sphere unpacked

Using the Sphere Standards in Urban Settings

The Sphere Project

*Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards
in Humanitarian Response*

The 'Sphere unpacked' guides

The 'Sphere unpacked' series discusses the use of the Sphere standards in specific situations.

'Sphere for Monitoring and Evaluation', 'Sphere for Assessments' and 'Using the Sphere Standards in Urban Settings' explain how to integrate key elements of Sphere's people-centered approach into the humanitarian programme cycle. These guides indicate the relevant parts of the Sphere Handbook at different moments of the response process and should therefore be used together with the Handbook.

All 'Sphere unpacked' guides are compatible in spirit with the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Humanitarian Programme Cycle guidance.

The Core Humanitarian Standard

'Using the Sphere standards in Urban Settings' refers to the Core Humanitarian Standard. The CHS has replaced the Sphere Core Standards and will be fully integrated into the next revision of the Handbook to be published in 2018.

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Terminology

Although the word 'indicator' is used in a variety of ways, there is a useful distinction to be made between the metric - the thing we actually measure - and a performance target, objective or ambition.

Contents

1. The Sphere Handbook and the *Sphere unpacked* Guides

The Sphere Handbook is one of the most widely known and internationally recognized sets of common principles and universal minimum standards for the delivery of quality humanitarian response. It reflects an integrated approach to humanitarian action which supports populations affected by disaster and crisis to survive and recover with dignity.

Figure 1: The relationships between the components of the Sphere Handbook

Humanitarian Charter	→	Core Humanitarian Standard and minimum standards	→	Key actions
Protection Principles	→		→	Key indicators
			→	Guidance notes

Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) and minimum standards: These are qualitative in nature and specify the minimum levels to be attained in humanitarian response across four technical areas. They always need to be understood within the context of the emergency.

Key actions: These are suggested activities and inputs to help meet the standards.

Key indicators: These are 'signals' that show whether a standard has been attained. They provide a way of measuring and communicating the processes and results of key actions. The key indicators relate directly to a minimum standard, not to a key action. The CHS has Key Performance Indicators.

If the required key actions cannot be carried out or the key indicators met, the resulting adverse implications for the affected population should be understood and appropriate mitigating actions taken.

Guidance notes: These include specific points to consider when applying the minimum standards, key actions and key indicators in different situations. They provide guidance on tackling practical difficulties, benchmarks or advice on priority issues. They may also include critical issues relating to the standards, actions or indicators and describe dilemmas, controversies or gaps in current knowledge.

The **key indicators** in the Sphere Handbook are qualitative and/or quantitative statements that describe a performance target. A group of these together outline the expectations to be met to achieve each minimum standard. In many cases, the specific metric – the aspect to be measured – is only implied in the Handbook, although some are described in detail in the Appendices.

The primary audiences for Using the Sphere Standards in Urban Settings are those working in humanitarian needs assessment, programme design and the management of humanitarian response. It may also be useful for a wider range of staff, including staff in government agencies in urban areas who find themselves confronted with a humanitarian crisis – and humanitarians – for the first time.

2. Why a Sphere guide on humanitarian response in urban areas?

This guide looks at understanding how Sphere may be contextualised to use in urban response. It has been developed in answer to the realisation that humanitarian response in urban situations is substantially different from what it is in rural situations, and that the number and scale of urban humanitarian responses will continue to grow as more of the world's population move to towns and cities.

Understanding and adapting to an urban environment

The minimum standards set out in the Sphere Handbook are qualitative and universally applicable: the standards themselves are never adapted. They are supported by key actions, indicators and guidance notes, some of which are quantitative. This supporting guidance must always be understood in the context in which the standards are to be applied – it can be contextualised.

This is common sense: there are occasions in which it is appropriate to adapt the quantitative aspects to specific situations. The needs and expectations of pastoralists in arid lands are different from those of farmers or of people living through the winter at very high altitudes. Similarly, there are specific aspects of urban environments that must be considered to ensure that these universal standards can be meaningfully applied. This guidance sets out some ways to contextualise and provides some examples from recent humanitarian responses.

Contextualisation in urban areas may mean a number of different things: considering a wider range of stakeholders than those suggested in the Handbook, adjusting amounts and quantities to appropriately address needs, a different understanding of what is meant by 'community' and comprehensive ways of considering chronic (and often complex) situations.

Many of the issues addressed in this guidance are not unique to urban contexts, but the urban environment can make these issues more acute, more immediate or more complex. It is important that practitioners are confident that they have understood the implications of their specific urban environment as they consider the application of a particular minimum standard. Urban environments do require practitioners to plan and implement in different ways, but in the majority of cases, the standards will still apply.

Are there any irrelevant standards?

No. On occasion, specific indicators to a standard or associated guidance may not be applicable to urban settings. For example, guidance on distances to water points may not apply in urban settings with piped water. This does not mean that the Standard itself is irrelevant. The intention of Water supply standard 1 is to ensure reasonable access to water which does not consume too much productive time. That concept is still important and should guide thinking around urban water provision (see Water supply standard 1: Access and water quantity, Handbook page 97).

The checklist for considering Standards in urban contexts

A **checklist** at the end of this document has been designed as a tool to assist in adapting specific Sphere indicators to urban operational environments. While not a complete checklist for urban programming, it provides a framework to consider the application of standards and the very questions you should be asking yourself as you conduct an urban setting response. It refers to the specific urban operational environment in which the programme is being undertaken. It is vital that this environment is properly understood.

3. Urban Environments

Humanitarian response in urban settings often presents challenges and complexities that differ from those confronting 'traditional' responses in rural or camp settings. Some of the contextual features that lead to these challenges are set out in the section that follows and provide the framework for the rest of this guidance document.

Across the humanitarian sector, the number and range of response actions in urban areas is growing, and the field is still evolving: urban experiences are still not well documented and good practice is still emerging. This does not render standards irrelevant or require the Handbook to be re-written, but it does require a more thoughtful, contextualised and nuanced application of the Standards with occasional, well-justified adaptation of key actions and indicators where appropriate.

In this chapter, a range of 'urban characteristics' is explored. Of course, these will not all apply in every case. Instead, the purpose of these sections is to set out the range of challenges and opportunities that may be associated with urban environments in order to support contextual analysis and the design and implementation of humanitarian programmes that are effective in urban settings.

Later in the guidance (chapters 5-8), these same issues are explored in terms of the application, adaptation and contextualisation of the indicators and actions accompanying each applicable standard.

What do we mean by 'urban' in this guidance?

The word 'urban' can be used to describe a wide range of situations for which there is no universally accepted definition. While it certainly includes cities and metropolitan areas, the size of the settlement is not its sole distinguishing feature; small townships can also qualify as 'urban areas', as can suburbs and informal settlements. Population density is an important indicator, as is (in many cases) growth.

For the purposes of this guidance, we are using the term 'urban' to include:

- prosperous suburbs, which would typically enjoy low population density and good service provision;
- well-established urban areas with higher population density and relatively good levels of services such as health, waste management and education;
- informal settlements and slums, such as the favelas of Brazil, the shanty towns around big Indian cities such as Mumbai or the satellite townships around Nairobi. While definitions vary, these areas typically have weaker infrastructure and higher population density combined with low levels of service provision. They may be newly settled or well established; they may be informal but recognised by the authorities or they may be illegal. Land tenure and ownership is often contested and the security situation is often poor;
- other types of urban areas such as peri-urban areas on the fringes of towns and small towns in other wise rural areas.

The urban environment can be seen as a system or as a web of interacting systems. The approach taken in this guidance is to isolate elements of the system and illustrate, firstly, how these elements have been considered in the design and implementation of humanitarian programmes and, secondly, how these approaches relate back to the Sphere Standards. However, good contextual analysis will recognise the interaction of these various elements and seek to form a holistic view.

Fluidity, complexity and diversity of the urban population

Urban environments are typically complex and fluid. They can change quite rapidly as people come and go. Registration processes may be poor or completely absent; thus it may not be possible to know who or even how many people is/are living in an area; the number of people may change – often increasing – quite rapidly.

This situation brings with it opportunities for **anonymity**, and some people will choose this option: unlike small rural communities where everyone knows everyone, some people and families may be almost 'invisible'. Indeed, some households faced with protection concerns may choose not to present themselves to receive assistance or may be prevented from doing so.

While it does make sense to speak of urban communities, the word "community" may have a different meaning in an urban as compared to a rural setting, often based on the fact that the urban population is less homogeneous and more diverse in terms of language, culture, ethnicity, religion and resources.

At the same time, people may identify with more than one group: the group of bus commuters, single mothers, unemployed people and those sharing a water source, a place of worship or a language. This multiple identification provides humanitarian agencies with good contextual analysis and understanding as well as multiple ways to identify and reach people... or in the absence of such understanding, multiple ways to exclude and ignore them.

In addition, an increasing number of refugees are living within urban environments rather than in formal camp settings; this is changing the nature of work with these populations and the host populations amongst whom they live.

Humanitarian programmes need to understand the complexity and diversity of urban populations and recognise the opportunities and challenges they bring in order to be effective.

Urban risks are different

Urban environments present different types of risk and vulnerability from those found in either rural areas or camp settings, although there are of course some overlaps. These risks can be separated into three broad groups.

The first group of risks relates largely to **physical aspects of the urban environment** such as the density of population, poor or reduced access to services, uncertain or contested land tenure, low compliance with building standards, and weak urban planning. Hazards in this group include fire and epidemics as well as increased exposure to storms, landslides and other man-made or natural hazards.

A second group of risks relates to **social aspects of the urban environment.** Hazards in this group include non-communicable diseases, endemic poverty, gender-based violence, opportunistic and organised criminality, and tensions between groups. Weak participatory structures may not allow for consistent and meaningful participation of women, young adults or marginalised individuals.

The third group relates to **economic aspects of the urban environment**. Poorer people in urban areas are particularly exposed to the risk of economic shocks as they tend to be reliant on local markets for their food and non-food needs. In response to such shocks, people in urban areas may adopt a range of stress-coping strategies that increase their exposure to these risks.

Emergency thresholds are generally defined in percentage terms, but it is important to also consider absolute numbers. In large, densely populated urban areas, the numerical caseload – the number of people with malnutrition, for example – may be very high and demand action even if the percentage emergency threshold has not been breached.

For some groups in some urban areas, the situation may be both chronic and acute at the same time: the typical values of standard indicators for health or food security may be at levels that – anywhere else – would constitute an emergency. Yet if these levels are 'normal', agencies are presented with particular problems in identifying a crisis when it is about to occur.

Humanitarian actors need to have a well-developed, contextualised understanding of urban risks and the ways in which people respond to them.

A diversity of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders

A key feature of urban environments is the wide range of institutions involved. Humanitarian agencies working in urban areas must have the capacity and will to engage with multiple actors and stakeholders.

Multiple departments of central government may hold responsibility for various sectors, while municipal- and district-level authorities may have mandates that cover various geographic areas. At the same time, a wide range of private sector, civil society and non-governmental actors, community organisations, faith-based groups, pressure groups and others may be present.

These various stakeholders often operate within different boundaries and at multiple levels, and responsibilities may not be clear. Ensuring coordination between them, especially for multi-sectoral responses, can be challenging.

With an increased presence of governmental authorities and control comes increased regularisation and responsibilities to adhere to national and local laws and policies. Some settlement areas (illegal, informal, slums) may not be recognised by the authorities, who may passively or actively resist efforts by humanitarian agencies to work in these areas. Issues of land tenure, housing rights and property ownership may be especially difficult.

Additionally, the relative power of humanitarian actors in urban settings may be considerably less than it is in rural areas. For example, the scale of humanitarian budgets may be relatively large compared to those of rural authorities, but quite modest compared to those of municipal actors. Humanitarian actors may find it more challenging to influence the authorities in urban rather than in rural situations.

Economic and social complexity

The complexity of urban systems brings significant challenges in terms of contextual understanding. Market systems are complex webs of interactions, and informal credit arrangements are often hard to understand. Commodity prices may be higher than in areas of production, while charges may apply for services (education, water, waste management) that are free in rural areas. In addition, in urban areas, most people rent their properties and this forms a large part of their recurrent expenditure. The proportion of rent to total expenditure varies according to economic status and location and influences vulnerability.

Diverse livelihood strategies complicate the application of tools like zoning and wealth group analysis, but may also assist in household-level recovery and be seen as a component of resilience and an opportunity.

Social and cultural interactions may also be complex in relation to the multiple 'groups' with which people associate. Similarly, a single 'community leader' is unlikely to represent everybody and multiple leaders may exist in different fields.

Culturally, household and family arrangements can be fractured and complex. As in rural areas, access to resources will probably be highly dependent on gender and age factors. Simple gender assumptions or stereotypes may not withstand scrutiny – again, as in rural areas, but often with additional complexity as a result of the urban environment. Deeper analysis of gender, family and household dynamics will be necessary, considering all aspects of diversity and placing them in a cultural context.

Public space – space owned by the authorities or government – tends to be more dispersed and smaller in urban contexts than in rural areas. Public space fragments the urban space while open public spaces are often colonised by the disenfranchised – even more so after sudden-onset disasters.

Modelling the outcomes of activities – baselines, monitoring and learning

In such an environment, generalisations are harder to make with confidence and simple linear models of causation are unlikely to be sufficient to predict the outcomes from activities. Unplanned outcomes may be harder to foresee.

In addition, standard tools, approaches and indicators – often developed in rural environments – may not perform as expected and may produce misleading results. In any case, the results they produce will need to be understood in the context in which they were generated. As everything is subject to rapid change, baselines generated in urban areas may not have much shelf life.

For this reason, it is important to include monitoring tools which are able to recognise unanticipated outcomes and which look beyond a single-sector perspective and the immediate target group to identify wider consequences. Similarly, the management of urban programmes needs to be able to respond quickly to such findings and take corrective action where necessary.

Urban opportunities as well as challenges

While humanitarian responses are typically challenging in urban settings, there are also many aspects of urban settings that provide opportunities.

CHS Commitment 1: Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate to their needs

Key action 1.2: Design and implement appropriate programmes based on an impartial assessment of needs and risks and an understanding of the vulnerabilities and capacities of different groups

In assessing opportunities, the essential word in this key action is **'capacities'.**

For example, urban environments typically provide better access to financial services and communications, opening up opportunities for technology-based assistance in the form of e-transfers, mobile phone transfers, electronic data collection and so forth.

The use of multi-purpose transfers makes multi-sector responses much easier to implement by allowing every recipient household to make its own decisions about priorities and needs and to determine its own responses.

Urban populations typically have better access to a wider range of communication options. This increases opportunities for two-way communication and accountability with the crisis-affected population.

4. Sphere and urban communities

Contextualising 'community'

In urban areas, the term 'community' relates to a more complex blend of factors which may be hard to pin down or even seem barely relevant. This is a challenge in terms of the application of standards: the Sphere Handbook contains over 300 references to 'community'.

In the context of the urban setting, "community" might mean the target population within a broader area, might include displaced people and the host community or it might mean everybody living or working within a specific geographical location.

Food security – food transfers standard 6: Food use

Food is stored, prepared and consumed in a safe and appropriate manner at both household and community levels.

Guidance Note 1 makes it clear that the reference to community within this standard relates to food hygiene where community level catering is organised. It is possible to organise community catering in urban areas and in this case, the term 'community' effectively means the community of beneficiaries – those targeted for the assistance. It would not apply to the whole community of people living in the area.

Example: Community catering for IDPs in Sri Lanka – British Red Cross

At the end of 2006, the whole population of Vaharai was displaced by fighting as the government forces took territory from the LTTE. Most of them moved to the nearby town of Batticaloa to the south, where they settled temporarily while formal camps were being prepared.

The British Red Cross had been working with this population since the Indian Ocean Tsunami and continued to support them through (and after) the displacement. Because they were displaced together, community ties remained strong and BRCS was able to provide cooking equipment and food at camp level while leaving the organisation and cooking to the affected people themselves.

Area-based approaches

One approach for working in urban areas is to adopt an 'area-based approach', using a district or community as the focus for the intervention rather than a sector or an individual beneficiary or household. We can also include 'neighbourhood' and 'settlement' approaches in this category. The area in question may have natural boundaries like gullies or main roads, or it may follow an administrative zone. As people may migrate into and out of the area, the specific group of beneficiaries may change and evolve.

Area-based approaches are often adopted in multi-sector, integrated urban response.
Depending on the capacity of the local authorities, the humanitarians' role may be more about facilitation and enabling than direct service provision.

Area-based approaches provide the opportunity to side-step some of the problems associated with repeated registration of mobile or transient communities and they allow for integrated programming and more strategic approaches to land use planning, for example. However, not all interventions will benefit from an area-based approach and the quality of the programme will always depend on the quality of the contextual analysis and programme design.

As with any programme, there will be people who benefit and those who are left out. Clarity and transparency about targeting must be complemented by a robust approach for dealing with those who have been excluded from the programme.

Example – Ravine Pintade neighbourhood improvement programme, CHF – Haiti

The Ravine Pintade neighbourhood improvement programme, managed by CHF (now Durable Solutions), took place in Haiti following the earthquake in 2010. It combined humanitarian assistance with a longer-term development approach that emphasised recovery and settlement upgrade.

The programme involved the community from the outset and actively identified and engaged with stakeholders.

Programme activities included disaster risk reduction, the creation of new public spaces and the improvement of infrastructure, repair and reconstruction of shelters, water supply, lighting and the provision of health services. This example cuts across the sectors of the Sphere Handbook, covering health, WASH, and shelter and settlements as well as including protection components, economic recovery and social aspects.

Community representation and leadership

Since urban dwellers are likely to associate themselves with a wide number of social, ethnic, professional or religious groups as well as their elected or appointed officials, it may be necessary to reach them through a diverse range of representatives or leaders.

Some individuals may not associate with any of the groups you have identified, and you need to seek to understand and contextualise the reasons why this might be the case.

For instance, self-appointed community representatives or 'gatekeepers' may present themselves as the voice of the community while charging fees to community members in order to access lists or services. Some of the more 'professional' ones provide coaching services to potential beneficiaries for maximum benefit. Such gatekeepers may be detrimental to effective contextual analysis.

Recognising and minimising marginalisation

Any community-based process for targeting or communication runs the risk of excluding individuals or groups in situations where people are typically marginalised or stigmatised by the community. Such people may not be welcome at community meetings, and community members may not identify them as vulnerable. They may include lower castes, people with disabilities, sex workers, people with mental illness, people who do not fit into traditional gender roles, divorced women – it entirely depends on the context.

Good understanding of the context is therefore necessary to identify situations in which marginalisation is likely and who might be affected; effective communication is needed to address it. Local partners and secondary data sources can be helpful here, although care needs to be taken to identify possible sources of bias. Marginalisation is a recurrent theme in the Sphere Handbook, and is specifically addressed by the second Protection Principle.

Marginalisation may be harder to identify in an urban context as a result of the diverse groups and multiple, overlapping 'communities'. Urban environments can be very distrustful or wary of 'outsiders' and particular efforts may be required to find and reach such people.

Some people or groups may deliberately avoid attention. In some cases, they may not consider themselves deserving of assistance, reflecting community prejudice. New arrivals and displaced people may fall into this category, as may some groups in areas where a caste system persists.

Ref: Handbook p36

Protection Principle 2: Ensure people's access to impartial assistance in proportion to need and without discrimination

People can access humanitarian assistance according to need and without adverse discrimination. Assistance is not withheld from people in need and access for humanitarian agencies is provided as necessary to meet the Sphere standards.

Example – Undocumented migrant workers unable to access flood assistance - Thailand

In 2011, parts of Thailand suffered serious flooding. In the industrial provinces north of Bangkok, large numbers of workers were displaced and were provided with assistance from the government, supported by NGOs. Amongst them were many migrant workers, including many without documentation.

The government largely ran the registration processes and people had to present a Thai ID or work permit in order to qualify for assistance. Some migrant workers were reluctant to approach the government registration points. Humanitarian staff worked with local officials to promote humanitarian principles and lobby for these people to be included on an equal basis. But they also created parallel registration processes to ensure that everybody had access.

Language proved an issue in many cases. Some of the migrant workers spoke Khmer or Burmese and no Thai. After discussions with a migrant workers' network, humanitarian workers actively sought out areas with higher concentrations of migrants in an attempt to ensure that they had access to assistance.

Communication, outreach, feedback and accountability

Diverse populations require diverse communication strategies, including community outreach structures as well as the use of media.

Vulnerable populations can be hard to identify and reach: they may remain hidden, unregistered or face significant protection challenges and barriers in seeking assistance and information to meet their needs. Populations in urban environments may also use and access information differently than in camp or rural contexts. Given the nature of the former environments, a wider range of services may also be available, yet knowledge about these services and how to access them can be a barrier for many vulnerable populations.

The challenges of communication and accountability systems in urban areas are very similar to those in rural environments, but often magnified. Urban populations may also be more forceful in their engagement with feedback and complaints mechanisms; such systems need to be robust.

However, urban environments often offer many more opportunities to reach people and for people to respond. Levels of access to mobile phones, newspapers and other media tend to be higher. It may be harder to call a community meeting during the day, but there are more opportunities around the clock and through the year and more means to communicate.

Ref: CHS p14

Core Humanitarian Standard 5: Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints.

Organisational responsibility 5.4: The complaints-handling process for communities and people affected by crisis is documented and in place. The process should cover programming, sexual exploitation and abuse and other misuses of power.

Organisational responsibility 5.6: Communities and people affected by crisis are fully aware of the expected behaviour of humanitarian staff, including organisational commitments made on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Example 1– Multiple pathways for communicating with Syrian refugees: IRC in Lebanon

The IRC has adapted multiple approaches to information-sharing, protection-monitoring and community acceptance for Syrian refugees living in urban and peri-urban areas of Lebanon. The IRC provides a range of services and referral pathways around protection and survivors or those at risk of gender-based violence at a number of centres. Services are available to both refugee and host community members, thereby reducing community tensions. Recognising that vulnerable populations may be unaware of these centres or face barriers in accessing these services, the IRC deploys a range of mobile approaches to information-sharing and protection through developing participatory targeting mechanisms with the community, training and deploying community liaison officers and developing community communication strategies. It also deploys mobile protection monitors to constantly monitor the protection environment, identify needs and deliver service information and pathways to referrals within the community. Monitors conduct community and household - level assessments across a range of urban areas from informal settlements and unfinished buildings/collective shelters to rented properties.

Other communication and information-sharing strategies include delivery of information through on-line platforms. The IRC has developed Service Info to enable refugees to search, provide feedback and rate assistance and commercial services ranging from healthcare to financial services. Service Info provides a solution to information gaps experienced by dispersed and mobile populations in urban areas looking for information on local services available, especially when there are multiple service providers. Services can also be improved through the feedback loop to service providers offered by the app.

Example 2 – Information and Complaints-Handling Centre, Mingora city, Pakistan

During the response to the 2010 monsoon flooding in Pakistan, the Human Rights Commission for Pakistan was subcontracted by CWS to manage the Information and Complaints Handling Centre in Mingora City, which handled complaints from community members relating to the flood response.

Their role was to act as a clearinghouse, forwarding complaints to relevant organisations and following up complaints resolution. They dealt with around 800 complaints received in the Mingora City area, of which some 350 were reported as resolved by community members. Information about the Centre was shared effectively through TV advertisements, banners, radio and people going door to door. Female users also noted that the proximity of the Centre meant that they could go themselves to make complaints rather than sending their husbands on their behalf. In an evaluation, staff were reported to be courteous, helpful and even available out of office hours by telephone.

Community members reported that a frequent complaint related to the non-receipt of GoP Watan (debit) cards: as a result of action by ICHC, Watan cards were issued to those who should have but had not received them; cards were unblocked and overdue instalments were paid. Examples were also given of water supply and gas problems being addressed. In the words of one community member, 'government problems were solved with this system'.

5. Protection concerns in urban situations

Urban areas present additional risks and raise increased protection issues which should be proactively addressed. These protection issues can often be most acute in unplanned, unrecognised or illegal settlements and may include risks related to industrial and chemical hazards.

Protection work can be seen from two perspectives. The first requires an active approach to directly address the causes and reduce the exposure of disaster-affected people. The second calls for an effort to ensure that technical sector activities do not inadvertently increase that exposure or otherwise create protection risks (do-no-harm).

It may be appropriate to identify particular groups with specific protection concerns. Examples might include women-headed households, recent arrivals or adolescents and young adults. Be aware that the legal environment is often more complex in urban areas– with more stakeholders and more oversight.

Ref: Handbook p38

Protection Principle 3: Protect people from physical and psychological harm arising from violence and coercion

Guidance note 10. Vulnerable people: Consideration should be given to individual, social and contextual factors in order to identify those most susceptible to certain risks and threats. Special measures may be needed for those facing particular risks, including women, children, people who have been forcibly displaced, older people, persons with disabilities and religious or ethnic minority groups.

Urban application:

Poorer urban areas, slums and illegal settlements may have limited coverage in terms of law enforcement, may be controlled by criminal elements or be subject to heavy-handed law enforcement agencies which themselves present a threat to some individuals or groups. Humanitarian agencies working in such areas should have a very clear understanding of these aspects of the context.

This guidance note explicitly references the need for contextual understanding. In urban contexts, such understanding is harder to develop while the consequences of getting it wrong may be more serious.

Working in unplanned settlements with poor land use

Settlers in unplanned settlements build on plots legally purchased from original owners on rural/agricultural land or in areas zoned other than residential. Although they are the legal owners of their plots, the settlements may still contravene planning laws and those settlements that have grown spontaneously without the benefit of good planning are likely to lack good access to services – sanitation, education, health care and so on. Some may be located in risk-prone areas, for example close to transport routes, waste sites, or industrial areas.

There are many examples of communities being engaged in the planning and successful remodelling of previously unplanned settlements and real opportunities to improve the situation often exist following a major disaster. Such programmes typically face challenges associated with a lack of central control and the complications of ensuring adherence to national regulatory systems and policies in areas where compliance and enforcement have traditionally been lacking or where incomplete land registries and lack of proof of ownership delay the process.

Shelter and Settlements Standard 2: Settlement planning

The planning of return, host or temporary communal settlements enables the safe and secure use of accommodation and essential services by the affected population.

Guidance note 1: Planning processes:

Local planning practices should be used and informed by the type of disaster or crisis, identified hazards and the impact on the affected population. Appropriate measures should be used to minimise settlement risks and vulnerabilities. Existing planning regulations should be complied with where required by the relevant authorities and where this does not impede the humanitarian imperative of meeting urgent shelter and settlement needs. The longer-term implications of planning decisions, particularly regarding sites for temporary communal settlement, should be identified.

Example – French Red Cross / Solidarités International, communication with multiple actors in land use planning in Christ-Roi, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

This guidance note already acknowledges the potential for conflict between planning authorities and the humanitarian imperative. But in certain urban environments, the situation may be complicated by the absence of central planning.

If no central authority will take responsibility for planning, then humanitarian actors must do so. Even transitional approaches to shelter need to be designed around a land-use plan, as the medium term cannot be known with certainty. It is important to facilitate (and also not to limit) the recovery and reconstruction process through good use of available land.

For the recovery programmes in Christ-Roi, the French Red Cross/Solidarités International communicated clearly with the different community groups and a wide range of other actors, including:

- CIAT (Comité Interministériel pour l'Aménagement du Territoire) in charge of urban an territorial planning ;
- DINEPA (Direction Nationale de l'Eau Potable et de l'Assainissement) in charge of water and sanitation in the country;
- MTPTC (Ministère des Travaux Publics et des Télécommunication) in charge of public equipment and infrastructure ;
- the Municipality of Port-au-Prince; and
- national and international NGOs that worked in or near the territory

This effective communication and coordination helped Solidarités International in this initial process – as did the distinction between listening to community voices and opinions and taking management decisions.

Minimising the negative effects of humanitarian assistance

Any humanitarian action will have multiple consequences and these will vary between different groups. Some of the consequences will be positive as intended, but some unanticipated outcomes that are negative for some people may occur.

Unintended and negative outcomes can be minimised by strong contextual analysis and by asking the question 'what if...?' for a number of different groups and scenarios. Include non-beneficiaries in the analysis and consider a range of scenarios linked to the project's risk analysis.

Ref: Handbook p249 & CHS p12

Shelter and settlement standard 1: Strategic planning

Shelter and settlement strategies contribute to the security, safety, health and well-being of both displaced and non-displaced affected populations and promote recovery and reconstruction where possible.

Core Humanitarian Standard 3: Communities and people affected by crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action.

Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects.

Example – Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) responding to concerns about the rental market, Syrian refugees in Jordan

By August 2014, the influx of refugees into Jordan had placed a significant strain on housing markets. At this time, around 80% of the 600,000 refugees were living outside of camps in commercial rented accommodation – and there had been a shortage of affordable housing even before the refugees began to arrive.

Cash-for-rent programmes existed, but there were concerns that these were adding inflationary pressures to an already stretched housing market, impacting both Jordanian residents and Syrian refugees. So NRC looked for a different approach that would have fewer negative impacts on the market.

NRC considered the problems caused by existing programmes and started to provide financial incentives and technical support to Jordanian landlords in northern Jordan to bring new units onto the rental market. In return, vulnerable Syrian refugee families identified by NRC were provided with rent-free accommodation of between 12-24 months.

The project increased the total housing stock available, improved standards and supported the local economy without creating inflationary pressures and while meeting the need for additional shelter for refugees.

Awareness and prevention of gender-based violence

The risk of gender-based violence should always be considered in programme design. In densely populated urban areas with poor facilities and weak rule of law, these risks may be increased and the planning of community facilities needs particular attention.

Risks may also be increased for members of other groups, such as people with disabilities and older people because of access challenges related to physical isolation.

Specific groups such as commercial sex workers or people living with HIV and AIDS may present particular challenges that are magnified in urban settings.

Ref: Handbook p89

WASH standard 1: WASH programme design and implementation

WASH needs of the affected population are met and users are involved in the design, management and maintenance of the facilities where appropriate.

Guidance note 1: Assessing needs (excerpt)

An assessment is needed to identify risky practices that might increase vulnerability and threaten the likely success of both the provision of WASH facilities and hygiene promotion activities.
The key risks are likely to centre on physical safety in accessing facilities, discrimination of marginalised groups that affects access, use and maintenance of toilets, lack of hand-washing with soap or an alternative, the unhygienic collection and storage of water and unhygienic food storage and preparation.

Example: Water and sanitation experiences in Haiti

Unplanned spontaneous camps developed very quickly in Port-au-Prince after the earthquake and water and sanitation facilities had to be added retrospectively. Making appropriate provision was challenging.

It quickly became apparent that the latrines provided on the edge of many of these spontaneous camps were not very safe environments, especially after dark. This led a range of humanitarian agencies to look at ways of improving safety, including the provision of lighting in the camps and a pilot project which provided PeePoo bags that allowed people to remain inside their shelters at night and safely dispose of the bag – and its contents – in the morning.

Working in areas controlled by gangs or where rule-of-law is limited

Some urban areas can effectively be 'no-go' zones where access is extremely challenging and potentially dangerous. Working in such areas may require the development of relationships with informal organisations which may be associated with criminality and/or violence.

This raises a challenging question: how should humanitarian organisations engage with criminal gangs?

CHS p10

Core Humanitarian Standard 2: Communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need at the right time.

Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant

Example – Habitat for Humanity, Simon Pelé, Haiti

Gang violence in informal communities is often the result of an organic attempt to fill a vacuum left by traditional authorities and typically arises through competition for limited resources, lack of economic opportunities or perception of social injustice. Though gangs do present additional challenges unique to urban environments, successful interventions can prove invaluable to reducing the violence and mitigating risk, thereby opening the door to further development.

In order to maintain their neutrality, organisations working in unsafe slum areas must be aware of the internal dynamics and prepare to approach the situation without the guarantee of assistance or protection from authorities. Humanitarian actors should not attempt to mediate conflicts which are often complex, long-standing and potentially volatile. Instead, organisations can support the peace process by maintaining neutrality, ensuring transparency (particularly through the beneficiary selection process) and ensuring that all parties have an opportunity to participate and have their voices heard.

In the context of Simon Pelé in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Habitat for Humanity found that it is often effective to temporarily halt (or threaten to halt) the project until the tensions subside. If the perpetrators and their supporters have been included as participants or beneficiaries, they will have an incentive to cease the violence so that the project can continue. Another effective approach was to leverage the social capital of non-violent beneficiaries to promote peace and accountability so that the project might continue.

As a former gang member stated upon graduating from a vocational training course sponsored by Habitat, "I have a profession now. I don't need a gun."

6. Working with a wider range of stakeholders

Urban areas usually have quite complex administrative arrangements, which create challenges but also opportunities for disaster management. A wide range of different government departments, agencies and line ministries may have parallel (and sometimes apparently overlapping) responsibilities; such overlaps may not be immediately obvious, especially to outsiders. A mapping or description of roles and responsibilities may not be readily available.

In addition to the official stakeholders, a wider range of civil society actors, including the informal sector, are also likely to be present and the economic and communications networks will also be more complex.

The coordination demands of urban humanitarian responses

The existence of multiple stakeholders implies the need for increased and more effective coordination, as well as clarity about the leadership of the coordination function. Where strong governance exists, a single line ministry, municipal authority or mandated disaster management authority may be able to lead coordination efforts effectively, although external support may be required on occasion.
In other situations, things may be less clear.

> *CHS p15*
>
> **CHS Commitment 6: Communities and people affected by crisis receive coordinated, complementary assistance.**
>
> Key action 6.3: Participate in relevant coordination bodies and collaborate with others in order to minimise demands on communities and maximise the coverage and service provision of the wider humanitarian effort
>
> **Example 1 – The response to Cyclone Haiyan, Tacloban, Philippines**
>
> A review of this response (carried out by the UK Department for International Development, DfID) states that almost all interviewees highlighted the number and diversity of stakeholders in urban areas – ranging from community-based organisations and cooperatives through landlords and banks to universities, utility companies and various levels and departments of local and national government.
>
> This meant that humanitarian agencies needed both the local knowledge and the time to understand and consult a large number of stakeholders in order to implement programmes. On the other hand, there were many more potential partners, making it possible to provide a broader range of support. The proximity of urban communities to service providers also meant that it was much easier for specialists to visit communities in Tacloban – for example to provide training – than would have been the case in more remote rural areas.
>
> **Example 2 – Contingency planning for elections, Nairobi, Kenya**
>
> There were concerns amongst humanitarian actors that the 2013 Kenya elections could be marred by violence as it had occurred during previous elections in 2007/8. Fortunately, this proved not to be marred by the case, but agencies undertook detailed planning ahead of the election period to ensure preparedness.
>
> Mapping of actors, capacities and response options within the contingency plan for this time covered a very wide range of actors – specifically referencing a range of government ministries and structures, the Kenya Red Cross, UN agencies, international and national NGOS, faith-based and civil society actors and listing numerous entry points in the urban communities and at the district level.

Working in illegal and unrecognised settlements

Unrecognised or illegal settlements present particular challenges in terms of humanitarian response, as coordination with the authorities is likely to be more difficult than in established urban centres.

Where settlers have invaded public or private lands and squatted them, they will be considered illegal even if these settlements have been present for long periods of time or are characterised by large populations and significant informal infrastructure. In most instances, residents will be paying rental fees to some non-legal entity but despite this, will have no legal tenure to these plots.

When responding to a disaster or seeking to reduce future risks, humanitarian actors ideally need to work with the people living in these areas, but this will complicate their relationships with the authorities, given landowners' vested interests in the land. Any efforts to improve the conditions within illegal settlements will make it harder to remove people from these areas in the future without providing compensation; forced evictions will risk breaching international human rights law. The legal and practical implications of working in illegal settlements are therefore significant and it should be expected that in many instances, national authorities will hesitate to support such activities.

Ref: Handbook p255

Shelter and Settlements Standard 2: Settlement planning
The planning of return, host or temporary communal settlements enables the safe and secure use of accommodation and essential services by the affected population.

Guidance note 2: Housing, land and property ownership, rights and usage (part)

For both non-displaced and displaced populations, identify ownership of relevant land, housing or other buildings and the holders of formal or customary use rights. Such issues are often controversial, especially where records may not have been kept or where conflict may have affected possession. Multi-occupancy dwellings or buildings with mixed usage will involve common or shared ownership or occupancy rights. The identification of the land or property rights of vulnerable people should be sought and such people supported, in particular women, those widowed or orphaned by the disaster, persons with disabilities, tenants, social occupancy rights-holders and informal settlers. Clarify formal, informal or understood rights of ownership or inheritance, particularly following a disaster in which the holder of the rights or title may have died or been displaced.

Example - KASS, CARE in Afghanistan

The Kabul Area Shelter and Settlements (KASS) Project was an integrated shelter-focused humanitarian intervention by CARE that took place in Afghanistan in 2006 and 2007.
KASS aimed to build local authority capacity to better respond to residents' needs for shelter and basic services. As a result of relationship-building and advocacy efforts, KASS signed a memorandum of understanding with the Kabul Municipality which was significant in that it gave permission for individuals residing in unplanned areas to build and occupy the structures on the land they owned. Previously, the Municipality had been unwilling to make concessions for residents in unplanned areas. This 5-year guarantee proved to be a key step in the overall process; without it, it would have been almost impossible to gain community enthusiasm for the task of rebuilding.
The Municipality expressed further commitment to the KASS project and process by assigning one staff member per targeted district to assist in overseeing the project implementation and to attend to issues and challenges at district levels.
Continuous dialogue between the project and the authorities ensured that KASS plans and implementation met the expectations and requirements of the national and district level authorities and further elicited support for reforms in land tenures and ownership rules. A conscious attempt to be highly consultative was employed and was key to the success of the project.

7. Considering numerical aspects of Sphere standards

There are times when it is appropriate to adapt the quantitative component of standards to make them more appropriate to the local context. The amounts or quantities may be increased or in some cases decreased to make them fully appropriate to the specific context. This section of the guidance addresses these aspects of adaptation and provides examples from urban settings – although the same process may also take place in rural environments.

This is not about a shortage of resources

This section relates to evidence-based, contextualised adaptation of the quantitative elements of minimum standards. This adaptation should always be undertaken in coordination with local expertise and on the basis of a strong contextual justification.

It is worth emphasising that this is not a discussion about reducing standards because funding is short and there is not enough to go around. (That discussion is about resource management and targeting).

When people need more than the guidance value suggests

In some situations, the guidance value associated with a standard may be set too low for the specific context. This may happen in urban areas, for example where the norms and expectations are higher than those elsewhere, or it may relate to affected areas in middle-income countries where expectations are higher (See case study p24).

Sphere Standard – Water supply standard 1: Access and water quantity

All people have safe and equitable access to a sufficient quantity of water for drinking, cooking and personal and domestic hygiene. Public water points are sufficiently close to households to enable use of the minimum water requirement.

Key Indicator 2

Average water use for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene in any household is at least 15 litres per person per day.

Guidance Note 2 (excerpt)

Where possible, 15 litres per person per day can be exceeded to conform to local standards where that standard is higher.

Example – Syrian refugees in camps and hosted in Jordan and Lebanon

Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon would struggle to manage with just 15-20 litres per person per day. Typical water use in Syria – and also in the hosting countries – is far higher than this. In Zaatari Camp, for example, a daily planning level of 35 litres per person was set for 2015 and it was recognised that some refugees would seek to bring in additional amounts above and beyond this.

This is far higher than the guideline set by Sphere and has been the source of some debate. Arguments in favour of the higher level include the cultural expectations of both refugees and hosts and the need (for example) to wash reusable diapers/nappies and sanitary cloths in plenty of water – more than ordinary clothes.

Arguments against include distinguishing between needs and wants, and the opportunities to balance slightly lower levels of provision (still above the guideline) with more proactive messages about water use during hygiene promotion sessions.

The situation is even more complex in host communities (both in Lebanon and Jordan) where refugees live in the same conditions as the residents and have the same kind of water usage and service provision, again well above the Sphere guidance.

When the guidance value is higher than appropriate

It is fairly easy to imagine situations in which the regular, pre-disaster situation of urban dwellers – and especially less wealthy urban households – is below the levels set out in the standards. The numbers of latrines or the living space per person in an urban slum is an example of that. This is not a cultural consideration: poor latrine coverage in an urban slum is unlikely to be a matter of choice.

Adapting standards downwards (or knowingly providing assistance at a level below the standard) is a serious undertaking and should not be undertaken lightly. It is not acceptable to provide a lower level of cover simply because 'that's what they are used to'.

However, there may be situations in which a lower-than-guidance level of assistance is appropriate. Such situations need to be carefully justified and documented.

Shelter and settlement standard 3: Covered living space

People have sufficient covered living space providing thermal comfort, fresh air and protection from the climate ensuring their privacy, safety and health and enabling essential household and livelihood activities to be undertaken.

Guidance note 1 (part): A covered floor area in excess of 3.5m² per person will often be required to meet these considerations.

Example – Floods in Antananarivo, Madagascar

Flooding following cyclone Chezda displaced many people in urban and rural parts of Madagascar in early 2015. In the urban response, humanitarian actors found it difficult to identify sufficient suitable sites for temporary shelters in densely populated urban areas.

Although suitable sites were identified elsewhere, the affected population did not want to move away from their homes for economic and social reasons. For example, many people who earned their income on a daily basis feared they would not be able to find work in another district or that their children would not be able to attend school.

After community meetings and coordination with the authorities, some shelters were provided that did not meet the Sphere Standards in terms of covered living space, but were seen by the displaced people as being an appropriate, temporary response to their situation.

It is interesting to note that guidance note 2 on duration goes on to say:

> *If 3.5m² per person cannot be achieved or is in excess of the typical space used by the affected or neighbouring population, the impact on dignity, health and privacy of a reduced covered area should be considered. Any decision to provide less than 3.5m² per person should be highlighted, along with actions to mitigate adverse effects on the affected population*

When national standards differ from Sphere minimum standards

In some cases, national authorities will already have set their own standards and these may be different from those outlined in the Sphere Handbook. Having two sets of standards to consider can be very challenging. While it is quite simple to say that the higher standard would normally apply, this may not always be the most appropriate response.

If there are two communities living side-by-side – for example a displaced and a host community – different levels of service provision in each group is likely to cause increased tension between the groups.

The challenge here is for humanitarian agencies to determine – in coordination with the authorities – the most appropriate course of action and communicate it effectively to all concerned.

The Sphere Handbook says (p9):

> *Sometimes the minimum standards may exceed everyday living conditions for the surrounding population. Adhering to the standards for disaster-affected populations remains essential. But such situations may also indicate the need for action in support of the surrounding population and for dialogue with community leaders. What is appropriate and feasible will depend on the context.*

8. Situations that are both acute and chronic

As noted above, some urban environments (and especially slums and unplanned settlements) may be in a permanent, chronic state of crisis. That is, the standard indicators tracking the normal situation in the area are consistently or frequently above the emergency thresholds. These may be Sphere indicators (density of latrine provision, health coverage, and access to food) or others, for example the frequency of waste disposal or chemical contamination in water and soil.

While this is clearly a developmental responsibility, it also presents humanitarian challenges. We know, for example, that such slums are high-risk areas for epidemic diseases, harbour malnutrition, and can be high-risk areas for civil unrest, crime and violence. We use the emergency thresholds to warn us when a response is necessary. But what should we do when these thresholds are exceeded as a norm? How does the humanitarian community know when this chronic situation – which urgently requires longer-term developmental action – evolves into a slow onset disaster that requires an additional, humanitarian response?

If, for example, we set higher thresholds before triggering an emergency response, does that suggest that the appalling conditions are somehow acceptable? And practically, it would be difficult to access humanitarian funding on an almost continuous basis to address a chronic problem.

There is a further challenge: one that is less connected to the Sphere indicators and more to specific compound indicators and tools that measure coping, food insecurity and similar concepts. Many of these indicators were designed for rural communities and their relevance to urban environments is not always proven. If such tools are used to guide decision-making in the absence of detailed contextual understanding, the risk of unanticipated results is much higher.

Work in large slums in Kenya illustrates that a modest change in circumstances can tip the scales and allow a chronic situation to collapse into acute poverty. Agencies need better tools to understand and identify such situations.

Example – Concern's IDSUE action research project, Kenya

The IDSUE project (Indicator Development for the Surveillance of Urban Emergencies) is a piece of action research led by Concern and funded by USAID / OFDA in five informal settlements in Nairobi and Kisumu. This five-year project has now collected over three years of research data.

IDSUE seeks to answer the fundamental question of *How do we know when a situation in an urban slum has gone from chronic poverty to a humanitarian crisis?*

The project currently follows indicators across six sectoral areas and uses the Sphere Minimum Standards as a reference for some of these indicators.

The first three years of the project focused on first identifying appropriate indicators and demonstrating the viability of a surveillance network. Now, the attention is shifting to setting thresholds which reliably indicate that a chronic situation is shifting to an emergency one.

One part of the project uses geo-spatial analysis to investigate the levels of correlation between the various indicators and domains. This provides maps which highlight those parts of the settlement with better than average, and worse than average, results for the various indicators. The results are very interesting and suggest that more work needs to be done to understand what the indicators are really telling us: in one location for example, there is effectively no correlation between dietary diversity and other indicators of food insecurity – yet dietary diversity is usually considered to be a good indicator of food insecurity.

9. Urban approaches by other technical standards-setting initiatives – The Humanitarian Standards Partnership

Sphere companion standards and urban response

Urban guidance is also important for various other handbooks and guidelines. Of those, some of the Sphere Companion Standards are of particular relevance here as they were developed in a Sphere-like manner and structured the same way. They are therefore very compatible with the Sphere Handbook and with each other. Thus, this guide also has relevance for the sectors covered by those standards and their guidance can be valuable for Sphere.

The five Companion Standards handbooks essentially cover two broad areas: children (protection and education) and livelihoods (livestock management and economic recovery) as well as cash-based programming. Some of the most important specificities related to urban programming are highlighted here. In 2016, Sphere and its companion standards have started working together as the Global Humanitarian Standards Partnership. For more information about Sphere Companions, please see the Sphere website.

Education as a component of urban humanitarian response

In 2010, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) launched the INEE Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery, the only global tool to define a minimum level of educational quality and access so as to increase coordination, transparency and accountability in education response. The INEE Standards are designed in a way that can be contextualised to many settings including urban contexts and provide a framework to coordinate educational activities of government, national and international NGOs, UN agencies, donors and other authorities. They provide a holistic approach to education policy and planning including community participation, assessment, coordination and Monitoring&Evaluation, access and learning environment, teaching and learning and teachers and educational personnel. The INEE Minimum Standards provide guidance on how to address specific issues that may emerge in urban settings from child protection to inclusive education and the provision of psychosocial support.

Child Protection in urban response

When the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS) were developed in 2012-2013, rural and camp situations were a more common point of departure than urban settings, and it was soon recognised that attention to the urban context needed to be strengthened in the second, forthcoming, revision of the CPMS. The situation of children in urban settings – street children, harmful child labour etc – is well recognised. However, the programming needed to meet those challenges for children as well as general situations – like urban natural disasters/refugee/IDP child protection responses and addressing the needs for children on the move – is still being developed and fine-tuned.

All children are vulnerable in emergencies, but certain realities including poverty, child labour, and urban violence place those living in urban areas at special risk of missing out on education. Education may play a particularly critical role for social integration of urban refugee children or help those coming from rural areas to garner the necessary skills to become economically competitive. As the number of children living in cities climbs, providing quality education for children is a growing concern for all stakeholders. While many of the challenges of accessing and benefiting from education apply equally to rural and urban settings, there are a number of issues associated with access and enrolment, quality of education and protection risks that are particularly significant in urban environments.

Minimum Requirements for Market Analysis in Emergencies

Although market assessments should be integrated as a standard practice informing response analysis to determine appropriate interventions in any context, they are even more important in urban areas because of the extent to which urban populations rely on markets for both their income and access to goods and services. Urban market systems can be complex and dynamic, including such aspects as their interactions and impacts on livelihoods; they are often better integrated and more competitive than rural markets and may demonstrate notable post-emergency recovery capacities.

The Minimum Requirements for Market Analysis in Emergencies provides extensive guidance and tips which can be applied to help you to appropriately contextualize the design and implementation of market assessment and analysis to manage the scope and complexity of urban markets.

10. Checklist for considering Standards in urban contexts

The following checklist serves as a tool to assist in applying specific Sphere standards to urban operational environments. It is not a complete checklist for urban programming. Rather, it is intended to provide a framework with which to consider the application of standards.   It refers to the operational environment, that is, the specific urban environment in which the programme is being undertaken. It is critical that this environment is properly understood.

Before you start using the checklist

Have you really understood the operational environment?
☐ Was a context analysis carried out?
☐ Is there a stakeholder analysis?
☐ Is there a risk analysis?

Read the whole of the standard, including the introductory text to the chapter, and the key actions, key indicators and guidance notes.
☐ Note that some chapters also include annexes.
☐ Try to understand the spirit or intention of the standard.

Checklist

1. APPLICABLE? Is the standard (and supporting text) specifically designed for a rural context? Does this mean that it is therefore not applicable to the urban operational environment?
☐ This will only apply to a very small number of standards and should not be the default response to applying 'challenging' standards to an urban environment.
☐ If the standard is explicitly and only applicable for a rural environment, it can be set aside.

2. SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED?
Is the standard implicitly designed for a rural (or camp, or other) context?
If so, it will need to be understood in the light of the operational environment.

☐ In what ways is the operational environment similar to the implied context and in what ways is it functionally different?

☐ For the differences, how do these affect the spirit of the standard? How might they affect the application of the Standard in the operational environment?

3. COMMUNITY
Does the standard (including the supporting text) make reference to community, to representation, stakeholders or to working with the authorities?

☐ Consider the multiple ways in which the term 'community' can be understood within the operational context. Include social, economic, ethnic, language, religious, age and gender, caste and other aspects in this analysis.

☐ Ensure that a full and diverse stakeholder analysis has been undertaken, looking at the potential positive and negative influence of each stakeholder on activities. Ensure that identified community representatives are valid and appropriate.

4. PROTECTION
Are there specific urban protection concerns that may influence the way in which the standard is considered?

☐ At the area level, consider issues of housing density, regularisation, access, infrastructure and industry, service provision and rule of law.

☐ Ensure that aspects of gender, age, disability, marginalisation, ethnicity, religion, caste, wealth, tenure and ownership, access and other factors are considered.

☐ Are there specific groups who may not present themselves for assistance and who may need to be individually targeted?

☐ Are there specific groups such as gangs, which need to be considered within the programme design process?

5. NUMBERS
Does the standard contain (in the supporting text) any quantitative elements such as numerical targets?

☐ Are there special circumstances in the operational environment that would lead you to consider that these quantitative elements should be reviewed and potentially adjusted?

☐ Are there national or municipal standards, guidance or legislation that must also be considered? Qualitatively, are they higher or lower than Sphere? What are the likely implications of adopting either set of standards?

6. COMMUNICATIONS
Which aspects of the standard require communication with the affected population?

☐ What communication challenges and opportunities apply in the operational environment?

☐ Consider language, literacy, daily schedules and gender issues in the analysis.

☐ Are there specific accountability issues raised by the standard for those affected by the disaster?

7. REALISM
Will the proposed activities allow the standard to be met in the operational environment?

☐ What additional challenges might the urban environment bring to the programme model – the theory of change or the logical framework?

☐ Does the risk analysis include the interaction of multiple factors, and have unanticipated outcomes been considered?

8. OPPORTUNITIES
Are there operational opportunities offered by the urban environment? Which aspects can be turned to advantage?

☐ Consider market systems, the banking sector, information technology and social media, public transport networks and all aspects of civil society and specifically identify opportunities.

☐ Consider urban planning processes and understand the political ambition for urban development of the operational context in order to develop constructive cooperation with the authorities.

☐ Ensure that all responsible authorities are included at all levels and that their mandate and limitations are understood.

The Sphere Project