Urban Africa Risk Knowledge

Briefing

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Urban resilience building in fast-growing African cities

Small- and medium-sized cities and towns in sub-Saharan Africa are growing fast and accumulating risks. Local governments seek to build the resilience of their city in conditions of complex interdependent urban systems and gaps in data and information. Technical and financial capacity issues often lead to them resorting to external expertise, which shifts the decision-making power away from the citizenry and elected leaders. To capacitate cities to lead their own resilience-building processes, new decision-support tools are required that can operate on data that are good enough and can enhance inclusive decision-making processes and local ownership. This briefing draws from the experience of the City Resilience Action Planning (CityRAP) Tool developed by UN-Habitat, including within the Urban Africa Risk Knowledge (Urban ARK) programme. The tool was implemented in 20 cities spread over nine countries in sub-Saharan Africa between 2015 and 2018.

African urbanism and risk accumulation

Demographic statistical projections indicate that the urban population of sub-Saharan Africa will triple in absolute number by 2050 as compared to 2015, passing from approximately 400 million to 1.2 billion people.[1] In most cases, both central and local governments are ill-prepared for such an extraordinary growth. Much of the population expansion is taking place outside, or in the absence of, official planning frameworks. As a result, large numbers of people meet their housing needs in informal settlements, often located in high-risk areas exposed to a range of natural and man-made hazards. Urban risks are accumulating in cities and towns as a result of weak governance capacity to manage this rapid urban expansion. This is particularly acute in small- to intermediate-sized cities in the region, which are rapidly growing, house the majority of the urban population, and began expanding from a minimal infrastructure and institutional base.

The direct and indirect effects of climate change are also being felt severely in urban areas as people, economic activities and assets continue concentrating in risky areas. While climate change is affecting a wide range of sectors, from water supply to food systems and health, its impacts are distributed unequally across the population, affecting mostly vulnerable groups. The capacity of local government plays a fundamental role in mitigating these urban risks.

The need to develop endogenous city resilience planning processes

Small to intermediate cities and towns in sub-Saharan Africa face some of the most significant capacity gaps in urban governance as a consequence of limited qualified human resources, finance and means. In general, planning for risk reduction and resilience in urban contexts is complex and requires a lot of data. As a result, city managers tend to rely on outside expertise to assess and design sustainable urban development strategies. This often leads to city governments facing

Policy Pointers

- **Build a common understanding and awareness** about the city's resilience and promote urban resilience planning using 'good enough' data in a participatory manner, based on the knowledge and perceptions of municipal staff and local communities.
- **Leverage local knowledge of urban risk** through inclusive consultations, participatory risk mapping and focus group discussions, and build local ownership of the city resilience planning process to define priority actions in the short-, medium- and longer-term, within a ten-year vision and with minimum interventions from externals.
- **Develop local capacity and engagement** to facilitate implementation of the identified priorities with clear responsibilities assigned to the different stakeholders.
- **Use the resulting city Resilience Framework for Action (RFA)**, which allows local stakeholders to self-organise and can be used for leveraging funds from sub-national or national authorities or from external partners.

"Within the broad spectrum of urban resilience, the tool is built on participatory methods and consensus-building techniques to involve all concerned stakeholders in the identification of entry points to start building the city's resilience with minimal external support."

difficulties in having real ownership of the planning process, which hampers implementation.

The Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda highlight the need to respect the principles of inclusive decision making and to base urban development decisions on local priorities. However, as planning is often not under the control of African cities because of lack of expertise or centralised legislation, citizens are often excluded from the process. The result is a population that is commonly disempowered, largely due to the belief that it does not have the required understanding and knowledge to contribute meaningfully to complex topics such as urban planning, resilience building or climate change adaptation.

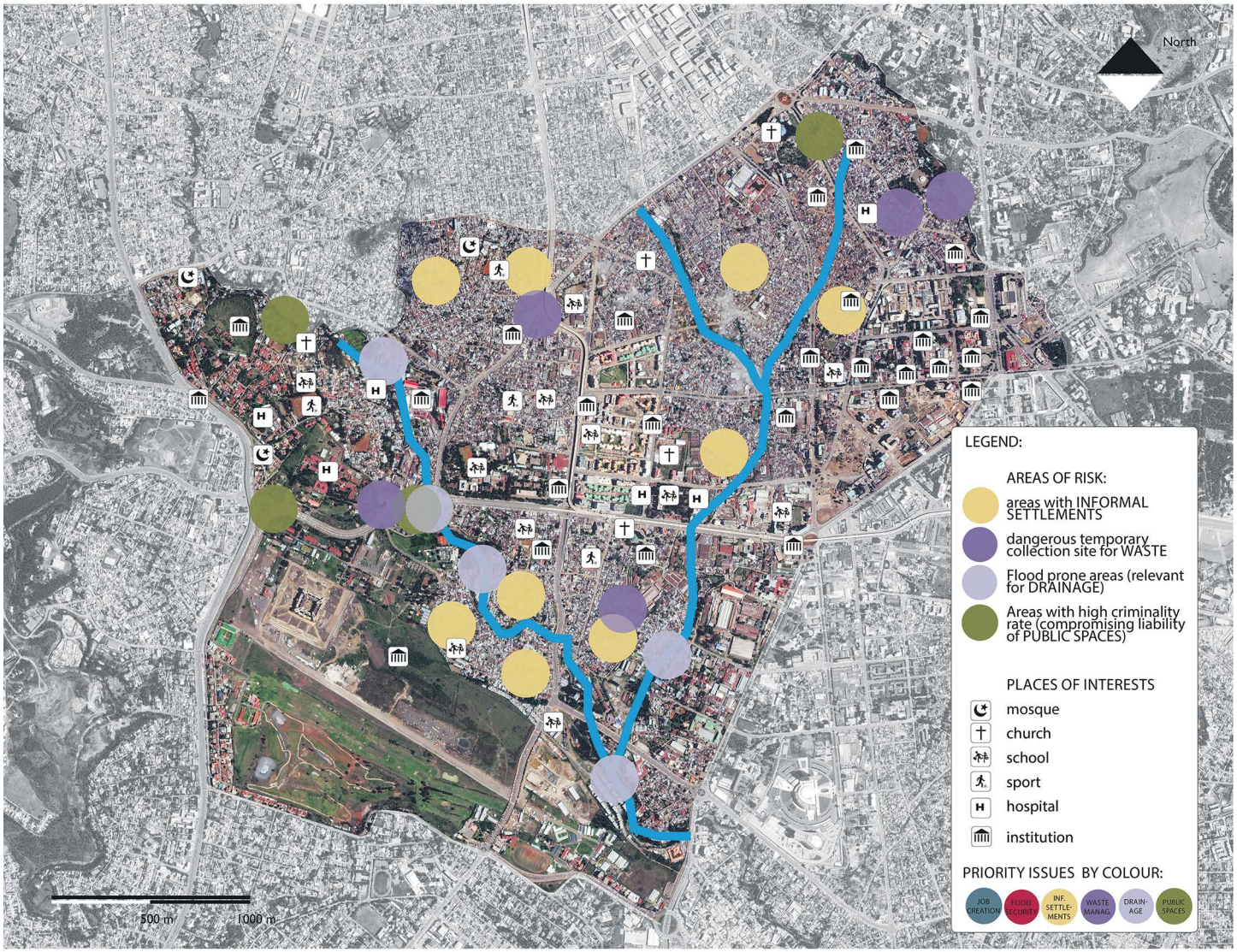
The emergence of urban resilience as a central working concept in the development and humanitarian communities has resulted in an increasing number of tools and guidelines.[2] Each tool works to frame visions and practices for urban planning – determining who has a voice and how priorities for planning are selected. However, most tools are too complex or require robust technical input, costly data collection methods, or external support for their implementation, and are hence not appropriately targeted to low capacity local governments in sub-Saharan Africa. This creates a disincentive to local governments in kick-starting the process of resilience planning, and most tools therefore risk falling into the trap of reinforcing top-down planning dynamics.

The CityRAP as enabling tool

Developing local governance capacity in risk management and resilience planning must be a key strategy to reduce the multiple risks that cities and their populations are exposed to. There is a need for a paradigm shift in the design and implementation of resilience planning tools that enables local authorities and communities to lead the process and, at the same time, build capacity.

A prerequisite is to build a common understanding of urban resilience and a solid cooperation mechanism for city governments and urban dwellers to tackle these issues jointly. As urban systems are complex and not all challenges can be met at once, there is a need to set priorities in a participatory manner and through consensus

Right: the planning process from participatory risk mapping in Guinea-Bissau (Photo: Chiara Tomaselli, UN-Habitat).



Above: Risk map resulting from the CityRAP process in Lideta subcity of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2016 (Design: Linda Zardo, UN-Habitat).

building. Since issues of urban poverty reduction, economic growth, quality of life and resilience are interlinked, the identification of critical underlying issues opens scope for multiple issues to be addressed simultaneously. Achieving the set priorities should translate into defining implementable actions or fundable projects. The difficulty is to trigger this process in a way that can be led by the end-users of city management, ie the municipality or city council. The aim is to foster the development of much needed capacity and catalyse an endogenous development dynamic – not for local actors and agendas to be driven by external expertise.

A tool that aims to operationalise such a paradigm shift is the City Resilience Action Planning (CityRAP) Tool that was conceived and developed by UN-Habitat between 2014 and 2018, including in partnership with the Urban Africa Risk Knowledge (Urban ARK) programme.[3] Within the broad spectrum of urban resilience, the tool is built on participatory methods and consensus-building techniques to involve all concerned stakeholders in the identification of entry points to start building the city's resilience with minimal external support.

The conceptual framework of CityRAP culminates in a ten-year city Resilience Framework for Action (RFA), including short- (0-2 years), medium- (3-5 years), and long-term (6-10 years) activities. The planning process is structured around five pillars – (i) urban governance; (ii) urban planning and environment; (iii) resilient infrastructure and basic services; (iv) urban economy and society; and (v) urban disaster risk management – to help guide local city actors' collection and analysis of existing data. The balance between city leadership and external facilitation is key to CityRAP's positioning as a tool that enables rather than surpasses city leadership, strategic thinking and action planning, according to defined priorities for systemic solutions to urban risk and resilience building. The process of interaction between the city team and external facilitators is ideally completed within two to three months through four phases, and requires only minimal financial resources for municipal staff time and workshops. The process of interaction between the city team and external facilitators is ideally completed within two to three months through four phases, and requires only minimal financial resources for municipal staff time and workshops.

After co-producing and implementing the CityRAP Tool in 20 cities in nine sub-Saharan Africa countries, the following policy recommendations could be derived:

– Build a common understanding and awareness about resilience: it is a fundamental start to enhancing the resilience of a city.

– Start enhancing resilience with data that are good enough: investigating the perceptions of municipal staff about the state of resilience of their departments can be a starting point to improve the performance of local government.

– Leverage local knowledge of urban risk through inclusive methods: participatory risk mapping with vulnerable communities and focus group discussions allow unskilled people and those not able to read or write to actively participate and have a say in their city's resilience strategy.

– Bring together local administrations and community representatives around collective and inclusive data collection, analysis and prioritisation of key issues to enhance resilience: the process can increase ownership and validity of a resilience strategy, and thereby its long-term success.

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Notes

1. UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs), Population Division (2018) World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision, Online Edition.

2. UN-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Programme) (2017) Trends in Urban Resilience 2017, Nairobi.

3. UN-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Programme) (2018) City Resilience Action Planning (CityRAP) Tool, Nairobi. Available online at http://dimsur.org/city_rap

Urban Africa Risk Knowledge

www.urbanark.org

Urban Africa: Risk Knowledge (Urban ARK) breaking cycles of risk accumulation in sub-Saharan Africa

A three-year programme of research and capacity building that seeks to open up an applied research and policy agenda for risk management in urban sub-Saharan Africa. Urban ARK is led by 12 policy and academic organisations* from across sub-Saharan Africa with international partnerships in the United Kingdom.

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