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SUCCESS STORY

Assessing Humanitarian Need in Urban Settings in Kenya

USAID Partner Concern Worldwide Develops First Indicators and Thresholds for Urban Food Security Emergencies in Kenya



Photo credit: Concern

Concern's research, conducted while developing an urban food security indicator set, finds that raising incomes among vulnerable urban households may be among the most important factors for reducing food insecurity. However, to build secure and resilient urban families, multi-pronged interventions—which include integrating safety and security measures, and establishing early warning and action mechanisms—are also needed to bolster the ability of low-income families to manage shocks.

In 2008, amid a global food and fuel price crisis, relief agencies in Kenya reported critical conditions in urban slums, but in a context of chronic poverty, they lacked data to demonstrate the emergence of an acute crisis and ensure a targeted response.

Much of the humanitarian community's knowledge is based on experience responding to emergencies in rural areas that cannot be easily applied to urban settings. The context and dynamics of cities are vastly different from rural areas—people in cities are, for example, mostly dependent on markets—rendering many proven approaches and tools ineffective.

In recognition of this gap, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) endorsed a strategy for meeting humanitarian needs in urban areas in 2011, and Concern Worldwide launched its Indicator Development for the Surveillance of Urban Emergencies project in Kenya. The project—supported by USAID with nearly \$3.5 million since 2011—aims to better enable humanitarians to identify and respond to urban crises through the use of data and development of emergency indicators specifically designed for urban contexts.

Following several rounds of operational research in informal settlements of Kenyan cities, Concern has developed and tested the first-ever set of indicators for urban food security emergencies. In 2015, Concern worked with various stakeholders to use the indicators such as coping mechanisms, food security and nutrition, health, income, and water, sanitation, and hygiene to develop emergency thresholds that enable relief actors to identify emerging food security crises, assess when crises have ended, and target response efforts.

Concern now plans to test the indicators and thresholds outside Kenya to ensure their utility for the broader humanitarian community. As urbanization results in increased needs in urban contexts, this innovative work is addressing a critical gap and contributing to the global body of knowledge on effective humanitarian programming in urban settings.