



This online discussion brought together a range of African, Asian and Latin American experts to debate urban climate disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies, and analyse the importance of political and financial support in effectively reducing climate risk.

URBAN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

SUMMARY

This week's discussion looked at city level disaster risk reduction strategies, and how the existence, or inexistence, of national DRR strategies can impact upon the development and effectiveness of these. Participants considered which actors were the most pro-active in reducing climate risk in their cities, with a particular focus on the role of the government and local communities.

Learning Alliance participants explained that although DRR strategies often exist on paper, formal strategies are largely non-existent in their cities. It was also felt resoundingly that emergency response strategies and actions are much more prominent than prevention and preparation. Participants highlighted key barriers to DRR efforts as a lack of long-term planning, poor political commitment and weak capacity amongst city officials. This echoed the views of the Latin American expert who was interviewed for this, Dr Alberto Maturana Palacios, who chaired the Chilean National Emergency Office for 12 years. Dr Palacios explained that the lack of emergency preparedness in Chile was largely due to the fact that the government had not prioritised the DRR in its development plans.





Key Conclusions

The online discussion pointed to the following key conclusions related to city level DRR efforts in African, Asian and Latin American nations:

- There is no clear link between the existence of a national DRR strategy and effective city-level DRR strategies; local solutions need to be developed at the local level
- The existence of urban DRR strategies on paper does not necessarily translate into practical action
- Within existing climate change and DRR efforts, actions focus on relief and response, rather than prevention
- Significant challenges exist in relation to the lack of local technical and financial capacity, as well as poor coordination between relevant stakeholders

CONTENT

Discussion: Urban Disaster Risk Reduction

[Page 3](#)

Interview with Dr. Alberto Maturana Palacios from Chile

[Page 7](#)



Discussion: Urban Disaster Risk Reduction

Learning Focus

Discussion 4 focused on city level climate-related disaster risk reduction. As exemplified by case studies and experiences from several Latin American cities, the region has encountered both significant successes and distinct challenges in relation to DRR initiatives. Notable successes relate to the involvement of civil society, as well as public investment and insurance systems, whereas the main challenges have been poor coordination between national and local government and a lack of legal mechanisms to support city level DRR initiatives.

The purpose of this discussion was to understand the relationship between national and local DRR strategies, to identify key actors in effective city programmes and analyse strategies for overcoming barriers to improving risk reduction in urban areas.

Discussion 4 was guided by the following three questions:

1. Does your city have a formal DRR strategy? What do you understand to be the relationship between this and the national DRR strategy?
2. Which actors are most proactive in DRR in your city?
3. What are the main challenges that your city faces in terms of significantly reducing disaster risk?

Latin American Case Studies

This week a series of case studies were shared with participants to demonstrate the successes and challenges of Latin American experiences with DRR in cities:

- Our interviewee from Chile, Dr Alberto Maturana Palacios, who chaired the Chilean National Emergency Office for 12 years, shared his experience of DRR strategies in Chilean cities, indicating that they have enjoyed limited success due to a lack of political and financial support. This interview is included at the end of this publication.
- The [ELLA Brief on Disaster Risk Reduction \(DRR\) in Urban Areas](#), written by Jorgelina Hardoy of IIED-Latin America in Argentina, gives examples of several community programmes designed to minimise risk
- The article on [DRR in Bogotá](#), Colombia, exemplifies how city level planning, legal and political actions have been instrumental in the development and standardisation of DRR actions in the city

Discussion Participation

Fourteen countries were represented in the discussion focused on city level DRR. Contributions came from 48 participants in total; South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa were the most highly represented regions.



Summary

Responses to the discussion questions demonstrated that formal DRR strategies are a rarity in cities across Africa and Asia. Several participants agreed that climate related disaster risk reduction strategies exist on paper, however in practice very little is being achieved. When discussing the DRR mechanisms in place in cities, the majority of participants confirmed that action is generally taken in the wake of an extreme event. Emergency response strategies exist, but actions to prevent such situations from arising or to minimise risks are not a priority for many city governments. As we saw in the Latin American case studies, response is only one component of DRR; to actually reduce disaster risk it is necessary to reduce vulnerability to extreme events before they occur, and this process must be location-specific and involve all stakeholders.

"The main issue was that for a long time it entailed only 'post-disaster relief' and only recently has risk reduction/ mitigation or preparedness been included in the scheme of things... Institutionally, India has everything in place however; the thrust is still more towards relief rather than risk reduction. The biggest funding that is available from the central government is called 'disaster response fund' indicating preparedness only in monetary terms - meaning having a fund that is to be used if and when disaster occurs. Even capacity building is inclined towards post disaster relief... in terms of planning for resources and impact mitigation of large projects and city level planning strategies, very little has been done."

- Kanak Tiwari, India
Researcher

Some of the main barriers to DRR were identified as the lack of long-term planning, political commitment and technical capacity amongst city officials. Many participants also spoke about the need for DRR to be integrated into climate change adaptation measures.

"The efforts to design strategies to adapt societies to the effects of climate change and national and international efforts to manage the disaster risks associated with extreme climate events remain fundamentally divorced. So it is necessary to assure that DRR policies and programmes operate in synergy with CCA strategies from the local to the national and international level for taking proactive steps towards reducing risk."

- Ashish Adhikari, Nepal
Researcher

Of the countries that do have city level DRR plans, it was interesting to see how these plans have differing levels of impact between cities. Two participants from South Africa, Stefan Raubenheimer and Riaz Jogiat, indicated that their cities do have formal DRR strategies. In South Africa municipal disaster risk management planning is mandated by national legislation. Stefan Raubenheimer explained that the city of Cape Town has taken a "proactive and integrated approach" to DRR. Whereas, Riaz Jogiat felt that in his city the strategy was ineffective, due to flawed risk identification and a lack of political will, among other reasons.



"It is however easy for national and sub national government to put these excellent policies on the table and then not push and incentivise local government to implement them."

*- Riaz Jogiat, South Africa
Government Official*

Participants from other countries, including Bangladesh and Vietnam, shared information about DRR plans that are based on a national plan. In these cases, the focus is not specifically on climate issues and improving urban climate resilience, but rather on all potential threats.

"The Disaster Management Act 2012 has empowered local government bodies, like the City Corporation Authority of Dhaka, to establish a City Corporation Disaster Management Committee (CCDMC) and a City Corporation Disaster Response Coordination Group (CCDRCG). And the National Disaster Management Plan 2010-2015 (which is also endorsed by the Disaster Management Act 2012) specifically promotes the preparation of a City Corporation Disaster Management Plan (CCDMP)."

*- Rafiul Islam, Bangladesh
Civil Society*

Several participants, notably from Ghana, India and Nigeria, indicated that national DRR strategies are intended to trickle down to the city level, but in reality this is not yet happening. These three countries do have relevant national acts and departments, yet very few concrete city level initiatives exist. Participants from these countries spoke of ad-hoc actions mostly related to emergency response.

Some countries are currently developing national DRR strategies, such as Uruguay, Zambia and Zimbabwe, while other countries do not have any such strategy. Participants felt that there is a very strong relationship between the existence of a national DRR strategy and any kind of action at the city level. As we have seen, the challenges posed by climate change affect different localities in very specific ways. Therefore, in order to really reduce disaster risk (rather than responding to disasters as they occur), local plans and strategies are necessary. It was interesting to learn that many participants felt that national governments are responsible for the absence of city level DRR, and that in the absence of such plans local actors such as the community and NGOs have not been having more of an impact on local DRR.

Other challenges identified, aside from lack of political commitment, included the lack of long-term planning, insufficient funding, weak technical capacity and governance at the local level, low community awareness and involvement, and a vision of DRR limited to emergency response.



“The main challenge in Makurdi city in reducing disaster risk is lack of preparedness. There are no plans in place and response is spontaneous and stops after the incident. The flood of 2012 received response as it occurred but afterwards, there were no mid-term to long-term plans to reduce the impact of the future incidence on the people. The affected people have returned to the flood plains of the river. Disaster issues are only handled by government officials without involving other key stakeholders and the affected people. Awareness on disaster risk need to be stepped up to help citizens respond more effectively.”

*- Simon Shomkegh, Nigeria
Civil Society*

Key Lessons

- The link between national and city level DRR strategies is not linear. We have seen that in some cases national plans encourage the development of local plans, while in others the existence of national plans has not had any impact at the local level. For those living in cities in countries that have not yet developed national DRR strategies, waiting for a national strategy need not be a necessary first step to reducing disaster risk at the city level.
- DRR plans on paper do not always result in practical action on the ground; the involvement of multi-stakeholder groups, particularly local decision-makers and community members, would improve the outreach and implementation of DRR strategies
- Currently most DRR actions undertaken in cities in the global South focus on emergency response rather than prevention. Even when dealing with emergency situations, awareness levels are not significantly raised to prevent reoccurrences of such disasters.
- Key barriers to the development of effective DRR strategies include a lack of political will, finance, technical capacity and community involvement

Supplementary Materials

Participants were provided with the following resources in preparation for the discussion:

- [Climate Change, Disaster Risk, and the Urban Poor: Cities Building Resilience for a Changing World](#)
- [Practical Experiences for Risk Reduction in Bogotá, Colombia](#)
- [São Paulo Case Study - Climate Change, Disaster Risk and the Urban Poor](#)
- [ELLA Guide: Urban Disaster Risk Management in Latin American Cities](#)
- [ELLA Brief: Pushing Through Reform: Lima’s Disaster Risk Management Strategy](#)



- [ELLA Brief: Institutionalising Disaster Risk Management: Latin America's Systems Approach](#)
- [ELLA Brief: Latin American Experience in Combining Disaster Risk Management with Poverty Reduction](#)

During the exchange, participants shared additional resources and links to relevant organisations:

- [Cape Town DRM approach](#)

INTEGRATING CLIMATE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION INTO URBAN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Interview with **Dr. Alberto Maturana Palacios** from Chile



Dr. Alberto Maturana Palacios chaired the Chilean National Emergency Office of the Ministry of the Interior (ONEMI) from 1994 to 2006, where he led the National Training Programme in Civil Protection and led a vigorous programme of modernisation of this institution. He also served as National Coordinator for the Chilean Civil Protection System, becoming the World Dean of International and National Directors). During the same period he founded and became the first President of the Inter-American Development Bank Disaster Network and the founder and first Chairman of the IberoAmerican Association of Governmental Organisations for Civil Protection and Defence (covering 23 countries).

What major climate change and disaster vulnerabilities exist in Chilean cities?

The Chilean territory is extremely long, running from the desert and sub-tropical regions in the north to the freezing South Pole. Separated from Argentina by the massive Andean mountain range to the East, and with a distance in excess of 8,000km of Pacific Ocean between the main land and the Easter Island territory. This diversity means that Chile experiences significant climate variability! Our main disaster vulnerability is that the country has suffered the largest earthquakes in human history and our long, long territory makes coordination and humanitarian assistance a significant challenge.



Have city level risk assessments been conducted in Chilean cities?

In terms of government initiatives, city level risk assessments have been very weak to date. In fact, most actions have been led by research institutions and NGOs. Recently, in response to the earthquake and tsunami that took place on February 27, 2010, local Chilean authorities have initiated DRR planning. We are still waiting for the government to pass a Civil Protection Law, that could include DRR and climate change, but it has been a long and slow process in Congress! The main shortcoming is the lack of government policy that prioritises DRR; that will involve budgeting, planning and action.

What major challenges do Chilean cities faced in terms of integrating climate change and disaster risk policies into city planning and city management?

The other main challenge that Chile faces is extreme isolation; that is compartmentalisation and poor government coordination in major cities due to overlapping responsibilities between agencies (such as the Ministry of Public Works, Housing, Environment and the Home Office).

What types of institutional changes are required to make Chilean cities more responsive at the local level to climate change and disaster risk?

- Assign priority to the subject in national and local policies
- The long-awaited Civil Protection Law in Congress could generate interest and political support for DRR and climate change issues
- Local authorities in main cities with enough executive capacity to coordinate isolated initiatives into a single integrated policy and actions

Santiago de Chile, our capital city, has more than 25 counties, but no central coordination by a single authority such as a Mayor. The Governor is a political actor, however and our laws and regulations, as in most countries, delegate the responsibility of territorial management to Mayors. Some important climate events originating from the Andean Mountains (such as mudslides, avalanches and flooding) affect several communities, each of them with different planning and coordination.



What key factors would help strengthen the institutional capacity of Chilean cities in delivering basic services and reducing vulnerability to climate and disaster risk?

- A National Civil Protection Law (in discussion in Congress)
- The National Security Agency that this law would create as part of a new institutional framework
- State policy on climate change and DRR
- More research and associated technology development/investments to improve Early Warning Systems related to weather and climate events

How are communities and municipal governments in Chile working together to confront climate change and disaster risk?

In Chile we have a National Association of Municipalities that works on several priority areas: education, poverty, environment, urban and rural planning. Unfortunately, climate change and DRR are not a priority on this agenda. Mayors always say the contrary, but a prevention agenda is not considered in city planning. The results speak for themselves. Two weeks ago, Santiago was affected by a rather unusual climate phenomenon, very uncommon in Chile at this time of the year. We don't have tropical weather, so rain in February is strange. It affected the Andes Mountains and several canyons that channel water into Santiago and nearby regions. The rains caused severe mudslides that destroyed potable water facilities and pipes, leading to a shortage in potable water with more than 2 million people affected in Santiago and Aconcagua River Basin nearby. This proved once again just how vulnerable Chile is to climate change. The flow of vehicles between Chile and Argentina was interrupted with thousands of travellers stuck at both sides of the border without shelter, food and water. I think this provides a good case study in terms of big city vulnerability and the associated problems that appear when triggered by a climatic event: unpreparedness, lack of planning and coordination become the real problems! Santiago is a big city with more than 5 million people and we do not have a Mayor responsible for the coordination of the 25 municipalities affected by the lack of water and related problems.

CONTACT [SSN](#)

To learn more about the Learning Alliance on Climate Resilient Cities, or any of the specific themes raised in the Learning Alliance Highlights, contact the author and Learning Alliance moderator, Charlotte Olivia Heffer, ELLA Brazil Project Coordinator at the Environmental Laboratory at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), at charlotte@lima.coppe.ufrj.br.

FIND OUT MORE FROM [ELLA](#)

To learn more about climate change, disaster risk management and governance in Latin America's cities, visit the [ELLA website](#), which has a full list of the knowledge materials available on these topics. To learn more about other development issues, browse other [ELLA Themes](#).



ELLA is supported by:

