

IDS RESEARCH SUMMARY

Research findings at a glance from the
Institute of Development Studies

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Urban Governance for Adaptation: Assessing Climate Change Resilience in Ten Asian Cities

This paper examines how to manage urban climate-related impacts by promoting planned and autonomous adaptation to improve climate change resilience. An analytical framework is developed by combining urban governance literature and rapid climate-resilience assessments in ten Asian cities. This framework can aid the development of future climate change resilience-building programmes.

Cities in developing countries are particularly vulnerable to the severe climatic risks associated with climate change such as flooding, pollution and the spreading of disease. This research, undertaken with partner institutes, assesses the vulnerability of cities to climate-related risks, and the role that urban-based governments play in building climate resilient cities. Ten Asian cities are assessed, based on an analytical framework that considers the key attributes of good urban governance in Asia. The paper argues that in order to build resilience, urban governments must display characteristics of decentralisation and autonomy; accountability and transparency; responsiveness and flexibility; participation and inclusion; experience and support.

This paper is based on recent research by IDS and partners that highlights climate vulnerability and adaptation in urban, as opposed to, rural areas. The background to the research project and methodology is presented, and linkages

made between climate change and sustainable urban development. A framework for investigating climate-resilient governance, and key findings of the city assessments are offered, before a comparative analysis is conducted.

The authors outline why cities in developing countries are most at risk, examining what makes a city resilient or vulnerable to climate changes. The strong linkages between adaptation and ongoing sustainable development are explored, as are co-beneficial development-adaptation activities. The paper argues that autonomous proactive efforts of slum residents need to be supported so that they can contribute to community-wide disaster risk reduction.

The paper emphasises the crucial role of the municipal government in building climate-resilient communities, as they are responsible for decisions on infrastructure, disaster preparedness and disaster response. Emphasis is placed on the importance of working in

partnerships (local governments, NGO's and private groups) so that city planning agendas remain focused on the needs of poor and marginalised citizens, and environmental integrity.

Good urban governance for adaptation is dependent to a large extent on the local government's ability to meet their responsibilities and their responsiveness to low-income groups. If decentralisation is to be effective, it needs to be supported by local capacity building and the improvement of accountability mechanisms. The authors propose a governance framework indicating how characteristics of good governance might support effective climate resilience building.

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“Lack of transparency and accountability in key sectors can have serious implications for climate resilience”

Key research findings

- City-level authorities are commonly constrained by three factors when managing climate resilience duties: the lack of clarity between city, state and national level bodies, poor coordination between departments and agencies, and severe financial constraints.
- Lack of transparency and accountability in key sectors can have serious implications for climate resilience and the resilience of the vulnerable to climate shocks.
- Most of the cities have experience in responding to disasters, and many have developed disaster management plans including effective early warning systems.
- City development plans often include a consultation period or organised public hearings. However, vulnerable and marginalised citizens may not feature in the proceedings, even though much is gained in giving such groups the chance to participate.
- Although the cities have varying levels of experience in disaster preparedness, they all face the challenge of protecting their citizens in the most remote or vulnerable settlements. (148 words)

This paper presents an analytical framework encompassing five characteristics of good governance which contribute to urban climate change resilience-building programmes. Further, it concludes that capacity for integrating climate risk reduction into city or municipal development plans is influenced by awareness levels, and the

motivation of representatives and government departments. Access to resources, accountability mechanisms and citizen participation in planning processes provide further indicators of a city's capacity to implement appropriate climate adaptation programmes. National level engagement with international climate policy and climate change mitigation indicate greater capacity and political will to implement programmes locally once frameworks and funding are present.

Key policy lessons / implications of research

- To build climate resilience rapidly without being maladaptive, both marginalised voices and climate science agencies must contribute to the development of climate-resilience programmes.
- Increased vulnerability to climate change requires legislative and administrative systems that will enable access to investigative and grievance procedures.
- Future resilience to climate change should be factored into relief and reconstruction phases, upgrading buildings and infrastructure to withstand future climate extremes.
- Climate resilience should balance citizen-led processes with timely and efficient implementation.
- The experience of NGOs, civil society organisations, community-based groups and research organisations is beneficial in relation to the less event driven aspects of climate change.

Credits

Thomas Tanner, Tom Mitchell, Emily Polack and Bruce Guenther, 'Urban Governance for Adaptation: Assessing Climate Change Resilience in Ten Asian Cities', Research Summary of Working Paper 315, March 2009

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