovery, focusing on how urban planning and management strategies can support the transition from short-term humanitarian response to long-term development and reconciliation.

Urban planning and management in a post-crisis setting involves more than rebuilding physical structures; it requires addressing social, economic, and governance challenges to lay a foundation for lasting peace. Conflicts often deepen existing inequalities and strain resources, creating urban environments marked by displacement, damaged infrastructure, and weakened governance. Effective urban planning and management can help bridge these divides by fostering inclusive approaches to reconstruction, supporting equitable access to resources, and engaging local communities and institutions in decision-making. In this way, urban planning is a powerful tool to promote social cohesion, build resilience, and prevent the recurrence of conflict.

The International Institute for Urban Development (I2UD) has made significant contributions to this field. I2UD's projects and interventions in cities, territories, and countries navigating post-conflict situations or dealing with major economic and political transitions around the world have demonstrated how inclusive planning processes can build the capacities of local and national governments to address complex post-crisis realities. I2UD's work emphasizes the importance of navigating power dynamics, engaging diverse stakeholders, building local capacity, and creating frameworks supporting immediate relief and longer-term sustainable development.

This study guide provides a comprehensive roadmap to understanding post-crisis urban recovery and reconciliation. In this study guide, "post-crisis" refers to contexts following natural disasters, other disasters, conflicts, major geopolitical or socioeconomic transitions, or other significant disruptions. The guide delves into the essential definitions and distinctions of post-crisis reconciliation and recovery, examining their social, economic, and physical dimensions. It then explores the interplay between cities, conflicts, and urban planning, highlighting the critical challenges urban centers and territories face during crises and the roles of governance and community resilience. The guide evaluates the contrasting paradigms of humanitarian and developmental approaches, addressing their limitations and synergies in post-crisis contexts. I2UD's contributions are highlighted, showcasing best practices and lessons learned from the organization's interventions in recovery and reconciliation across various global contexts. The guide concludes with an analysis of the relevance of these frameworks to current global challenges, offering practical tools and resources for practitioners. Annexes provide a curated list of I2UD resources and discussion questions for further exploration.

DEFINING POST-CRISIS RECONCILIATION AND RECOVERY

In the context of post-conflict and major geopolitical transition, understanding the terms “reconstruction,” “recovery,” and “reconciliation” is essential. Traditional “reconstruction” tends to focus on restoring infrastructure and returning a community to its pre-conflict state. However, this approach has limitations, as it may inadvertently restore the very issues that contributed to the original conflict, such as socioeconomic inequalities and unaddressed grievances. This narrow emphasis on physical rebuilding often overlooks deeper social, economic, and political challenges within a fractured community, risking a superficial recovery that fails to prevent future conflicts.

In contrast, “recovery” offers a more comprehensive and forward-looking approach, encompassing a broader range of needs, including economic, social, medical, and psychological support. Recovery goes beyond physical reconstruction, aiming to build resilience and adaptability, supporting a more inclusive and stable future. Aligned with the philosophy of “building back better,” recovery emphasizes addressing root causes of conflict and promoting equitable growth, thus fostering long-term stability. This approach supports the physical renewal of urban areas and encourages communities to grow and evolve, building structures and systems that can withstand future challenges.

“Reconciliation” is also central to effective recovery. It is a process focused on restoring trust and rebuilding relationships within communities divided by conflict or crisis. Reconciliation addresses the deep-seated divisions, grievances, and polarization that, if left unaddressed, could lead to renewed violence. Inclusive, participatory efforts are key to effective reconciliation as they foster mutual understanding and create shared goals among different groups.

While both post-disaster and post-conflict recovery processes share similarities, such as the need to rebuild infrastructure, restore services, and address displacement, there are also important distinctions. Post-disaster recovery usually has a clear start date and is often marked by a sudden onset, such as an earthquake or hurricane. In post-disaster contexts, international solidarity and coordination are typically high, leading to more immediate support. Although post-disaster recovery efforts may reveal underlying social or economic vulnerabilities, there is usually consensus on the need for action, simplifying planning and response efforts.

However, recovery is far more complex in post-conflict and major geopolitical transition situations. Conflicts are often protracted, lacking a definitive start or end, and may leave communities fragmented with damaged or deliberately targeted infrastructure. Power vacuums, governance struggles, and lingering factional divisions complicate planning in post-conflict settings. Furthermore, issues such as land grabbing, contested authority, and inequitable resource distribution create additional barriers to equitable recovery. Therefore, Planning must navigate these complexities, addressing immediate physical needs and the broader, often volatile, socio-political realities of post-conflict communities. Through an inclusive and adaptable approach, urban planning and management can play a critical role in moving communities from short-term response to long-term development and recovery.

All three elements (reconstruction, recovery and reconciliation) are required for holistic and equitable redevelopment strategy and longer-term sustainable development impacts. In major conflicts, crises, and geopolitical transitions, rebuilding infrastructure, reweaving social fabrics, addressing underlying fractures, and fostering inclusive governance are all interlinked and interdependent. These processes ensure that communities are restored and equipped to address future challenges, build trust, and establish mechanisms for peace and cooperation.

CITIES, CONFLICTS AND PLANNING

Conflicts severely impact urban areas, disrupting essential systems such as housing, sanitation, transportation, and health services. Urban centers are particularly vulnerable and under immense pressure due to rapid population growth. By 2030, two-thirds of the global population is predicted to live in cities, with 96% of urban growth expected to occur in developing countries, many of which already face fragility. And according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), armed conflicts are increasingly fought in urban environments, with approximately 50 million people currently bearing the brunt of such violence.[1]

Beyond physical destruction, conflicts also erode cultural sites deeply embedded in people's identities and collective memory. Conflicts often compound pre-existing social and economic inequalities, creating heightened risks and instability within urban communities. This fragility is further amplified by forced displacement, which, according to the UNHCR, affected approximately 120 million people in 2024.[2] Among these displaced populations, 60% of refugees and 80% of internally displaced persons (IDPs) now reside in urban areas. More refugees and IDPs are moving into urban areas to avoid camp settings that may lack opportunities, such as employment and access to services.[3] This trend became particularly evident during the Syrian refugee crisis as many displaced people sought integration into urban areas rather than remaining confined to camps.[4]

In Turkey, Gaziantep was projected to grow by 457,720 over ten years, yet within three years, it grew by 500,400 due to the influx of Syrian refugees. With many refugees living within the city, the Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality developed short-term and long-term plans for providing services to an expanded population.[5] The transformation of camps into cities raises critical questions about long-term sustainability. For instance, Kakuma Camp in Kenya, established in 1992, now houses over 164,000 people and has evolved into a semi-permanent urban area. As camps grow in size and complexity, they often acquire characteristics typical of cities, necessitating integrated urban planning to address infrastructure, services, and governance. Similarly, cities facing a population influx during crises or conflicts must adapt to accommodate displaced populations to avoid overburdening existing systems.

Despite being closest to the affected populations, local governments are often not integrated into or left out of humanitarian responses. However, they are instrumental in providing essential services and maintaining continuity in community support. While the central government plays a key role in redevelopment, local governments can drive the adoption of new policies and practices, especially when national-level politics reach a standstill. For example, local authorities in the Irish border region advocated for and led projects strengthening cross-border and cross-community cooperation.

Post-crisis planning and management should address the urgent needs of crisis-affected populations, such as housing and basic services, while laying the foundations for lasting development, resilience, and peace. In the post-crisis context, planning is a critical management and coordination tool among various stakeholders, helping to structure land settlement and infrastructure investments. It can foster local ownership, strengthen community ties, and support an inclusive vision for future urban growth if done well. Planning must integrate humanitarian and developmental perspectives to build resilience and support social cohesion.

1 Maurer, P. (2017). War in cities: What is at stake? International Committee of the Red Cross.
2 USA for UNHCR. (2025.). Refugee statistics.
3 UNHCR Innovation Service. (2016). The power of cities. UNHCR.
4 A 2015 World Bank report noted that only 12 percent of the estimated 2.2 million registered Syrians under Temporary Protection (SuTPs) live in tents and temporary shelters; the rest are settled in urban areas, seeking their own accommodations and work opportunities.
5 Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality. (2019). Municipality improves inclusion of Syrian refugees in Turkey. The Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR.

MAJOR CHALLENGES AND IMPACTS ON CITIES

Conflicts reshape urban landscapes and bring a host of economic, social, and spatial challenges. Key issues include:

- **Declining Economic and Employment Conditions:** Conflict disrupts local economies, leading to job losses and reduced economic opportunities, especially for vulnerable populations.
- **Changes in Governance Systems or Hierarchies:** Post-crisis power shifts or governance vacuums can hinder effective urban planning, as weakened institutions struggle to coordinate recovery.
- **Refugee/IDP Crisis and Population Shifts:** Cities face increased pressures from population influxes, often lacking the capacity to accommodate the sudden growth.
- **Infrastructure and Housing Deficits:** Conflict or crises often leave cities with substantial infrastructure and housing gaps, requiring significant investment and strategic planning to meet urgent and long-term needs.
- **Mismatch or Lack of Governing Capacities:** Local authorities frequently lack the resources or capacities to manage post-crisis urban needs, highlighting the need for strengthened institutional support.
- **New Political Boundaries and Cross-Border Issues:** In cases where conflict alters boundaries or introduces new political divisions, urban planning must adapt to these changes and manage potential cross-border tensions.
- **Balancing Short-Term Needs with Long-Term Strategies:** Immediate recovery needs must be balanced with a long-term vision for redevelopment, which includes economic growth and resilience against future crises.
- **Ethnic/Cultural Tensions and Reconciliation Challenges:** Conflict exacerbates existing social divides, making reconciliation and inclusive development central goals of urban planning in post-conflict environments.

Effective post-crisis urban and territorial planning encompasses recovery's physical and social aspects. By incorporating the following strategies, local government authorities can address immediate needs and support long-term urban resilience:

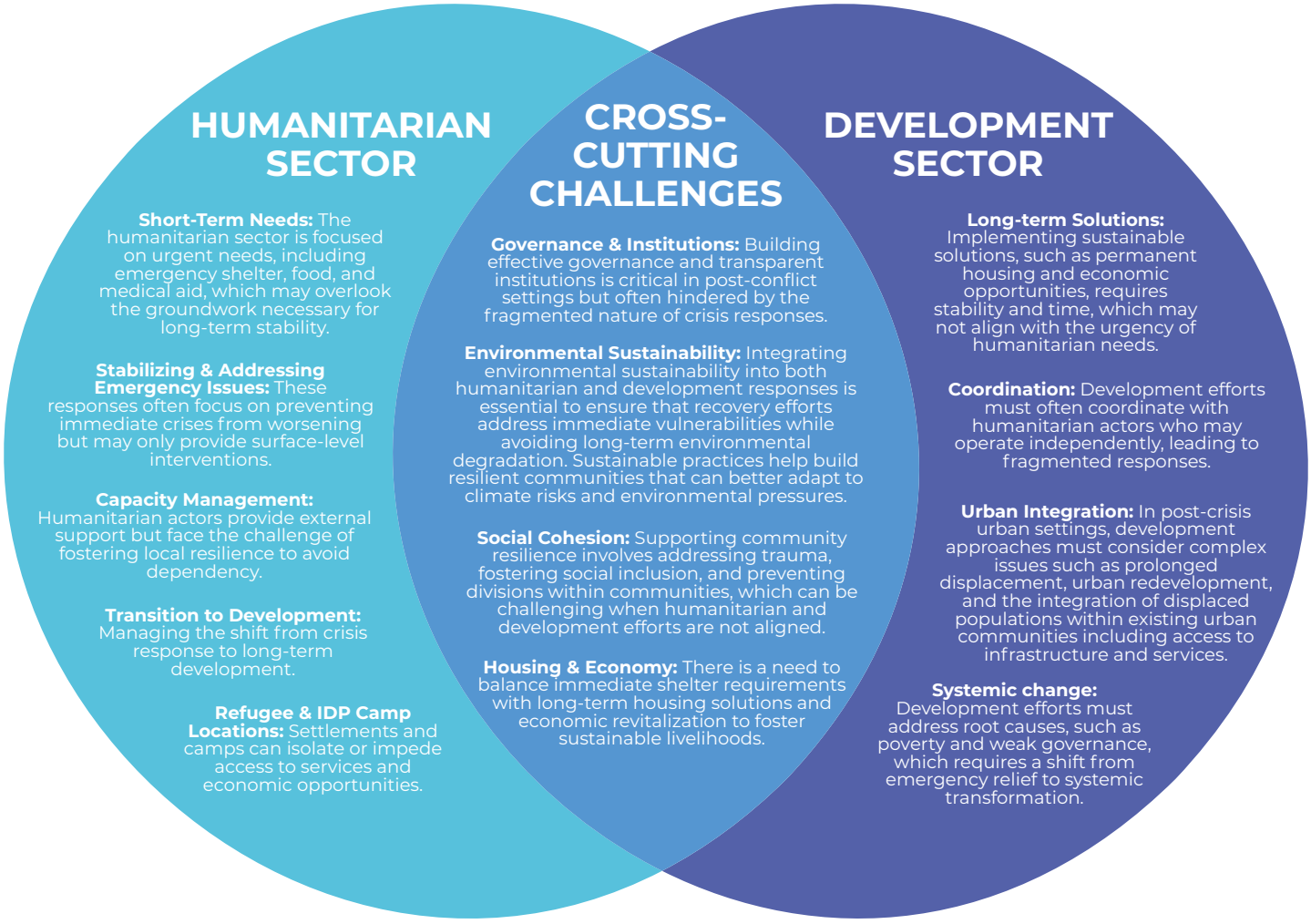
- **Promoting Social Integration:** Inclusive planning processes that engage displaced persons, host communities, and local authorities foster mutual understanding and reduce tensions. By prioritizing shared public spaces and equitable service delivery, cities can build a sense of collective ownership and belonging.
- **Culturally Sensitive Reconstruction:** Integrating cultural heritage into urban redevelopment helps restore communal identity and builds resilience by recognizing and preserving the shared history of affected populations.
- **Empowering Local Institutions:** Strengthening local governance capacity is vital for sustainable development. Involving local governments from the outset ensures that recovery efforts align with local needs and lay the groundwork for a resilient, self-sustaining urban future.

HUMANITARIAN VS. DEVELOPMENT PARADIGMS

In post-crisis and recovery scenarios, there is often tension between humanitarian and development sectors due to their differing objectives, time-frames, and methods. Humanitarian interventions focus on immediate, life-saving relief, aiming to address urgent needs in the aftermath of a crisis. This rapid-response approach can inadvertently overlook long-term development goals, which prioritize sustainable growth, rebuilding infrastructure, and strengthening local institutions. On the other hand, development efforts focus on systemic Change, addressing root causes such as poverty, governance issues, and economic instability, which are essential factors in building more resilient communities.

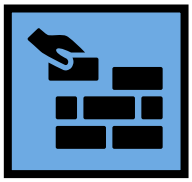
The conflict between these sectors is compounded by their distinct funding sources, timelines, and priorities, leading to a fragmented response that struggles to transition effectively from emergency relief to long-term recovery. Urban planning and management play a critical bridging role in aligning these sectors by providing a framework that incorporates immediate needs and sustainable development. Through integrated planning, humanitarian responses can be structured to support future growth, while development efforts can build upon the foundation set by emergency interventions. Urban management thus becomes essential for creating a coordinated, holistic approach that aligns short-term relief with long-term recovery.

KEY CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS



REVIEW OF POST-CRISIS RECOVERY POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Urban and territorial planning has played a pivotal yet evolving role in post-crisis recovery, shaped by changing global paradigms in humanitarian response and development practice, as well as lessons learned from past failures. Recovery paradigms have evolved from narrowly focused rebuilding efforts to more complex approaches integrating economic reform, local governance, social cohesion, peacebuilding, and climate resilience. This section reviews major policy shifts from post-WWII reconstruction to the present, highlighting how each phase has addressed—or overlooked—the interconnected goals of reconstruction, recovery, and reconciliation.



1. Post-WWII – Economic Liberalization (1945-1970s)

Context

In the aftermath of WWII, much of Europe was in ruins, with damaged infrastructure and economies. The U.S. sought to stabilize and rebuild Europe to prevent the spread of communism and promote market economies.

Key Policies

- **Marshall Plan (1948):** Provided billions in aid to rebuild European infrastructure, focusing on developing open-market economies to promote stability and prevent future conflicts.
- **Emphasis on Infrastructure and Market Economies:** Reconstruction focused on physical rebuilding—roads, railways, utilities—and market liberalization, which laid the groundwork for free-market economic systems.

Limitations and Backlash

- **Dependence on Foreign Aid:** European countries became reliant on U.S. funding, raising concerns about sovereignty and the influence of foreign powers on domestic policy.

2. Cold War and Structural Adjustment Programs (1970s-1980s)

Context

The Cold War saw the U.S. and USSR competing for influence in developing nations, often through financial and political support. The World Bank and the IMF, influenced by Western countries, introduced Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) to stabilize economies in post-conflict and developing countries. For example, Nigeria implemented SAPs following the Biafran War (1967–1970) to manage reconstruction and reduce economic instability. Similarly, Chile faced major economic restructuring after the political turmoil following the military coup, and El Salvador grappled with structural adjustments amid civil conflict and efforts to rebuild.

Key Policies

- **Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs):** Focused on economic reforms, including fiscal austerity, trade liberalization, and privatization of state-owned assets, as conditions for receiving loans.
- **Economic Liberalization:** SAPs aimed to integrate post-conflict countries into the global market economy, promoting private sector growth over state-run economies.

Limitations and Backlash

- **Worsening Inequality:** SAPs were widely criticized for disproportionately benefiting elites and foreign investors while cutting social programs that served vulnerable populations.
- **Loss of Sovereignty:** Many recipient nations resented SAPs as these policies undermined national sovereignty and forced countries into economic dependency on Western institutions.
- **Mixed Economic Outcomes:** Many countries struggled to achieve sustainable economic growth under SAPs, and the focus on economic reform without adequate social support created lasting social and economic divisions.
- **Lack of Local Capacity** Building: SAPs often emphasized short-term project management over long-term institutional development. Programs were frequently implemented through Project Implementation Units (PIUs) that operated independently of local institutions, bypassing opportunities to strengthen local governance. While this approach expedited project delivery, it left recipient countries with limited capacity to sustain reforms or address systemic challenges once external support was withdrawn.

3. Post-Cold War Era and Rise of International Administrations (1990s)

Context

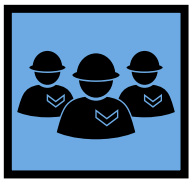
With the end of the Cold War, international attention shifted to peacekeeping and nation-building in conflict zones. International organizations assumed more significant roles in post-conflict recovery, particularly in regions with weak or absent governance.

Key Policies

- **International Administration and Peacebuilding:** International bodies, such as the United Nations, established administrations in countries like Bosnia, Kosovo, and East Timor. These administrations focused on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of combatants and security sector reform (SSR).
- **NGO Involvement:** There was a rapid increase in international NGOs working on social issues like human rights, gender equality, and inter-ethnic relations in post-conflict zones, including Rwanda's post-genocide reconciliation and Cambodia's community development after the Khmer Rouge regime.

Limitations and Backlash

- **Limited Local Participation:** International administrations often sidelined local governments, reducing local ownership and undermining trust among communities.
- **Dependency on External Actors:** These interventions fostered dependency on foreign aid and organizations, and local governments often lacked the capacity to sustain peacebuilding efforts independently.
- **Conflicting Agendas:** The involvement of multiple international actors with different priorities led to fragmented efforts, with limited coordination and effectiveness in long-term stabilization.



4. Post-9/11 – Security-Focused Reconstruction (2000s)

Context

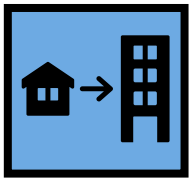
The 9/11 attacks led to a security-focused approach to reconstruction, especially in areas deemed at risk of harboring terrorism. This era saw increased involvement of military forces and private sector contractors in reconstruction efforts.

Key Policies

- **Military-Led Reconstruction:** The U.S. and its allies assumed responsibility for reconstruction in conflict zones like Afghanistan and Iraq, prioritizing security and stabilization over comprehensive civilian recovery.
- **Rise of Private Consulting Firms:** Governments increasingly outsourced reconstruction projects to private consulting and engineering firms, which took on roles traditionally filled by public sector or nonprofit entities.

Limitations and Backlash

- **Security Over Development:** The focus on immediate security often overshadowed broader development needs, resulting in minimal progress on social and economic recovery.
- **Ethical and Accountability Issues:** Private contractors faced criticism for prioritizing profit over sustainable recovery, and some interventions were deemed inappropriate or ineffective.
- **Short-Term Focus:** Military-led projects often lacked continuity, with rapid project cycles that did not support long-term institution-building or community engagement.



5. 2005 – The “Build Back Better” (BBB) Approach

Context

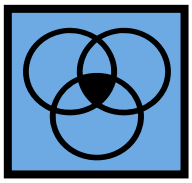
The 2005 Indian Ocean Tsunami highlighted the limitations of traditional recovery efforts, prompting a shift toward recovery that includes social improvement and resilience.

Key Policies

- **Principles of BBB:** The approach includes “do no harm,” accountability to affected communities, prioritizing vulnerable populations, and emphasizing recovery that builds resilience and reduces future risks.
- **Integration into the Sendai Framework:** The BBB principles were later formalized in the 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, influencing global standards for post-disaster and post-conflict recovery.

Limitations and Backlash

- **Challenges in Implementation:** Although BBB principles were widely accepted, actual implementation often fell short due to funding limitations, lack of local input, and inadequate oversight.
- **Funding and Commitment Issues:** BBB’s long-term focus required sustained funding and commitment, which were often lacking, leading to inconsistent outcomes.
- **Top-Down Approaches Persisted:** In some cases, BBB efforts were still led by international actors, limiting the role of local communities and creating disparities in recovery outcomes.



6. The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (mid 2010s-2020s)

Context

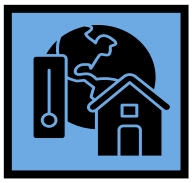
The Syrian refugee crisis marked a turning point in global humanitarian response, as it represented one of the first large-scale displacement crises where refugees predominantly sought refuge in urban areas rather than traditional camps. Cities in neighboring countries like Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, and urban centers across Europe, became the primary destinations for millions fleeing conflict. This urban shift created unique challenges for host communities, straining housing, infrastructure, services, and governance systems. In response to these unprecedented demands, the international community recognized the need to bridge the gap between short-term humanitarian aid and long-term development, introducing the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (HDP Nexus) as a more holistic approach to recovery and resilience.

Key Policies

- **World Humanitarian Summit (2016):** The UN and other organizations committed to integrating humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding goals to create more sustainable and resilient communities.
- **Global Alliance for Urban Crises (2016):** This alliance focused on preparing urban areas for crises, recognizing that cities are often at the forefront of humanitarian emergencies and need integrated, resilient planning strategies.

Limitations and Backlash

- **Coordination and Funding Challenges:** Integrating different sectors proved challenging, with siloed funding structures and competing priorities hindering collaboration.
- **Complex Implementation:** Translating the nexus approach into practical programs has been complex, as humanitarian and development agencies often have different mandates and timelines.
- **Lack of Clear Accountability:** The overlap between humanitarian and development responsibilities sometimes created confusion and a lack of accountability among actors involved.



7. Current Trends (2020s-Present) – Integrating Climate Resilience and Recognition of Urban Displacement and Migration – Framing Recovery Through a 'Post-Crisis' Lens

Context

As climate change intensifies and urban displacement becomes more prevalent, recovery efforts are increasingly viewed through a "post-crisis" lens that integrates post-disaster and post-conflict strategies. This approach acknowledges that natural and human-made crises require resilience-oriented recovery, blending climate adaptation with the complex realities of urban conflict and displacement. Recent policies emphasize climate resilience in urban recovery and integrating displaced populations into city planning as part of a broader, unified post-crisis framework.

Key Policies

- **Climate Adaptation in Urban Recovery:** Emphasizes the construction of climate-resilient infrastructure and the incorporation of environmental sustainability into recovery plans, particularly in urban areas vulnerable to both conflict and natural disasters. This approach reflects the increasing convergence of disaster and conflict recovery through climate-focused planning.
- **Urban Displacement and Migration:** Programs increasingly recognize urban areas as primary sites for displaced populations and integrate planning for affordable housing, secure tenure, and access to basic services.
- **Focus on Decentralization:** Decentralized approaches support local governance and prioritize capacity building, recognizing that local actors are crucial for sustainable and context-specific recovery.

Limitations and Backlash

- **Funding and Resource Gaps:** Climate-resilient infrastructure and long-term housing solutions require significant funding, which is often limited in post-conflict scenarios.
- **Urban Tensions:** Integrating displaced populations in urban areas can lead to competition over resources and social tensions between host communities and displaced individuals, requiring sensitive planning to avoid exacerbating divisions.
- **Long-Term vs. Short-Term Priorities:** Balancing urgent recovery needs with long-term climate resilience goals is challenging, particularly when immediate resources are limited, and climate adaptation is not prioritized.

I2UD'S WORK IN POST-CRISIS RECONCILIATION AND RECOVERY

Since the early 1990s, the Institute for International Urban Development (I2UD) has worked in urban and territorial planning within post-crisis contexts, tackling challenges across various regions and situations. From the transition economies of Eastern Europe to post-apartheid South Africa and from cross-border collaboration in Ireland to the protracted conflicts of the MENA region, I2UD's work has demonstrated the importance of capacity building, participatory processes, and contextually grounded planning and management solutions.

I2UD's work began in Eastern Europe during the post-USSR transition, addressing the broad changes brought about by the shift from centralized planning and communal ownership to decentralization and open market systems. Projects in Poland, Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania focused on building the capacity of newly empowered local governments to take on unfamiliar responsibilities while addressing development gaps and fostering inclusivity in long-marginalized communities. For example, I2UD introduced participatory planning processes in Poland, working with neighborhood residents on cost-sharing initiatives with the city and reshaping planning legislation to reflect local needs and realities. Similar approaches were developed in Tirana, Albania, to provide essential services in neighborhoods facing rapid growth from rural to urban migration.

In South Africa, I2UD supported the post-apartheid transition through the Municipal Infrastructure Program (MIP), focusing on capacity building and strategic development for long-neglected and marginalized communities within and outside major cities. By integrating assessments, technical assistance, and capacity-building activities into a single program, I2UD helped local governments identify and address priority issues for investment that addressed immediate needs. I2UD also held regular training programs for officials and municipal councilors on Infrastructure Planning and Partnerships for economic development.

I2UD supported over a decade of cross-border collaboration between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Through its technical and advisory support as a founding partner in the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD), I2UD contributed to territorial planning that extended beyond urban centers, emphasizing the importance of strategic planning at both regional and local scales. The ICLRD partnership among universities and research centers facilitated reconciliation and future-oriented development in a context shaped by historical divisions and complex challenges. Through this work, I2UD and its ICLRD partners helped facilitate and document best practices of regional cooperation and shared services for municipalities across the Ireland-Northern Ireland border. A combination of timely publications, research reports, training programs, and conferences built a network among cross-border practitioners.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, I2UD addressed the impacts of protracted conflicts and displacement, with cities becoming primary destinations for displaced populations. Through the development of the Iraq National Urban Strategy (NUS), I2UD worked to strengthen sub-national capacity, including developing an online platform to improve information sharing and development processes between the fragmented governorates, key stakeholders, etc., and promote inclusive and strategic policies that reflect the post-conflict challenges and opportunities. Similarly, in Tanzania and other countries, I2UD has supported municipalities in integrating displaced populations, ensuring that refugees are seen not only as a burden but also as contributors to their new communities' social and economic lives.

I2UD has also contributed to landmark reports and research in post-conflict development. The MENA regional background report for the World Migration Report (WMR) at the height of the Syrian refugee crisis recognized the urban dimensions of the refugee crisis and the long-term challenges posed by protracted conflicts. The research highlights that cities have become primary destinations for displaced populations, placing immense pressure on urban infrastructure, housing, and public services, often ill-equipped to handle sudden influxes of migrants, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees. Municipalities frequently depend on national governments for policy support and funding, as local resources are often insufficient to meet the scale of the need.

Across these diverse contexts, I2UD has demonstrated a deep understanding of the challenges inherent in post-crisis planning: mismatched systems, limited resources, neglected regions, and rapid population growth. Overcoming these challenges includes recognizing displaced populations' economic potential, fostering inclusive policies, and ensuring municipalities have the necessary tools, legal frameworks, and financial resources to manage these changes. I2UD's approach emphasizes that recovery cannot simply involve importing systems or expert-driven solutions. Instead, local capacity should be built incrementally, addressing short-term challenges without losing sight of long-term sustainability.

I2UD'S BEST PRACTICES IN POST CRISIS RECONCILIATION AND RECOVERY

Building on these insights, the following outlines key principles and best practices distilled from I2UD's 30+ years of experience in post-crisis urban planning and management. It also references reports that provide examples and methodologies that can be useful in this context.

Scoping and Understanding Contextual Challenges

A comprehensive understanding of the local context is critical to ensuring that post-crisis recovery efforts address the underlying causes of conflict and inequities, governance capacity, and infrastructural gaps. This process involves conducting detailed analyses of political power structures, cultural divisions, housing systems, infrastructure and services, and community needs while engaging directly with affected populations, including displaced groups, to understand their lived realities.

Workshops and focus groups with diverse stakeholders help uncover tensions and priorities. For example, understanding how unequal access to public services or inadequate infrastructure contributed to conflict can inform recovery strategies that promote equity and reconciliation through collaborative urban planning. Scoping becomes a critical first step for fostering trust and mutual understanding among stakeholders while identifying solutions rooted in local realities. Additionally, practical contextual analysis helps frame responsive projects by international agencies.

I2UD Digital Library Resources

- **Review of the South African Government's Grant-Funded Municipal Infrastructure Programs (1998-1999).** The review assessed infrastructure programs across nine South African provinces, ensuring participation from local public officials, council members, community leaders, and residents. The summary and detailed reports provide insights into the economic and social conditions in the provinces four years after the 1994 election, along with recommendations for future projects. The Summary Document highlights nine noteworthy projects. Findings from the reports were later shared in workshops, broadening the reach of lessons learned and best practices among a wider group of stakeholders.

- **Design Studio: Strategic Urban Redevelopment in a Transitional Economy in Gdansk, Poland (1996).** The Design Studio examined urban planning, housing, and development in post-communist Poland, focusing on Gdańsk Province. The program examined economic policies, construction costs, and prevailing building typologies, providing participants with a comprehensive understanding of the region's urban development landscape. Key documents from the project included a detailed studio overview, a report titled Urban Regeneration and Housing in a Transitional Economy: Gdańsk, Poland, and a case study summary, A Foreign Investor's Perspective on Strategic Planning and Urban Development in Poland.

- **Redevelopment and Upgrading of Selected Unsafe and Unplanned Areas in Cairo and Giza Governorates (2012-2016).** I2UD partnered with the Tarek Waly Center (TWC) and Environmental Quality International (EQI) on a Needs Assessment and Activity Design Study to improve services in four large informal settlements. Amid Cairo's ongoing housing crisis—exacerbated in the post-Arab Spring period by political and economic instability—millions remain without access to basic infrastructure, services, and livelihood support. The team's methodology, supported by AFD, provides an excellent example of how contextual analysis can lead to a successful project design. The comprehensive Needs Assessment and Situation Analysis addressed socioeconomic conditions, civil society stakeholders, and urban, infrastructural, and environmental conditions. The analysis also included a Participatory Needs Assessment, small business market scan, and institutional policy review. Consultations with stakeholders and the Activity Design Study informed investment packages for each area, developed with local governments. Launched in 2017, the project continues through 2025 with successive phases and EU support.

Integrating Top-Down and Bottom-Up Governance

Decentralization in post-conflict or crisis settings fundamentally reshapes the relationship between central and local governments, transferring responsibilities to municipalities to better address community needs. While this shift offers opportunities for more inclusive, locally driven recovery, it also introduces challenges as municipalities often lack the capacity, resources, or frameworks to manage their expanded roles. I2UD has facilitated workshops in numerous contexts that bring together central and local officials to collaboratively review proposals, overcoming tensions in newly established institutional relationships. This approach ensured that projects were rooted in a shared understanding of needs and challenges. Effective decentralization requires capacity-building, clear roles, and mechanisms for coordination to ensure recovery efforts reflect national priorities and local realities.

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- **Urban Planning and Local Economic Development for Romania (UPLED) (2000-2001).** As Romania underwent major social, economic, and political transformations, including the decentralization of fiscal and urban management responsibilities, the UPLED program supported the cities of Oradea, Iași, and Focșani in developing city strategies and improving urban management practices to foster local economic development. The program combined technical analysis, seminars, local and international case studies, expert guidance, and networking opportunities to strengthen communication between central and local officials. This facilitated a more coordinated approach to urban development and governance.
- **Workshops on Strategic Planning and Management of Municipal Infrastructure Programs, South Africa (1999).** These workshops were based on an evaluation of South Africa's Municipal Infrastructure Programs (MIPs), which aimed to expand infrastructure services in cities and townships during a period of rapid change. The sessions brought together key stakeholders from local and national levels to assess program performance and refine strategic planning approaches. Documents include the evaluation report, an outline on Performance Indicators, a presentation on MIPs, and international case studies.
- **Shared Services Across Local Government (2010-2012).** In the context of the peace process following decades of conflict between Ireland and Northern Ireland, ICLRD examined international models of shared services that promote coordination between different levels of government and across administrative boundaries. Case studies from Scotland, Spain, New York, and Ontario highlighted practical approaches to joint planning, resource sharing, and integrated service delivery. These insights informed cross-border initiatives between Ireland and Northern Ireland that aimed to align national policies with local implementation while fostering collaboration among local councils and central government bodies.

Empowering Local Stakeholders Through Capacity Building

Local governments, community organizations, and civil society groups often lack the technical expertise, financial resources, and institutional knowledge to navigate complex recovery processes. Capacity-building initiatives, such as conferences, targeted workshops, and training programs, build networks among stakeholders and a common understanding of the key issues they are jointly facing. Importantly, training also equips these stakeholders with the skills to manage urban planning, infrastructure development, and resource allocation effectively.

In post-apartheid South Africa, I2UD supported municipalities through the Municipal Infrastructure Program (MIP), offering training in project prioritization and long-term planning to address disparities in service delivery. Similarly, in Poland, participatory planning workshops enabled residents and local governments

to collaborate on urban redevelopment projects, fostering community-driven solutions. In Ireland, I2UD's participation in a university network, the International Centre for Local and Regional Development, highlighted the role of spatial planning in cross-border cooperation through training programs, conferences, and the development of networks among local governments.

I2UD's capacity-building efforts have demonstrated the value of inclusive approaches, which engage marginalized groups such as women, ethnic minorities, and displaced populations, ensuring that recovery processes are equitable and representative. By strengthening local capacities, recovery becomes more resilient, reducing dependency on external actors and fostering long-term governance that aligns with community needs. Therefore, capacity building is not just about skill development but also about empowering stakeholders to drive transformative, locally grounded recovery initiatives.

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- **Shaping and Managing Cross-Border Development, Executive Training Programs for Irish Border Cities (2010-2014).** Through the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD), I2UD helped design and deliver executive training programs for Council Executives, Councilors, and senior government staff in the context of long-standing divisions between Irish border cities. These programs strengthened planning and governance capacities across three groupings of border counties with shared functional relationships. Workshops, seminars, and annual conferences created space for local stakeholders to jointly identify priorities and develop shared strategies, while follow-up technical assistance supported implementation. For example, the Newry–Dundalk Twin-City training led to a Memorandum of Understanding recognized by the European Union as a best practice outcome, leading to further mutual support on tourism, green energy, and economic development projects in Newry-Dundalk.
- **Municipal Development Planning in Belize (2014).** Seven municipalities in Belize developed Municipal Development Plans through Local Planning Working Groups that included active citizens, council employees, council members, and mayors. Training modules were integrated into each chapter of the municipal plans, providing towns with the necessary skills and guidance to develop effective planning activities. While not a post-crisis context, this work exemplifies how outside experts and locals can co-develop municipal plans with an embedded capacity-building program, sharing community knowledge and international best practices.
- **Szczecin Local Initiative Program, Poland (1999).** The Local Initiatives Program in Szczecin linked neighborhood revitalization with economic development through community partnerships. For example, participatory workshops and training programs used case studies for other community development corporations to explore and co-develop a model that worked on the ground for Szczecin. The project established a collaborative network of local universities, foundations, civic institutions, and nonprofit organizations to improve lower-income neighborhoods' physical and social conditions, ensuring that urban improvement efforts were inclusive and sustainable.

Addressing Impacts of Institutional and Policy Changes at the Local Level

In any post-crisis situation, new policies and relationships rapidly emerge that must be accounted for when designing and implementing local projects. Identifying the gaps in technical, financial, and human resources that emerge due to these shifts is essential. Addressing these gaps requires careful planning, ensuring that projects and policies are designed to meet the evolving needs of local communities. Projects should prioritize interventions for marginalized communities, integrating reconciliation efforts into project design to promote inclusivity and social cohesion. Building capacity through the implementation of these projects is vital, as it equips local stakeholders with the skills and resources necessary for long-term sustainability.

Targeted pilot projects can play a crucial role in catalyzing change. These smaller, impactful projects activate broader policy goals, demonstrate the viability of new approaches, and restore trust in governance, driving recovery and resilience at the local level.

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- **Albania Land Management Program (2007).** After the government transitioned to a democracy in 1990, local authorities were responsible for developing local plans and managing transportation and infrastructure systems, which had previously been managed at the central level. The Tirana program focused on enhancing local municipal capacity within decentralization. Specific actions included training local officials in urban planning, land management, and the provision of infrastructure in a market economy. The program improved living conditions in upgraded areas by providing essential infrastructure to 8,300 families across eight municipalities and positively impacting neighboring communities. The program facilitated the introduction of critical social services within informal settlements, including schools and health facilities, promoting greater social inclusion. Through the development of strategies for regularization and infrastructure investment, the program provided a framework that included participatory planning to integrate informal settlements into the urban fabric while highlighting their economic contributions.

Redressing Historical Inequalities through Participatory Planning

While participatory processes take more time, they lead to better outcomes by involving marginalized communities in decision-making and ensuring that urban development addresses both immediate needs and long-standing disparities. Participatory planning creates platforms for residents, especially those historically excluded, to engage in shaping recovery strategies. By giving all stakeholders a voice, these processes ensure that urban planning reflects the community's diverse needs.

Town halls, advisory boards, and targeted outreach help ensure that recovery plans reflect the needs of all residents, particularly those most affected. Collaborative partnerships between local governments, civil society, and international stakeholders are essential for comprehensive and effective recovery strategies. Capacity-building efforts should be designed to ensure marginalized communities can participate meaningfully in planning processes. Conflict-sensitive design addresses social divides, and transparent decision-making fosters trust and accountability. Although these approaches require more time and effort upfront, they lead to more sustainable, contextually relevant, and widely supported solutions.

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- **Lublin Neighborhood Partnership Initiative (1994-2000).** This initiative focused on rehabilitation and revitalization in historically marginalized communities by introducing citizen involvement in the planning process through participatory and empowerment strategies and the mobilization of local resources. Changes in zoning and an innovative cost-sharing program financed infrastructure and environmental improvements and incentivized private investment in housing and micro-enterprises. The Lublin Local Initiatives Program received a UN Best Practice Award in 1996.

Strategic and Spatial Strategies for Revitalizing Economies for Long-Term Recovery

Urban planning and management should consider broader territorial development and interventions to make linkages beyond the city to facilitate economic revitalization in a post-crisis environment and support long-term recovery. Inclusive approaches are critical, particularly in integrating internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees into the economic fabric of recovery efforts. Strategic spatial interventions can play a significant role in fostering economic revitalization. For instance, Ireland's development of new highways and strategic spatial corridors has been crucial in strengthening economic activities in historically neglected border regions. By focusing on enhancing services and infrastructure on both sides of the border, these projects create synergies that deliver mutual benefits and promote regional economic integration. In South Africa, rebuilding connections among communities that were once physically separated, particularly through improved transportation links, has facilitated economic development and enhanced social mobility. This approach has allowed formerly isolated communities to reconnect and engage in the broader economy, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable recovery.

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- **National Urban Strategy for Iraq (2014-2018).** In a post-conflict setting, this project strengthened coordination across Iraqi government levels, integrating spatial and sectoral planning at the governorate level to support sustainable urban recovery. I2UD prepared technical and area reports and a five-part presentation for a 2016 Strategic Urban Development Framework Workshop in Erbil (Irbīl), Iraq. An example is the final presentation on the Iraq National Urban Strategy, offering a synopsis of applying themes and principles of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and the new urban agenda in a post-conflict setting.

- **Background report for World Migration Report (2015).** An I2UD research team produced a background paper and research materials for the International Organization for Migration's 2015 "World Migration Report," addressing displacement, migration, and resettlement issues in the Middle East and North African geographic region, highlighting the importance of regional cooperation and understanding regional conflict dynamics in managing local migration and displacement challenges. A series of case studies and reports highlight durable shelter solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees in Iraq, Syria, Spain, Italy, Sudan, and Yemen. Supporting materials include "Project Statistics and Refugee Camps" in the region, a "Provincial Action Plan" for Van, Turkey, and an outline of "Durable Housing Solutions and Livelihoods for Georgian IDPs."

- **Applying the Functional Territories Concept: Planning Beyond Borders (2016).** With the shift to strategic spatial planning, planners have increasingly engaged with concepts such as 'fuzzy boundaries' and 'soft spaces', with functional areas closely tied to this shift in policy and practice. This briefing paper reviews the regional planning frameworks for Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Scotland, and how working with the 'functional territories' concept calls for a flexible approach to spatial planning and regional governance. These territories shift depending on the issue, such as labor markets, transportation, or health access, allowing regional actors to develop strategies that reflect actual patterns of daily life and economic activity. This approach supports more integrated planning across politically sensitive borders, like those between Ireland and Northern Ireland, where spatial strategies have helped strengthen economic linkages and coordination in historically neglected or divided regions.

Cultural and Public Spaces as Catalysts

While rebuilding infrastructure is important, prioritizing public and cultural spaces is crucial for true social reconciliation and long-term recovery. These spaces go beyond physical gathering places; they act as essential tools for rebuilding trust, fostering social cohesion, and uniting communities, particularly marginalized groups. Cultural spaces help restore a sense of shared identity, offering opportunities for people to reconnect across divides, engage in dialogue, and heal together. Restoring cultural identity and heritage is vital in this context. Public spaces that honor local culture and history provide a foundation for communities to rebuild shared values and reconnect with their roots. Culturally informed development that recognizes the unique socio-cultural dynamics and cultural memory in the rebuilding process creates more people-centered interventions. By prioritizing these spaces in redevelopment efforts, communities can begin the process of healing from the trauma of conflict, setting the stage for a more unified and resilient society.

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- **Preserving the Historic Urban Fabric in a Context of Fast Paced Change (1998).** This cultural heritage essay by Dr. Mona Serageldin addresses the challenges of maintaining historic centers in rapidly changing societies, particularly in newly independent states and countries undergoing political transitions. The insights remain relevant today, as climate change and migratory upheaval necessitate complex planning to protect valuable urban spaces and cultural heritage.
- **Economy of Historic Preservation (2014).** This research examines the relationship between cultural heritage preservation and urban development, featuring case studies from the Medina of Tunis, Tunisia; Icheri Sheher in Baku, Azerbaijan; and Quito, Ecuador. Developed in collaboration with the Iraqi Ministry of Municipalities and Tourism and the Erbil Governorate, the program aims to strengthen urban and regional planning while promoting the value of cultural heritage in rebuilding efforts.
- **Continuity and Change presentation at the International Federation for Housing and Planning World Congress, Oslo (2004).** The paper addresses how urban dynamics and large migratory flows can change urban neighborhoods and the value of preserving cultural heritage in light of these pressures.
- **Cooperation and Capacity Building for Promoting Cultural, Natural, and Built Heritage in Transylvania (2004).** This project addressed development challenges in Romania's Saxon Villages, such as Brașov, Sibiu, and Sighișoara. It focused on protecting cultural and natural heritage while providing recommendations for future programs that recognize the significance of these spaces in community development.

Data as a Reconciliation Tool

Data is a powerful tool for fostering solution-focused dialogue and facilitating reconciliation. By providing transparent, objective insights, data helps depoliticize discussions, enabling stakeholders to focus on shared challenges and collaborative solutions rather than divisive narratives. Data played a key role in overcoming misunderstandings and bridging divides in Ireland. Visualizing major social, economic, and demographic trends across the island through atlases highlighted these trends holistically, irrespective of political borders. This approach emphasized commonalities and created a neutral foundation for constructive conversations, even in the presence of biases and deep-seated stereotypes.

In Iraq, through work on the National Urban Strategy (NUS), I2UD staff created an online platform for sharing information and visualizing data through maps. This platform fostered collaboration by providing a shared, evidence-based framework for developing urban strategies, guiding policy and project decisions that align with collective needs. When used strategically, data guides the development of collaborative projects and policies, fostering trust and cooperation between previously antagonistic parties. By grounding conversations

in evidence, data transforms dialogue into a unifying force for recovery, helping communities work together to address shared goals.

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- **The Atlas of the Island of Ireland: Mapping Social and Economic Change the Atlas of the Island of Ireland (2008 and 2015).** This publication highlighted the similarities and contrasts between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, providing a comprehensive understanding of significant demographic, economic, and social trends that were previously unavailable. Its publication helped initiate evidence-informed dialogues on the functional space where cooperation could bring mutual benefits, rather than relying solely on the political space. ICLRD published a new edition in 2015 and conducted training programs for government staff and community practitioners on utilizing all-island interactive data and mapping tools.

- **Participatory Planning Platform, Demographic Projections and Economic Analysis in Iraq (2016-2018).** This study aimed to reshape the 2010 spatial strategy for Iraq based on current conditions while aligning with the post-conflict vision presented by the Ministry of Planning. A related presentation, titled 'Progress Update,' highlights methods for gathering and integrating data for spatial analysis. An Indicator Technical Brief highlights the importance of computing and mapping indicators for planning and decision-making at the national and governorate levels. The technical brief study outlines how to assess prevailing conditions in each governorate through a multidimensional perspective, combining statistical data and their spatial implications. To address security concerns, a web-based platform was created to collect data from individual governorates, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of regional conditions.

Iterative Success and Building Momentum

In the face of immense challenges, achieving success through iterative steps is critical. Small, tangible wins demonstrate progress, foster unity, and build the momentum necessary for long-term recovery and reconciliation. Success, in this context, is cumulative—each step lays the groundwork for the next, creating a foundation of trust and collaboration that strengthens over time.

When rebuilding from the ground up, expecting an immediate resolution to deeply rooted conflicts is unrealistic. The process is akin to "knitting the fabric back together,"[6] requiring patience, persistence, and incremental efforts. Rather than imposing a definitive solution at the outset, the focus should be on fostering dialogue, addressing immediate needs, and gradually working toward shared goals. This iterative approach reinforces confidence among stakeholders and allows for adaptability, ensuring that solutions evolve in response to emerging needs and challenges. By prioritizing steady, collaborative progress, communities can rebuild trust and unity, even in the most divided and complex circumstances.

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- **Romania Local Governance Bridge Program – Metropolitan Planning and Cooperation in Romania (2005)**. I2UD supported the municipality of Oradea in developing the Oradea Metropolitan Zone, an initiative that became a model for legislation on metropolitan cooperation across Romania. After economic liberalization and administrative decentralization, Romanian cities faced intense competition, fragmented governance, and sprawling urban growth that spilled across jurisdictional boundaries. Oradea's step-by-step efforts to coordinate development with surrounding towns and communes—beginning with informal agreements and joint planning exercises—enabled local governments to tackle shared infrastructure and service delivery challenges despite limited initial capacity. These small but concrete actions laid the groundwork for more formalized partnerships, eventually inspiring national legislative reform and broader metropolitan collaboration.

6 Andy Pollack, founding Director (1999-2013) of the Center for Cross Border Studies, Armagh, Northern Ireland.

Recognizing and Adapting to Demographic Changes

Rapid demographic shifts, often driven by crises or conflict, pose significant challenges for cities regarding service provision, infrastructure, and social cohesion. When temporary situations, such as the displacement of IDPs and refugees, become prolonged or permanent, cities must adapt their strategies to accommodate these changes. As highlighted through numerous I2UD research projects in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Africa, displaced populations often move to areas with more opportunities rather than remain in places with limited resources. Integrating these populations into urban life requires rethinking housing, employment, education, and social services to ensure they can contribute to and benefit from the broader community.

Rapid demographic changes require cities to reassess their strategic priorities and service provision. The needs of the population as a whole and the specific requirements of marginalized or newly arrived groups will evolve. In Tanzania, for example, regions with settlement of large Burundian refugee populations prompted a reevaluation of which interventions and services would be most beneficial. Adapting to these changes requires flexibility in planning and a focus on long-term resilience, ensuring that no group is left behind as cities grow and transform.

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- **The Dynamics of Neighborhood Transformation (2015).** Dr. Mona Serageldin's keynote presentation for the City Debates 2015 at the American University of Beirut examined the impact of spatial segregation and social exclusion on gentrification in the Mashreq countries, including Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine, and Jordan. This work highlighted the long-term trends and immediate responses to turmoil and civil unrest, providing a framework for understanding how demographic shifts influence urban development.
- **Integrated Development Plan in Support of the Socio-Economic Integration of Former Burundian Refugees in Tanzania. (2015).** This World Bank-funded initiative assessed socio-economic investments, land regularization, and community engagement activities to facilitate the local integration of Burundian refugees in Tanzania. In 2014, the President announced that long-term refugees would be granted Tanzanian citizenship, becoming "New Tanzanians." Many have lived in different settlements in two regions since 1972. As newly naturalized citizens, they gained rights such as land ownership and political participation, and local authorities needed to integrate these settlements into the governance framework.
- **UN-HABITAT Spatial Regional Plan for the Kurdistan-Iraq Region Housing Program (2014).** I2UD provided an analysis of the housing program to address the needs of lower-income households across three Iraqi governorates. The project included a Synthesis Paper and presentations on enhancing capabilities for refugees in Baghdad, alongside case studies on housing initiatives in Bosnia Herzegovina, and Georgia. These materials underscore the importance of adapting housing strategies to meet the demands of population changes and the impact of recent conflicts on the housing stock.
- **Background report for World Migration Report (2014).** This report presents comprehensive research in the MENA region on the dynamics of migration and displacement, emphasizing the necessity of understanding demographic changes and their implications for urban planning and service delivery. It offers insights into how cities can better accommodate displaced populations and ensure their integration into urban life.
- **Humanitarian Responses by Local Actors: Lessons from Croatia (2016).** This research paper assessed the impacts of the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis in Croatia. The Croatian Government coordinated the transit of 650,000 migrants and refugees, engaging a wide range of international, national, and local stakeholders to address urgent needs. Local authorities played a critical role by leveraging available resources, such as land and infrastructure, while central coordination mechanisms helped streamline services. The response demonstrated institutional capacity to manage large-scale humanitarian crises, though challenges arose in meeting the basic needs of migrants quickly due to their rapid transit.

Resilience and "Building Back Better"

Rebuilding after a crisis presents a unique opportunity to restore what was lost and "build back better," creating more resilient, sustainable communities. This process requires time and a careful balance between addressing immediate needs and laying the foundation for long-term recovery and growth. Meeting basic needs is essential, but ensuring that the rebuilding efforts contribute to resilience and the well-being of future generations is equally important.

While the priority is often to address the most pressing issues, it is crucial to remember that rebuilding after a crisis is a one-time opportunity to shape the future. If long-term plans are not developed during this phase, they may never come to fruition. The recovery period should be viewed as an opportunity to introduce new systems, infrastructure, and policies that rebuild and enhance the community's ability to withstand future challenges.

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- **World Bank MNA Urban Action Plan - From Spring To Renaissance: Repositioning The Arab Cities (2013)**. Developed in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, this report frames post-crisis recovery as a critical opportunity to reshape urban development across the MENA region. It highlights how political upheaval and conflict exposed deep structural vulnerabilities in cities, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states. In response, the report calls for strategic urban planning that not only restores services and infrastructure but also strengthens institutions, land management, and service delivery systems. By promoting spatial planning and resilience-building, it positions the recovery phase as a one-time chance to lay the foundation for more inclusive, stable, and future-proof cities.
- **Habitat III Arab Regional Report (2016)**. Prepared in the context of the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis and widespread conflict-related displacement, this report emphasizes the need to embed resilience and sustainability into post-conflict reconstruction efforts. It advocates for recovery strategies that go beyond physical rebuilding to strengthen urban governance, enhance social cohesion, and improve planning systems, particularly in cities experiencing rapid population growth due to displacement. By stressing the importance of not replicating pre-crisis vulnerabilities, the report frames recovery as a chance to introduce inclusive, data-informed, and future-oriented urban systems that can better withstand future shocks and support long-term development.

Planning for Exit and Handover

Sustainability requires careful planning for international actors' eventual exit in post-crisis recovery. From the outset, recovery efforts must prioritize local ownership by building institutional capacity and empowering local authorities to manage long-term responsibilities. Establishing clear timelines for handover fosters accountability and ensures recovery efforts are grounded in local governance systems. This encourages a seamless transition from external intervention to local leadership, promoting stability and continuity in post-crisis urban development.

An important aspect embedded in I2UD's methodology has always been building the capacity of local partners and local authorities, particularly in post-crisis or transitional contexts. Project design incorporates capacity building and training to ensure that projects and programs can continue beyond the scope of the Institute's participation. This planning for 'handover' or 'exit' can be found in projects throughout the digital library, including the already mentioned work in Belize, Poland, Romania, among others, including:

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- **Iraq National Urban Strategy (2016-2018).** Underlying all I2UD's work with UN-Habitat to update Iraq's National Urban Strategy was capacity building and training to allow for Iraqi officials and civil servants to take over and continue the planning and development process. The country had undergone decades of international development funding and technical support throughout various conflict and post-conflict scenarios, but without underlying institutional and skills building, leading to fragmented policy and program implementation. Capacity building programs and critical online tools were introduced to improve communication and coordination between central and governorate levels, and increased participation of communities in local development.

Prioritizing Neighborhood-Level Planning for Housing and Services

In post-conflict contexts, neighborhood-scale interventions are essential for rebuilding communities. Finding ways to reconcile conflicts among different political, ethnic, and religious communities living in adjoining neighborhoods can contribute to reducing tensions. Physical interventions at the 'interface areas' that benefit both communities can help revive economic activities and develop shared spaces.

Large-scale national housing policies often fail to address the diverse and immediate needs of displaced populations, informal settlers, and returning residents. By focusing on the neighborhood level, planning efforts can be more responsive to local housing conditions, tenure security issues, and service accessibility, ensuring that reconstruction is rooted in the lived realities of affected communities. Engaging communities in the planning process fosters trust, social cohesion, and participation, ensuring that reconstruction meets their needs. Targeted investments in infrastructure, such as water, sanitation, and public spaces, improve quality of life while integrating housing with economic opportunities, and land tenure regularization helps prevent future displacement.

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- **Lesedi Local Municipality Development Framework, South Africa (2011).** This initiative leveraged South Africa's Neighborhood Development Partnership Grant (NDPG) to revitalize and upgrade strategic locations, reconnecting historically segregated communities to economic opportunities.
- **Living Together Series-ICLRD (2010-2012).** I2UD contributed to a research series by ICLRD on public housing in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, where residents and local officials worked to improve housing and communities in economically and socially segregated public housing estates. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive worked alongside ICLRD to identify communities working together and the broader issues affecting segregated areas. The study team also profiled three housing estates in the Republic of Ireland where residents and stakeholders had come together to improve the area.
- **Svishtov Community-Based Investment Program, Bulgaria (2002).** This initiative fostered collaboration between residents, businesses, and the municipality to improve neighborhoods and essential services. Beginning with small projects like playgrounds and public spaces, it empowered residents to take an active role in local development, strengthening trust with municipal officials. As citizen groups gained confidence, they became effective advocates for broader improvements. The program also helped the municipality better understand community priorities and demonstrated the potential for co-financing. Over time, it laid the foundation for lasting partnerships with NGOs and civic organizations, institutionalizing participatory planning. Its success earned Svishtov a 2004 Konrad Adenauer Foundation award and recognition in a 2007 World Bank publication on participatory budgeting.

Facilitate Cross-Border and Inter-Jurisdictional Cooperation

Coordinated planning across borders and jurisdictions is critical for addressing shared challenges in post-conflict regions. Research by the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) has demonstrated how planning at different spatial scales—such as river basin management and economic corridors—can enhance collaboration and stability. By integrating cross-border governance structures and functional planning approaches, governments can improve resource management, economic development, and infrastructure investments, strengthening regional resilience and fostering long-term recovery. This process is increasingly vital as climate shocks—such as floods, droughts, and extreme weather events—and long-term stresses like sea level rise, desertification, and rising temperatures intensify, disregarding geopolitical boundaries.

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The **International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD)** published research reports, briefing papers, and case studies on how various forms of urban and regional planning—enacted at different spatial scales—could facilitate better collaboration on the pressing issues facing the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Documents include:.

- **Implementation of River Basin Management Plans: Current Issues and Future Needs (2012).**
- **The Basel Metropolitan Area: Three Borders, One Metropolitan Area (2010-2012).** This case study on promoting regional development in the Basel Metropolitan Area was developed as part of the ICLRD research program on cross-border and inter-jurisdictional planning. These cases are part of ICLRD's efforts to improve local government capacity within the border region as local councils increasingly develop their projects in partnership with central government agencies, cross-border bodies, civil society, and the private sector.
- **ALL CHANGE BUT ANY ALIGNMENT? The Impact of the Proposed Governance and Planning Reforms Across the Island of Ireland on Inter-Jurisdictional Planning (2010).** The report examines proposed changes in spatial policy and practice in both jurisdictions and whether the reforms will enhance the opportunities for collaboration on a cross-border and inter-jurisdictional basis in spatial planning and multi-level governance. The findings highlight that, while the reforms aim to promote greater policy alignment, significant gaps remain in governance structures and planning frameworks. The analysis underscores that without deeper integration between the two jurisdictions, the potential for addressing shared regional challenges effectively, such as climate resilience, economic development, and infrastructure planning, will be severely limited.

RELEVANCE AND APPLICATION TO CURRENT GLOBAL ISSUES

The world is facing an unprecedented escalation in conflicts and crises, with the scale and impact of these events growing more severe each year. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), one in eight people globally was exposed to conflict in 2024, with over 50 countries ranked as experiencing extreme, high, or turbulent levels of conflict. Political violence incidents have risen by 25% in 2024 alone.[7] At the same time, fragility and conflict have entrenched poverty, with people in fragile settings being 10 times more likely to live in poverty than those in stable countries.[8] By 2030, up to two-thirds of the global extreme poor could reside in fragile or conflict-affected situations, underscoring the deep connection between conflict, poverty, and vulnerability.[9]

Urban areas are increasingly at the center of these crises. From devastating urban warfare in Ukraine, Syria, Gaza, and Sudan to the impacts of large-scale displacement and migration from countries like Myanmar, Venezuela, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Afghanistan, cities face compounding pressures. Urban conflicts are no longer isolated events; they are prolonged crises that destroy critical infrastructure, disrupt governance systems, and fragment social cohesion. Climate change further amplifies these challenges, exacerbating resource scarcity, displacement, and vulnerabilities in fragile urban contexts.

Rebuilding and recovery efforts in conflict-affected regions are, therefore, extraordinarily complex. They require not only the restoration of physical infrastructure but also the rebuilding of trust, governance, and social systems. The following section highlights the rebuilding challenges in some of the most pressing current conflicts, including Gaza, Syria, Sudan, and Ukraine. It highlights the interplay between urban destruction, governance failures, and the compounded impacts of climate change.

The humanitarian and rebuilding challenges in Gaza illustrate the scale of devastation urban warfare can bring. Over 90% of Gaza's 2.3 million residents have been displaced, many multiple times. The war has reduced essential infrastructure to rubble, with 80% of roads and health facilities damaged or destroyed. Gaza faces monumental challenges in clearing an estimated 40 million tons of debris, a process projected to take 15 years and cost $650 million.[10]

The destruction of water and sanitation systems is catastrophic: 70% of water infrastructure, including all wastewater treatment facilities and desalination plants, is inoperable.[11] Unemployment is upwards of 80%, and poverty is nearly universal, with the International Labour Organization (ILO) stating that 'Gaza has witnessed an almost complete destruction of economic activity in all sectors'.[12] Reconstruction is expected to be hampered by restrictions on importing building materials, ongoing hostilities, and political challenges in the international community, complicated by Israel's continued occupation. A report by the UN has

7 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). (2024). ACLED Conflict Index – July 2024.
8 Corral, P., Irwin, A., Krishnan, N., Mahler, D. G., & Vishwanath, T. (2020). Fragility and conflict: On the front lines of the fight against poverty. World Bank.
9 Vasilyan, J., & Ben Bih, K. (2023). How can we do better? Improving climate and disaster resilience in complex settings. World Bank Blogs.
10 Krauss, J., & El Deeb, S. (2024). Gaza is in ruins after Israel's yearlong offensive. Rebuilding may take decades. Associated Press.
11 IBID
12 United Nations. (2024,). UN chief: Gaza war has created a humanitarian catastrophe. UN News.

emphasized that for Gaza to recover, significant shifts, including the lifting of economic restrictions, are required, stating that if Gaza returned to its prewar status with blockades from Egypt and Israel, it would take 350 years for its economy to return to its precarious prewar level.[13]

Rebuilding Syria after more than a decade of civil war involves restoring not just infrastructure but also social and political systems shattered by years of conflict. The physical damage is immense, with estimates ranging from $250 billion to $400 billion for reconstruction.[14] However, the challenges extend beyond funding: governance remains fragmented, and external actors continue to influence reconstruction efforts for their own strategic interests.

Key obstacles include forming an inclusive transitional government, empowering civil society to ensure transparency, and navigating justice and reconciliation processes with former Assad regime officials. Syria's reconstruction also requires rebuilding economic ties among internal regions and trust with fractured groups and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, including women, children, and minorities. Without these inclusive efforts, recovery risks reigniting tensions and perpetuating instability.

Sudan's ongoing conflict, which erupted in April 2023, has displaced 9.1 million people internally, the largest number ever reported, with another 1.2 million refugees fleeing the country.[15] The destruction of Khartoum, previously a refuge during Sudan's earlier conflicts, marks a new level of devastation, with cultural landmarks, neighborhoods, and infrastructure in ruins.

Rebuilding in Sudan faces profound uncertainties. Years of failed governance and competing interests of warring factions make establishing a foundation for recovery daunting. Critical infrastructure, such as roads, hospitals, and utilities, has been destroyed, and unexploded bombs and remnants continue to make many areas unsafe.[16] Even if the fighting ends, rebuilding cities and resettling displaced populations could take years. The current absence of humanitarian access exacerbates the crisis, leaving millions without basic services or a path for recovery.

The war on Ukraine is expected to be the costliest reconstruction in modern history, with early World Bank estimates placing reconstruction costs at $411 billion as of March 2023 over ten years, with estimates in early 2024 of up to $1 trillion.[17] Entire cities and critical infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and energy facilities, have been targeted, leaving millions displaced. Recovery in Ukraine must contend with the simultaneous demands of rebuilding amidst an ongoing assault from Russia and addressing the long-term economic and social impacts of displacement. Compounding these challenges is the threat of environmental degradation from the conflict, including contaminated land and water systems. Ukraine's recovery will require significant international investment, coordination, and support to restore its economy and social systems while ensuring resilience against future threats.

The increasing impact of climate change magnifies the recovery challenges in these conflict zones. Over the last two decades, over 2,500 disasters and 40 major conflicts have impacted an estimated 2 billion people.[18] Fragile states are disproportionately affected by climate-induced disasters, which strain already weakened systems and exacerbate vulnerabilities. Rising sea levels, water scarcity, and extreme temperatures

13 Krauss, J. (2024). It could take 350 years for Gaza to rebuild if it remains under a blockade, UN report says. AP News.
14 Bland, A. (2024). Monday briefing: The mammoth task of rebuilding Syria – and how to achieve it. The Guardian.
15 UN OCHA. (2024). Sudan's intolerable war and long road to recovery. ReliefWeb.
16 Mbonye, P. N. (2024). Explosive remnants of war: A growing threat to children and families in Sudan. UNICEF Sudan.
17 Merritt, J. (2024). Even as the war persists, Ukraine is rebuilding — here's how. World Economic Forum.
18 UNEP. (2023). From disasters to conflicts: tackling the impact on people and planet. UNEP.

compound rebuilding challenges in Gaza. In Sudan, climate-driven resource scarcity fuels ongoing conflict and displacement. In Syria, droughts have worsened food insecurity, while in Ukraine, environmental degradation from the war has long-term consequences for agriculture and water systems.

Climate change contributes to increased conflict, often through indirect pathways, by exacerbating vulnerabilities among the most at-risk populations. As of 2023, almost 3 in 4 forcibly displaced people were living in countries with high-to-extreme exposure to climate-related hazards, and nearly 1 in 2 were living in countries where they also remained exposed to conflict.[19] The relationship between climate change, conflict, and displacement is complex and highly context-specific, making oversimplification a risk that could lead to ineffective or inappropriate actions. Therefore, urban planning and management in post-conflict recovery must integrate locally led climate resilience and adaptability. Effective recovery frameworks must address immediate humanitarian needs and long-term strategies for sustainable urban development. Inclusive approaches, participatory governance, and local capacity building are essential to rebuilding cities that can withstand future shocks, whether from conflict or climate change.

19 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2024). Global Trends Report 2023: Forced displacement in 2023. UNHCR.

UTILIZING THE I2UD DIGITAL LIBRARY TO ADDRESS FUTURE CHALLENGES

As global challenges become increasingly interconnected, I2UD's recovery frameworks offer practitioners adaptable strategies that balance immediate needs with long-term resilience and development goals. The I2UD Digital Library consolidates decades of research, case studies, and project insights as emphasized through the best practices distilled from this work in the previous section. These resources are more than a repository of past work—they are an essential toolkit for practitioners navigating today's rapidly evolving crises. From addressing urban displacement to fostering social cohesion, the archive provides actionable guidance rooted in real-world applications. By offering access to proven strategies and lessons learned, it empowers practitioners to craft context-specific solutions that are innovative and grounded in experience.

With over four decades of experience, I2UD has developed a wealth of expertise and resources that address the complex interplay of conflicts, displacement, and climate crises. The projects and case studies in the library emphasize the importance of tailoring solutions to local contexts, recognizing that no two crises are identical. Practitioners can draw on I2UD's extensive archive to understand how recovery efforts have succeeded or failed in similar contexts, offering a foundation for informed decision-making. Best practices, such as participatory planning and capacity building, are distilled into actionable insights that can be adapted to meet the specific challenges of each setting.

By integrating these lessons into their work, practitioners can address challenges such as displacement, rebuilding infrastructure, and addressing policy changes in inclusive and sustainable ways. Technologies like I2UD's Climate AI can play a transformative role by enabling data-driven decision-making in low-capacity environments and incorporating climate vulnerabilities into recovery processes. By making such tools accessible and building local capacity for effective use, communities can directly benefit from data-driven solutions, enhancing equity and sustainability in recovery efforts.

Urban planning and management are pivotal for transitioning from short-term humanitarian responses to long-term recovery and reconciliation. As cities increasingly bear the brunt of conflicts and climate-related crises, I2UD's archive offers a holistic lens for addressing these challenges. It goes beyond physical reconstruction, helping practitioners navigate deeper social, economic, and governance issues to lay a foundation for lasting peace.

The iterative nature of I2UD's work, tools, and methods developed through years of work in complex environments ensures that recovery efforts remain relevant and effective, even as global challenges evolve. This process of continually refining methodologies ensures they remain adaptable and forward-looking. The I2UD Digital Library provides practitioners with an invaluable resource to address today's crises while building the resilience to tackle future challenges. These tools and frameworks enable recovery efforts that are effective and grounded in inclusive and sustainable principles.

ANNEX 1 CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF I2UD RESOURCES POST-CRISIS RECONCILIATION AND RECOVERY

Below is a complete list of I2UD projects, publications, and research related to post-conflict reconciliation and recovery.

Year	Title	Project Type	Funder/ Sponsor	Countries	Overview	So What?
1992	Strategy for Technical Assistance and Training: Housing and Land Management in Poland for Gdansk, Gdynia, Kraków, Lublin, Poznań, and Szczecin, Poland	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	USAID Regional Housing and Urban Development Office	Poland	This scoping report is based on interviews and meetings with Polish government officials. Its goal is to develop a technical assistance program for urban housing and land management to support Poland's transition to a market economy. The report provides recommendations at the national level and for six major cities.	The report provides analysis and recommendations on how municipalities in Poland could transition from communal ownership structures for land and housing, a legacy of the former communist government, to an open market system. It covers issues relating to housing and land management, strategic planning, infrastructure finance, real estate development, privatization, and the promotion of private sector participation in urban development in Poland. The analysis concluded with a framework for structuring effective local relations to address major municipal finance concerns.
1994	Framework for Land Management and Urban Development in a Market Economy, Mission Report with Case Studies Annexes, for Tirana, Albania	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	USAID Regional Housing and Urban Development Office	Albania	This scoping report provides recommendations for Albania's transition to a market economy. It focuses on the cities of Tirana and Durres. The report sets out a strategy for land management in rapidly urbanizing cities, processes for urban planning, and developing municipal capacity to meet opportunities in a market economy.	The report recognizes and addresses the development of formal and informal land markets, which are common in situations of rapid growth and decentralization. It provides recommendations for central and local governance entities to plan and manage the duality of informal and formal land markets.

Year	Title	Project Type	Funder/ Sponsor	Countries	Overview	So What?
1995	Design Studio 1995: Urban Regeneration and Housing in a Transitional Economy: Lublin, Poland	Education, training, case studies	The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University	Poland	This is part of a series of design studio courses focused on addressing urban issues in societies undergoing economic restructuring, institutional transformation, and social change. The studio focused on designing transportation connectors to rehabilitate older districts in Lublin.	The studio brings together a real scenario of a city in transition that needs redevelopment that addresses the local urban fabric and minimizes displacement.
1996	Design Studio 1996: Strategic Urban Redevelopment in a Transitional Economy in Gdansk, Poland	Education, training, case studies	The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University	Poland	This is part of a series of design studio courses focused on addressing urban issues in societies undergoing economic restructuring, institutional transformation, and rapid social change. The Studio focuses on redevelopment plans in the port city of Gdansk, where state-owned property was transferred from the central government to municipalities.	Planners and designers in Poland were reformulating their approaches to urban planning and management in light of market reforms, the re-establishment of full private ownership rights, administrative decentralization, and the institution of local governance. The site for the Studio could reconnect the historic zones severed by the 19th—and early 20th-century industrial development.
1996	City of Szczecin Capital Improvement Program, Case Studies for Technical Assistance Program, Szczecin, Poland.	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	RTI International; USAID	Poland	Technical assistance project to develop a capital improvement program for Szczecin, Poland. The program focused on building the city's creditworthiness through long-term investment and financial planning systems.	The program emphasized linking land management strategies to the provision and financing of infrastructure. It developed public-private partnerships with citizens and businesses, focusing on public infrastructure that was aligned with and supported by community needs and priorities.

Year	Title	Project Type	Funder/ Sponsor	Countries	Overview	So What?
1994-2000	"Lublin Local Initiatives Program" & "Lublin Old Town Rehabilitation Project," Technical Assistance for Urban Upgrading in Lublin, Poland	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	USAID Regional Housing and Urban Development Office; Lublin Neighborhood Partnership Initiative	Poland	Project materials and case study documents for a technical assistance project focused on developing a participatory urban rehabilitation program in neighborhoods and the central city district in Lublin. The program established cost-sharing between the city and residents to rehabilitate infrastructure and stimulate private sector investment in housing.	The program institutionalized participatory planning and community-based development processes into municipal frameworks. In two years, 137 houses were renovated in the two pilot areas, and 50 new buildings were constructed. After regularization, 55 shops opened in the rehabilitated buildings, and 18 buildings were entirely converted to commercial use. Close to 120 people worked in these micro-enterprises.
1998	"Preserving the Historic Urban Fabric in a Context of Fast Paced Change," Research Essay by Dr. Mona Serageldin	Research and policy discussion	Center for Urban Development Studies at the Harvard Graduate School of Design; Getty Conservation Institute	Global	The report addresses the threat to historic urban areas from rapid urbanization, weak legal frameworks, and economic pressures, especially in developing cities. It highlights the risks of displacement, loss of cultural identity, and neglect of heritage sites.	This report offers tools and integrated strategies—legal protections, community-based planning, and adaptive reuse—that can support recovery by anchoring displaced populations, rebuilding trust, and creating shared spaces for reconciliation. In cities where physical destruction parallels social division, heritage conservation becomes a platform for inclusive rebuilding and economic revitalization grounded in local identity.
1998-1999	Review of the South African Government's Grant-Funded Municipal Infrastructure Programs," Technical Reports on Nine South African Provinces	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	Development Bank of Southern Africa	South Africa	A review of South Africa's Municipal Infrastructure Programs (MIPs) focused on nine municipalities. The MIPs assisted municipalities in providing a basic level of service in post-Apartheid South Africa.	In a post-apartheid context, the new South African government was trying to address the huge disparities in municipal capacity and service provisions in marginalized communities through the MIP program.

Year	Title	Project Type	Funder/ Sponsor	Countries	Overview	So What?
1999	Szczecin Local Initiative Program, Urban Improvement Intervention Strategy, for the USAID Regional Housing and Urban Development Office, Szczecin, Poland	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	USAID Regional Housing and Urban Development Office	Poland	This project builds on the success of the Lublin Local Initiative Program and develops a similar program within Szczecin. The program focused on creating economic opportunities for lower-income residents and strategically investing assets and resources to revitalize distressed communities.	The program introduced a community-led redevelopment process during the transition to a market economy. It also created a neighborhood planning approach to facilitate community and municipal coordination and a policy for supporting neighborhood organizations and NGOs.
1999	Workshops on Strategic Planning and Management of Municipal Infrastructure Programs (MIP), from Review of Grant-Funded MIPs in South Africa	Education, training, case studies	World Bank Urban Infrastructure Project; Development Bank of South Africa; Department of Constitutional Development of RSA; Unit for Housing and Urbanization of the Harvard University Graduate School of Design	South Africa	Workshops presented findings, challenges, and recommendations for improving MIP impacts.	The workshops focused on building the capacity of national and provincial staff to improve the MIP program through monitoring and evaluation processes, project prioritization, and overall intervention impact.
2000	Reconnaissance Report: Local Economic Development," Regional Planning Survey for Bucharest, Romania	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	RTI International; USAID	Romania	A scoping report outlining a technical assistance program to increase the capacity of local municipalities in urban planning and local economic development.	This report outlines a practical development assistance approach that combines city-led workshops, training in specific topics, technical assistance, and building a network of city professionals.

Year	Title	Project Type	Funder/ Sponsor	Countries	Overview	So What?
2000	IEP October 2000: Seminar on Strategic Planning for Urban Revitalization and Local Development in Pretoria, South Africa	Education, training, case studies	The Office Of Environment And Urban Programs; The U.S. Agency For International Development; Harvard University's Graduate School of Design	South Africa	The first in a series of Executive Education seminars for central, provincial, and municipal officials in the Republic of South Africa. This seminar focused on 'Strategic Planning for Urban Revitalization and Local Development'	This training program focused on building local municipal capacity to deliver services and address decades of underinvestment during the apartheid period in many urban and rural communities throughout South Africa. Available case study summaries include innovative programs from: Adjame, Ivory Coast; Fortaleza and Belem, Brazil; Lublin, Poland; Ahmedabad India; Szczecin and Lublin, Poland; and Boston, Massachusetts.
2001	IEP May 2001: Infrastructure Planning and Partnerships for Local Economic Development, Eastern Cape, South Africa	Education, training, case studies	Center for Urban Development of the Harvard University Graduate School of Design	South Africa	Another series of trainings for South African municipal officials on local development and partnerships for economic and social development projects	Case studies were used to highlight innovative approaches from cities in different countries, as noted above. These trainings focused on introducing best practices and methodologies for financing infrastructure improvements.
2001	IEP August 2001: Infrastructure Planning and Partnerships for Local Economic Development, Pretoria, South Africa	Education, training, case studies	Center for Urban Development of the Harvard University Graduate School of Design	South Africa	A follow-up to the first training held for South African municipal officials on local development and partnerships for economic and social development projects.	The program included interlinked modules, lectures, case studies, site visits, discussion groups, and networking with professional counterparts from international metropolitan regions. Participants used case projects to examine strategies from the viewpoint of both public and private partners and assess the feasibility and potential impacts of policies and projects on the community and the city.

Year	Title	Project Type	Funder/ Sponsor	Countries	Overview	So What?
2002	Svishtov: A Community-Based Investment Program for Municipal Development, Technical Assistance for Capital Investment Strategy in Svishtov, Bulgaria	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	RTI International; USAID	Bulgaria	Development of a community-based investment program to fill the gaps in municipal development when funding is inaccessible through central/ regional institutional financing systems.	Developed an innovative financing program suitable for smaller municipalities to fund local programs from their resources and mobilize external funds for community-based activities. Its success earned Svishtov a 2004 Konrad Adenauer Foundation award and recognition in a 2007 World Bank publication on participatory budgeting.
2004	"Cooperation and Capacity Building for Promoting Cultural, Natural and Built Heritage in Transylvania," Technical Assistance Report for Brașov, Sibiu, Sighișoara and Târgu Mureș, Romania	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	GAIA-Heritage	Romania	The report was a background report for capacity building of local officials in Romania. The study addressed current development challenges in Romanian regions referred to as Saxon Villages of Transylvania: Brașov, Sibiu, Sighișoara and Târgu Mureș. The project addressed efforts to protect cultural and natural heritage, outlining issues, and provided recommendations for future programs.	The report focused on protecting cultural and natural heritage while providing recommendations for future programs that recognize the significance of these spaces in community development.
2004	"Continuity and Change" by Dr. Mona Serageldin, Topic Paper for 48th World Congress, International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP)	Research and policy discussion	Center for Urban Development Studies at the Harvard Graduate School of Design	Global	This paper was the basis for Dr Serageldin's panel discussion on "Governance for Urban Change" at the 48th International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP) World Congress in Oslo, Norway. The paper addresses how urban dynamics and large migratory flows can change urban neighborhoods and the value of preserving cultural heritage considering these pressures.	Cities are the repository and the custodians of an important cultural heritage that disruptive change can preserve or destroy. Managing this change requires restoring the coherence of the socio-cultural framework so that it can evolve by incorporating new elements, adapting and responding to new challenges, and generating new opportunities. This implies restoring some degree of continuity. The inability to manage change creates disruptions that aggravate cleavages along ethnic, religious, and class lines.

Year	Title	Project Type	Funder/ Sponsor	Countries	Overview	So What?
2005	Romania Local Governance Bridge Program – Metropolitan Planning and Cooperation in Romania," USAID-ROMANIA Report for the Association of Romanian Municipal Chief Architects, Ploiesti Metropolitan Area, Romania	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	USAID	Romania	The report provides recommendations for intercommunal and metropolitan cooperation in Romania. City growth occurred across administrative boundaries primarily due to new economic and housing activities in greenfield areas and along emerging development corridors. It provides a legal framework, scenarios, and models for regional cooperation.	I2UD worked with the municipality of Oradea to develop the Oradea Metropolitan Zone, which became a model for legislation on metropolitan cooperation in Romania. The report reviews emerging practices in other major urban centers in Romania and metropolitan planning in the US and the EU.
2004-2017	ICLRD: Annual Conference Reports on Urban Planning for the Island of Ireland	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	CroSPlaN (European Union: INTERREG IVA) InterTradeIreland;	Ireland; Northern Ireland	Summary reports from 10 years of conferences led by the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) to address cross-border cooperation and networking between municipalities along the border of Ireland and Northern Ireland.	The conferences provided a safe and nonpolitical place for senior government officials and civic leaders to consider cross-border cooperation. Attended by over a hundred delegates each year, participants had an opportunity to present their work, hear outside experts, and develop networks among delegates. The Conference reports highlight the key issues and programs related to cross-border cooperation.
2006-2013	ICLRD: Spatial Strategies for Peace and Reconciliation on the Island of Ireland – Collected Research Reports by the International Centre for Local & Regional Development (ICLRD).	Education, training, case studies	CroSPlaN (European Union: INTERREG IVA); International Fund for Ireland; Irish Government (Higher Education Authority HEA)	Ireland; Northern Ireland; United Kingdom	Between 2006 and 2013, the ICLRD published applied research on urban reconciliation, community regeneration, and inter-regional and cross-border co-operation for the Island of Ireland, specifically border regions between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland communities.	The conferences provided a safe and nonpolitical place for senior government officials and civic leaders to consider cross-border cooperation. Attended by over a hundred delegates each year, participants had an opportunity to present their work, hear outside experts, and develop networks among delegates. The Conference reports highlight the key issues and programs related to cross-border cooperation.

Year	Title	Project Type	Funder/ Sponsor	Countries	Overview	So What?
2008-2015	The Atlas of the Island of Ireland: Mapping Social and Economic Change, Publication by ICLRD	Education, training, case studies	ICLRD; All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO); the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DELCG); CroSPlaN (European Union: INTERREG IVA);	Ireland; Northern Ireland; United Kingdom	Visualization of the major social, economic, and demographic trends and interactions across the island of Ireland done in 2008 and 2015. The atlas showed trends holistically across Ireland, irrespective of political borders.	The publication helped to initiate evidence-informed dialogues among policy and decision makers on the functional space where cooperation could bring mutual benefits rather than the political space alone.
2010-2014	Shaping and Managing Cross-Border Development, ICLRD Executive Training Program Materials, for Irish Border Cities: Newry-Dundalk Twin City Region & Northwest Region, Ireland	Education, training, case studies	CroSPlaN II - An INTERREG IVA Funded Programme	Ireland; Northern Ireland; United Kingdom	A 5-module executive training program that was for members of local municipality networks in the Irish/ Northern Ireland cross border region. Programs were delivered to geographical groupings of border counties that shared functional relationships. The training programs were followed up with technical assistance to progress a particular priority identified by participants in the training program.	The trainings led to significant changes in cross border relationships and coordination including an MoU between Newry-Dundalk leading to further mutual support on tourism, green energy and economic development projects. Other municipalities created agreements to deliver cross-border services and provided a framework for long-term cooperation in spatial planning.
2010-2012	ICLRD: Urban Reconciliation Case Studies for Public Housing Estates in Ireland and Northern Ireland, with Study Profile on the Basel Metropolitan Area	Education, training, case studies	European Union (European Regional Development Fund); CroSPlaN (European Union: INTERREG IVA); the Housing Executive	Ireland; Northern Ireland; Switzerland; Germany; France; United Kingdom; United States	A mix of case studies and community profiles to support regional planning in the Ireland and Northern Ireland cross border regions. Include profiles for six metropolitan estates.	These documents provide examples and best practices for regional cooperation and shared services across political borders. The profiles provide context, the challenges of and opportunities for cross border cooperation in six metropolitan areas..

Year	Title	Project Type	Funder/ Sponsor	Countries	Overview	So What?
2011	Technical Assistance to Lesedi Local Municipality," Design Framework for South Africa's Neighborhood Development Partnership Grant (NDPG), Gauteng Province, South Africa	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	Lesedi Local Municipality, Republic of South Africa, South African Government Neighborhood Development Partnership Grant (NDPG)	South Africa	I2UD developed participatory design frameworks for four communities hampered by the spatial segregation resulting from the urban planning methods implemented during the apartheid period.	This initiative utilized South Africa's Neighborhood Development Partnership Grant (NDPG) to revitalize and upgrade strategic locations, reconnecting historically segregated communities with economic opportunities. The lack of access to other urban areas effectively isolated these communities from the economic development in nearby cities. The original urban plan also isolated the townships by creating barriers such as rivers and rail lines, which limited growth and connectivity.
2011-2013	Borderlands: The Journal of Spatial Planning in Ireland, ICLRD Publication	Education, training, case studies	CroSPlaN (European Union: INTERREG IVA and INTERREG IIIA)	Ireland; Northern Ireland; Switzerland; Germany; France; United Kingdom	Features I2UD contributions to this annual publication on cross-border and inter-jurisdictional cooperation.	Provides best practices and case studies on regional and metropolitan spatial planning relevant to the Irish context.
2012-2016	ICLRD Briefing Papers 2012-2016: "Implementation of River Basin Management Plans" — "Applying the Functional Territories Concept: Planning Beyond Borders"	Education, training, case studies	ICLRD	Ireland; Northern Ireland	Two issue papers on cross-border and regional planning issues: 1. cross-border river basin management 2. planning in function territories that cross political boundaries.	These briefing papers address planning issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries to form their functional territories, where broader regional planning is imperative to managing territories and geographies.

Year	Title	Project Type	Funder/ Sponsor	Countries	Overview	So What?
2012-2016	"The Unplanned Areas Upgrading and Employment Enhancing Programme in Egypt," Needs Assessment and Activity Design Study for Informal Settlements in Cairo, Giza Governorates, Egypt	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	Agence Française du Développement (AFD); Social Fund for Development (SFD)	Egypt	I2UD and local partners assessed living conditions and access to services in four large informal settlements in Cairo and Giza, emphasizing community participation and micro-finance services. The project aimed to increase temporary employment opportunities through community-based infrastructure and services and long-term employment by supporting microenterprises through access to credit and training.	In the wake of post-Arab Spring instability, I2UD's work in Cairo demonstrates how deep contextual and participatory analysis can guide recovery in fragile urban settings. It ensures investments respond to urgent infrastructure, livelihood, and governance gaps to improve service delivery.
2013	MNA Urban Action Plan – Policy and Strategy Papers: "The Evolving Regional Urban Agenda: Key Challenges and Opportunities," & "From Spring to Renaissance: Repositioning the Arab Cities"	Research and policy discussion	World Bank	MENA region	An urban development policy and strategy plan for the Middle East and North Africa (MNA/ MENA) region. The report outlines key urban development challenges and priorities for implementing the MNA Urban Strategy Action Plan in a context of rapid urbanization, institutional centralization, and political change.	This report highlights that the post-Arab Spring turmoil exposed the urgent need for more inclusive, citizen-driven urban development in MENA cities. It recommends strengthening city capacities for economic growth and service delivery, reducing regional disparities, decentralizing authority and resources, and promoting participatory urban governance. It also calls for country-led decentralization, better integration of the poor into city economies, and the adoption of community-led, place-based initiatives to build more resilient, equitable cities.
2014	World Migration Report, Background Papers on Displacement, Migration and Resettlement in MENA (Middle East and North Africa)	Research and policy discussion	International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2015 World Migration Report; UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency)	MENA Region	Background report for the 2015 IOM World Migration covering IDP and Refugee conditions and policies for the MENA region.	This report provides a comprehensive overview of issues and trends related to crisis and displacement in the MENA region during the peak of the refugee crisis in mid-2010. It includes a discussion of country and urban policies and capacities to manage displacement issues.

Year	Title	Project Type	Funder/ Sponsor	Countries	Overview	So What?
2014	"Economy of Historic Preservation" in Erbil, Kurdistan, Report for Strengthening Urban & Regional Planning (SURP)	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	Ministry of Municipalities and Tourism (MoMT); Erbil Governorate; UN HABITAT	Iraq; Tunisia; Azerbaijan; Ecuador	The report and presentations were developed for officials in Erbil, a region of Kurdistan in Iraq, to help examine the interrelationship of cultural heritage preservation, urban development, and recovery. The analysis aligns with the SURP program goals to stimulate financing for local infrastructure and promote land value capture and community participatory processes.	The report emphasizes that integrating cultural heritage into post-conflict recovery strategies can foster social cohesion and economic revitalization. In Kurdistan, this approach is particularly relevant as it supports the restoration of war-impacted urban areas, creates local employment through building rehabilitation, and reinforces Kurdish identity. Communities can bridge divisions and promote inclusive development by preserving shared heritage sites like the Erbil Citadel.
2014	Spatial Regional Plan and Assessment for the Kurdistan-Iraq Region Housing Program	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	UN-Habitat	Iraq	An analysis of the Kurdistan Iraq-Region Housing Program, which proposed significant public investment into meeting the housing needs of lower-income households in three Iraqi governorates. International case studies are included.	This analysis and policy recommendations highlight the complementary responsibilities of national, regional, and local authorities in producing housing, the cost and appropriateness of the building typologies eligible for government financing, selecting beneficiaries, and strategies to enhance economic impacts.
2015	Keynote for City Debates 2015, American University of Beirut: The Dynamics of Neighborhood Transformation: Long-Term Trends and Immediate Responses to Turmoil and Civil Unrest	Education, training, case studies	American University of Beirut	Egypt; Iraq; Jordan; Lebanon; Palestine; Syria	This is a presentation and accompanying text for Dr Mona Serageldin's Keynote speech at the City Debates conference. The speech focused on gentrification in the context of post-conflict and post-crisis reconstructions, foreign and domestic investment and disinvestment, communal and political tensions, and regional insecurities.	The lecture discussed issues of spatial segregation, social exclusion, diversity, and social mixity in Mashreq countries. The presentation highlighted the role of remittances, the impact of government-led upgrading projects on gentrification and displacement, and the resurgence of semi-private spaces. It also focused on the impacts of turmoil and civil unrest, IDPs in urban areas, and the increase of security concerns conditioning locational choice, leading to the fragmentation of cities.

Year	Title	Project Type	Funder/ Sponsor	Countries	Overview	So What?
2015	Integrated Development Plan in Support of the Socio-Economic Integration of Former Burundian Refugees in Tanzania.	Technical Assistance Project: Review and Recommendations	World Bank	Tanzania	The study assesses priorities and provides recommendations for socio-economic investments supporting the integration of refugees in two regions in Tanzania where multi-generational Burundian refugees have lived for many years.	The process and product of this assessment are based on the active engagement of the villages, districts, regions, and civil society, with the consultants acting as facilitators. The report provides: (1) a methodology to undertake a participatory and rapid spatial and technical planning assessment to identify priority socioeconomic investments; (2) determine how these priorities should be sequenced and integrated into existing development planning structures and processes.
2016	Humanitarian Responses by Local Actors: Lessons from Croatia	Research and policy discussion	International Institute for Environmental Development (IIED)	Croatia	This research examines Croatia's response to the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, where 650,000 migrants and refugees transited the country over seven months. The Croatian government coordinated a complex, multi-stakeholder effort, with local authorities providing crucial infrastructure and services. A centrally managed transit reception center and deterritorialised response allowed for swift movement across the country, though rapid transit limited the ability to fully meet migrants' needs, requiring adjustments by humanitarian actors.	The Croatian experience highlights strong institutional capacity for managing large-scale crises and the vital role of local infrastructure and civil society. It raises important questions about local authorities' roles in national crisis response frameworks and the balance between security logistics and rights-based humanitarian aid. As Croatia shifts to refugee integration, clearer coordination and more inclusive governance will be needed for future crises.

Year	Title	Project Type	Funder/ Sponsor	Countries	Overview	So What?
2016	Habitat III Regional Report for the Arab Region	Research and policy discussion	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). UN-Habitat Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS)	MENA region	One of five regional reports that correspond to the UN regional commissions in preparation for the Habitat III conference. The report fed into the key messages, priorities and policies of the global report and outcomes of HIII, namely the New Urban Agenda. The goal of the report was to review key urban trends, policy, dynamics and issues that affected the MENA region since from 19996 to 2016 or since the Habitat II conference.	The report highlights the impacts and issues of ongoing turmoil and conflict throughout the region and its impact on communities and urban areas. It addresses broad development issues and those specifically related to post crisis recovery and reconciliation such as displacement and migration, changing institutional and governance frameworks, loss of cultural heritage assets, demographic changes, social inclusions etc.
2014-2018	National Urban Strategy for Governorates in Iraq, Development Strategy for Phase II of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Iraq Ministry of Planning Local Area Development Programme (LADP II)	Spatial planning and strategies	UN Habitat; Local Area Development Programme (LADP-EU)	Iraq	Development of a National Urban Strategy for Iraq focused on urban systems, development trends, and building local capacities to manage at the national and governorate level.	The planning process involved developing an innovative online platform to analyze and inform governorate-scale policy and project development. The methodology addressed security issues by allowing data collection, remote work, and collaboration among central and local authorities. Online teaching and collaboration helped to fill local capacity gaps and address past failures of recovery processes. In addition, the spatial strategy highlighted and addressed issues related to post-conflict development and displacement and developed realistic growth and spatial plans for the country.

ANNEX 2 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

MAJOR REPORTS AND DOCUMENTS

1. UN-HABITAT:
   - Urban Planning Responses in Post-Crisis Contexts (2020)
   - Migration Infomred Urban Planning (2024)
   - Urban Recovery Framework publication series (2022)
   - Supporting Safer Housing Reconstruction After Disasters: Planning and Implementing Technical Assistance at Large Scale (2019)
   - Land and Conflict: Lessons from the Field on Conflict Sensitive Land Governance and Peacebuilding (2018)
   - Humanitarian Affairs, and the role of UN-HABITAT: Strategic Policy on Human Settlements in Crisis and Sustainable Relief and Reconstruction Framework (2008)
   - Women in Post-Conflict Settlement Planning (2013)
2. United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)
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   - International Disaster Resilience Leaders Forum Incheon 2024: Final Report
   - Policy brief: Urban disaster resilience (2023)
   - Local authority and urban practitioner perspectives on risk reduction since 2015: Recommendations for a mid-course correction (2023)
   - Build Back Better in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction (2017)
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   - Culture in City Reconstruction and Recovery (CURE)
   - Knowledge Report for the Fourth Edition of the World Reconstruction Conference

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND INFORMATION HUBS

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2. Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction
3. Columbia - Post Conflict Cities Lab
4. Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR)
5. OECD - The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Interim Progress Review
6. World Humanitarian Summit 2016
7. IOM - Peace and Recovery
8. Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in humanitarian action (ALNAP)
9. World Bank - Fragility, Conflict and Violence
10. The International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD)

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ANNEX 3 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions address a diverse array of topics and complexities, offering insights into the multifaceted challenges of post-crisis recovery and reconciliation. These sample questions can be tailored to suit different audiences or perspectives. They are designed to stimulate thoughtful discussions on key themes, including definitions, causes, policy approaches, and global best practices in post-crisis urban planning and management.

1. What are the primary challenges faced by urban areas during times of crisis or conflict?
2. What are the key differences and overlaps between humanitarian and development paradigms in post-crisis recovery? How can urban planning bridge the gap between these paradigms to create a cohesive recovery strategy?
3. How can participatory planning processes help mitigate social tensions and promote reconciliation in post-crisis settings?
4. What are the challenges and benefits of integrating displaced populations (e.g., refugees and IDPs) into urban recovery strategies?
5. Why is the restoration of cultural sites and public spaces significant in the reconciliation process? How can cultural heritage preservation contribute to long-term urban resilience?
6. How can the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus framework address the complex realities of modern crises? What challenges exist in implementing this framework, and how can they be overcome?
7. How does climate change make post-crisis recovery even more complex, and what can cities do to prepare?
8. What emerging trends or challenges in post-crisis urban recovery should policymakers and practitioners anticipate?
9. How can lessons from past recovery efforts inform the development of more adaptive and inclusive planning strategies for future crises?
10. What are some examples of successful post-crisis recovery efforts, and what made them effective?
11. In what ways can technology and data improve planning and rebuilding efforts after a crisis?

Have these questions been useful in your classroom discussions? We would like to know!
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