Inserting rights and justice into urban resilience: a focus on everyday risk in cities in the South

Community-based organisation and action can contribute greatly to disaster risk reduction, and interlinked to this, to building resilience to the impacts of climate change. However, as the case study cities from the Urban Africa: Risk Knowledge (Urban ARK) programme show, community action needs to be oriented towards working with local government, and not become a substitute for local government inaction. This is the case even when local government lacks the capacity to act, since it can still encourage and legitimate (or constrain and repress) community-based action. The city studies also show how attention to the full spectrum of risk highlights the synergies between risk reduction from everyday small and large disasters. In addition, community-led data collection on conditions in informal settlements can inform and strengthen community-local government partnerships for risk reduction.

Resilience is increasingly informing the policy agenda of urban risk management in cities in the global South. In the past, the focus has been on ensuring and investing in resilient infrastructure. Hard infrastructure, technical engineering and ecosystem services continue to play a critical role in building pathways to resilience. However, this briefing aims to reconceptualise resilience with more emphasis on **rights** and **justice** for urban citizens, and less focus on infrastructure as the object to be made resilient. A justice orientation draws on theories that consider justice to include: the fair distribution of social and material advantages; meaningful participation in decision-making processes; acknowledgement of social, cultural and political differences; and the right to minimum levels of capabilities and opportunities to achieve livelihood and wellbeing goals (Young, 1990; Sen, 1990; Rawls, 1971).

This briefing deliberately assumes a Southern perspective. The failings of everyday development are perhaps most real in the South, where urban inequality is high, and social and ecological resilience is threatened. As a result, impoverished urban populations are increasingly vulnerable to everyday stresses and less able to deal with more rare extreme events. The discussions here are informed by the lived realities and conceptual innovations of urban contexts. Key consideration is given to resilience, rights, entitlements and risk management in urban areas (Lawhorn *et al.*, 2014). The entry points we use for considering the logic and utility of a justice orientation include: finance; decision making; scale; and global systems. This justice orientation encourages a critical consideration of the what and for whom of resilience interventions (Meerow and Newell, 2016).

The urban resilience agenda

Policy narratives around urban resilience tend to focus on expert-driven input – such as engineering-based understandings – and

Policy Pointers

• Use of the resilience concept can play a central role in progressive development if engaged with through the lens of the rights of urban citizens.

• Opportunities must be created for 'negotiated resilience' that focus on processes rather than on resilient outcomes.

• If locally situated processes, knowledges and norms are integrated into resilience responses, they are more likely to be successful.

• More African contributions are needed to help reimagine the role that African cities might play in global financial, political and science processes.

externally defined pathways to development (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012). The global narrative also assumes that planning processes are both relevant and inclusive, regardless of local decision- making norms or capacity at a city level. In spite of these criticisms, the resilience agenda has been endorsed by global development frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Northern development agencies (for example, the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities project). The result is that the concept will be present – and is likely to be dominant – in urban planning for some time.

While recognising that multiple actors play a part, city governments play a primary role in delivering urban resilience. However, contemporary resilience planning often shifts the responsibility to individuals and households at risk. This shift encourages urban citizens to cope with, rather than resolve, the social structures, legal apparatus and administrative practices that distribute vulnerability and risk. The voices of urban residents and their capacity to contribute to resilience building are often missing, with clear implications for procedural justice. The presence of resilience alongside wellbeing and poverty alleviation in the SDGs places a positive emphasis on the need to deliver urban resilience alongside good governance, but with little guidance around how financial systems, decision making or information systems might support this policy agenda.

Questioning resilience

While there is considerable momentum in the resilience agenda at present, it is not without critics. In particular, critiques focus on the ambiguity of the term 'resilience'. Its ambiguous nature leaves the concept vulnerable to vested interests, and does not account for the political structures that shape decision making in local contexts. We consider that the increasing use of the word in urban planning and visioning documents makes the concept important to engage with. Resilience holds value because its approach is both multiscalar and systems oriented. This approach is more useful in addressing the complex, everyday stressors in socioecological contexts than the siloed approach that can dominate urban adaptation and planning (De Sherbinin *et al.,* 2007; Carter *et al.,* 2015).

Rights and justice in the context of resilience

'Rights' and 'justice' are both contested terms. They have **intrinsic** value, meaning that they are valuable in themselves, and **instrumental** value, in that they hold value as a way to achieve further goals, regardless of whether they hold value in themselves. Their instrumental value is central to resilience as it implies that having a rights- or justice-based

entitlement increases the formal or informal social protection afforded to the rights bearer.

This briefing assumes that people have some basic rights to core entitlements, for example personal safety, health, water, shelter, energy, transport and communications, food, education, and sanitation (Sultana and Loftus, 2012). Entitlements are understood as the bundles of commodities that a person can access in their society, including all of their rights and opportunities (Sen, 1984). With regards to justice, some theories emphasise the importance of recognising and treating everyone as equal participants within a democracy, while others focus on the importance of distributing something.

The resilience agenda needs to help cities prepare for catastrophic events that can overwhelm existing systems, and also for everyday risks. There are persistent failings in administrative, organisational, budgetary, and human resource agendas in many cities in the South. These failings undermine people's rights and entitlements and cause increased vulnerability of these urban communities to shocks (Neumayer and Plumper, 2007). The challenge, but also the opportunity, that resilience framing presents is to bring together efforts that protect systems and processes that deliver basic needs, while also managing and planning for extreme events.

Making the investments and procedures through which progressive rights claims can be made the object of resilience ensures that resilience is a central component of pro-poor and progressive development. This is especially important because the degree to which communities are resilient to everyday risks and extreme events is related to the distribution of employment opportunities, infrastructure, adequate housing and other daily needs. In African cities, the number of people living in informal settlements with a lack of risk-reducing infrastructure is growing, which is leading to further inequality – in mental and physical health standards, for example (Ezeh *et al.,* 2016).

In order for resilience to play a central role in progressive development, it is necessary to:

• Develop a rights- and justice-based framework for vulnerability based on plausible (even if contested) views
• Identify the underlying causes of poor alignment between ideal rights and justice, and people's actual lived entitlements
• Understand how a resilience approach to governance, and focused rights- and justice-based local empowerment of vulnerable communities, can facilitate the alignment of rights, justice and entitlements – ensuring that entitlements are more secure in the face of everyday challenges, such as violence and disease.

One of the main purposes of this briefing is to focus on the Southern perspective and in particular on the experience of and potential in African cities. As such, we propose four entry points to inserting rights and justice into urban resilience.

1. Move away from financial understandings of risk

Risk is a social construct that comes from people's perception. To really understand risk and its role in urban governance, any analysis should engage a very broad set of stakeholders. However, the risk discourse has tended towards financial analysis and insurance considerations that focus on economic loss as a result of discrete events. The broader human impacts, and the critical losses of poorer households as a result of everyday risks, as well as larger events, are less quantifiable and are often overlooked (Vatn and Bromley, 1994; Hallegatte et al., 2017). A justice focus reorientates urban governance structures towards looking at what types of risk are important to mitigate and prioritise, and what outcomes ought to be avoided.

The emerging resilience discourse provides the opportunity to improve on existing financial risk analyses by furthering understanding of the structural causes and trade-offs involved in addressing risk through a financial lens. Resilience approaches would benefit from:

• Understanding the requirements of global capital and reallocating this capital towards poverty-alleviating public goods
• Engaging the social justice perspective and revealing sources of power that currently influence urban governance
• Reorienting investments to ensure that justice-based concerns are properly incorporated in decisions around risk
• Understanding the political and economic relationships shaping urban governance regimes that have not been fully considered
• Including a broader set of criteria in decision making to ensure negative externalities are addressed and actions that generate positive externalities are prioritised.

2. Create opportunities for negotiated resilience

The concept of negotiated resilience does not predefine what resilience should look like. Instead it implies a process and the need for an arena in which diverse interests can discuss and negotiate their interests, values and experiences in order to define the concept (Harris *et al.,* 2017). Importantly, the process of negotiating resilience involves contestation, deliberation of trade-offs, prioritisation of interests and critical

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evaluation and redistribution of gains and losses. It is an iterative process that requires ongoing support for meaningful involvement and equitable participation. The concept has the potential to really harness the rights and justice questions of resilience for whom, to what, where, when and why (Meerow and Newell, 2016), placing equity, accountability and justice into resilience planning and interventions that can otherwise be techno-centric and capital-driven (Anguelovski *et al.,* 2016).

3. Strengthen endogenous forms of resilience

It is important to ground resilience in specific urban contexts. The African urban context can provide insights into other contexts as well. African cities often have low levels of governance capacity, high levels of informality, planned and unplanned urbanisation, combined with low economic development (Parnell and Oldfield, 2014). Although there are many challenges to achieving resilience in African cities, there are also many locally embedded sources of resilience. A mix of formal and informal networks exists alongside diverse knowledge practices, presenting an opportunity to build resilience from the bottom up (Myers, 2011; Pieterse, 2008; Taylor and Peter, 2014). In building resilience, we should be careful not to always impose externally defined pathways and approaches. Many communities have the endogenous capacity to adapt to risk and be resilient.

4. Place urban resilience within global systems

While endogenous resilience is important, African cities also sit within nested global, regional and local political and financial systems. They also, however, have several characteristics in common that set them apart. Notably, they share an experience of colonialism and late decolonisation. They have been integrated into a peripheral place in the post-colonial world system that has created an urban political economy that is unique to Africa (Ernston *et al.,* 2014). These cities have limited ability to influence the global system. Recent solutions

to building resilience have relied on green consumption, the growth of capital markets, and other financial solutions that risk treating the issues symptomatically and do not attempt to understand the structural causes of vulnerability. Local priorities, complexities and contestations must be recognised in order to break the cycle of economic dependency, ineffective political regimes, and embedded unsustainable development. Inserting rights and justice into resilience offers a foundation to start better addressing local challenges through shifting administrative structures, visions and on-the-ground investments, while still reimagining Africa's role in the global system.

Conclusion

Given that the concept of resilience is widely used and gaining policy traction, this briefing underlines the need to continue critical engagement with it. A resilience framing can support pro-poor development if rights and justice are inserted into the thinking and policy of urban governance. The experience of Southern cities, particularly African cities, must be central to the debate about the concept of resilience. With a focus on rights and justice, the everyday risks experienced by growing numbers of urban residents will not be forgotten.

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