



STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS AND LOCAL INNOVATIONS

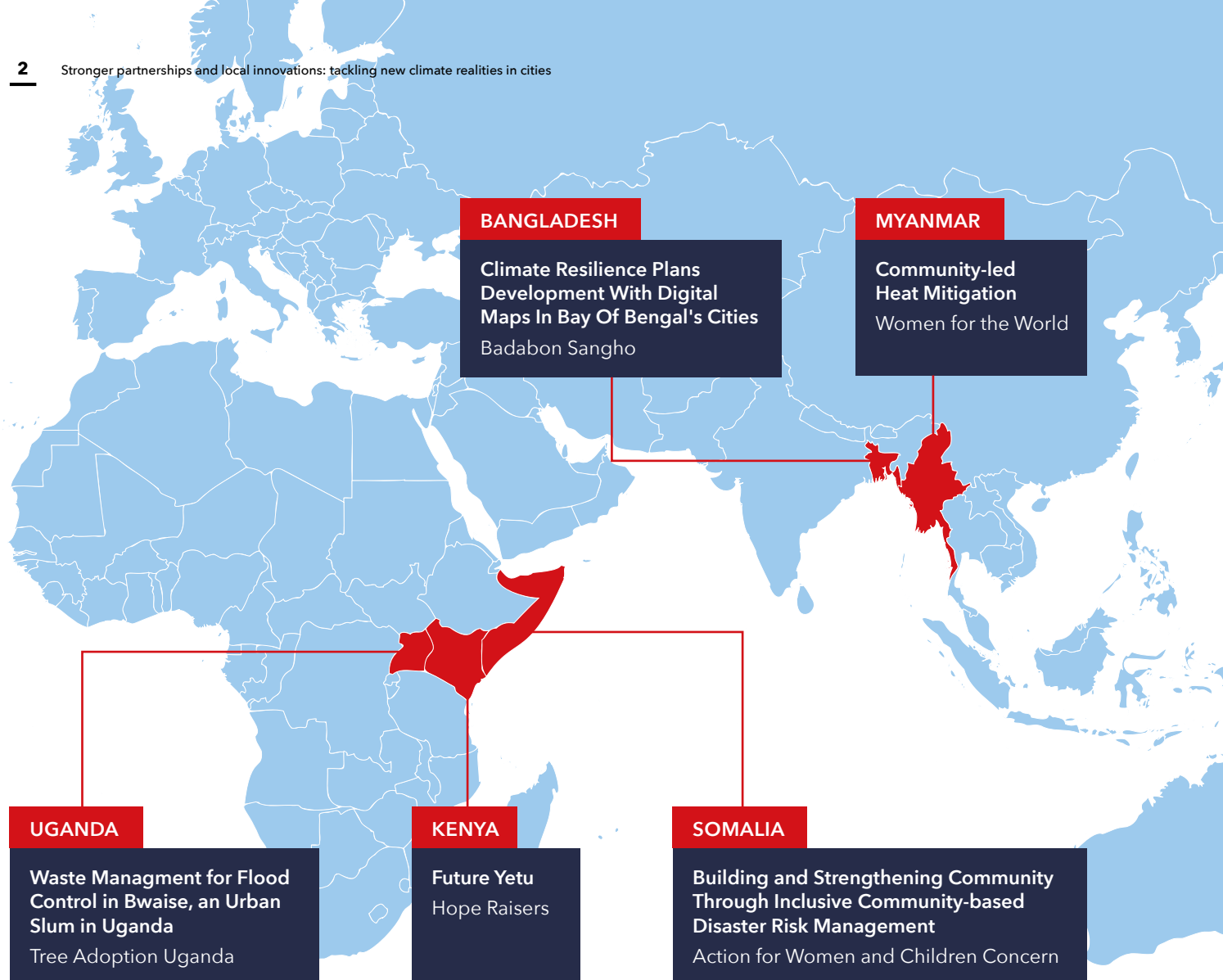
Tackling new climate realities in cities

This summary report is based on learnings from Cities Alliance funded projects on local adaptation to climate change. It synthesizes six key lessons from projects in Bangladesh, Kenya, Liberia, Myanmar, Somalia and Uganda that successfully bridged local governance with community action and demonstrates how such initiatives can be supported by international agencies, national governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The report also draws on global debates and emerging consensus among expert researchers and practitioners in the field of community-driven climate adaptation and resilience. It highlights what needs to be done to support local climate action in urban areas through citywide infrastructure, policy changes at municipal and national level, infrastructural development and increased availability of finance to support community-driven responses.

Cities Alliance
Cities Without Slums

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KEY LESSONS

1.



PRIORITIZE BUILDING RESILIENCE WITH THE URBAN POOR

Local and national governments urgently need to respond to climate change impacts threatening low-income residents living in informal settlements. They must recognize the rights of residents to participate in developing local climate action plans.

2.



TACKLE BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

Local and national governments must align climate adaptation solutions with local development needs by framing climate initiatives within existing community priorities. This will also help tackle the knowledge gap in policy planning and implementation.

3.



BUILD LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR RESILIENCE

Local governments should adopt people-centred approaches to build relationships between local government, residents' associations, community-based organizations (CBOs) and other key stakeholders.

4.



CO-PRODUCE LOCAL SOLUTIONS FOR ADAPTATION

Low-cost and locally led innovations and solutions can boost local resilience while supporting city-wide planning and action. Their effectiveness can be greatly enhanced when implemented through partnerships with local and municipal governments.

5.



PRIORITIZE INCLUSIVE CLIMATE ACTION

Adaptation and resilience projects must recognise local diversity, gendered inequalities and the vulnerabilities that youth, people with disabilities and other minorities face. Local governments and projects must promote women's empowerment and include disadvantaged minority groups.

6.



MAXIMIZE LOCAL IMPACT THROUGH BETTER FUNDING AND SUPPORT

Donors should invest in funding mechanisms that target local communities, governments and institutions and support long-term collaborative and context-driven climate action. This will boost the impacts of interventions and help institutionalise good practice.



Photo: Cities Alliance

THE URGENCY OF LOCAL ADAPTATION IN CITIES

Climate change is a major threat to the health, well-being and livelihoods of urban residents around the world. Globally, more than 1 billion residents of informal settlements have high levels of vulnerability due to insecure livelihoods, lack of basic services and social exclusion.¹ Informal settlements are typically located on land highly exposed to hazards and lack the protective infrastructure to reduce risk. The density of buildings and other infrastructure creates the urban heat island effect, further exacerbating temperature rises. Changes in land cover affect runoff and thereby the frequency and intensity of flooding. And coastal cities often are affected by subsidence which compounds the effect of sea-level rise. These impacts hit residents of low-income and informal settlements with especially dire consequences. Meanwhile, the absolute number of people living in slums will continue to rise as African and Asian countries rapidly urbanize.

This underscores why informal settlements must be seen as a development and climate action priority. But despite the need for increased support, most city governments and local communities receive scarce resources for local adaptation action. Municipal governments can find it challenging to build collaborative and trusting partnerships with residents of informal settlements. But climate actions that align with local development needs and leverage local capacities yield better and more sustainable results.

WHY WE NEED INNOVATION AND STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS

Despite clear vulnerabilities, urbanization and urban development present opportunities to reduce climate risks and meet long-term climate goals. Local governments and organized community groups are key actors

for effective and sustainable interventions to reduce risks and build resilience. Meanwhile, local civil society and private business can be important stakeholders and bridge builders, helping to enhance capacities and ensure successful collaboration. Incremental climate adaptation solutions that bring together and draw on the complementary strengths of local governments and communities have a critical role to play.

The Cities Alliance is a global partnership that supports cities to deliver sustainable development. It works to increase the capacities and resources that enable local communities and local governments to develop people-centred and context-relevant solutions to the global threats of a changing climate. It aims to reduce the risk and vulnerability of residents living in informal housing settlements and to better understand how communities can partner with local government and other key stakeholders.

BOX 1. ABOUT THE CITIES ALLIANCE INITIATIVE: BUILDING PEOPLE-CENTRED RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The Cities Alliance global programme Climate Change, Resilience and Informality in Cities supported partnerships between urban communities and local government to build resilient cities that reduce risk and vulnerability to climate impacts. It aimed to strengthen urban ecosystems, promote investment in local resilience efforts and advocate for people-centred resilience.

Each in-country project selected through the Innovation Mechanism had a budget of about US\$30,000. They partnered with community groups in informal housing settlements to pilot innovative technologies and increase local resilience to climate change through awareness-raising and adaptation interventions. *Innovation* is defined as the development of concepts, products and processes that are

either new in absolute terms or a novelty in their application and adaptation to a different context. Through the Community Upgrading Fund an exemplary community project which also ensures local government support and involvement, and supports local climate change adaptation, was set up. Cities Alliance also ran capacity-building workshops tailored to the specific needs of local organizations and provided opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and exchange across projects as well as at international events and virtual conferences.

These projects took place entirely during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. They had to adapt to public health regulations and to the health and economic crises felt acutely by the target communities. Like climate disasters, health hazards tend to disproportionately

affect those with the least social power and access to care. Cities Alliance provided grantees with the appropriate flexibility to modify projects in order to follow health protocols and consider the immediate needs of project participants and target communities.

The project was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). For more information see: www.citiesalliance.org/how-we-work/global-programmes/climate-change-resilience-and-informality/overview and <https://www.citiesalliance.org/how-we-work/stronger-partnerships-local-innovations-new-climate-realities-cities/overview>

In 2020, Cities Alliance funded a suite of integrated community-led projects that identify and address challenges for urban development and climate-induced risks in informal settlements. The projects were implemented in the Greater Horn of Africa and the Bay of Bengal through Cities Alliance Innovation Mechanism (see Box 1). Through a competitive call for innovative practices of community-based adaptation, the

Cities Alliance funded projects led by NGOs with strong ties to local communities in Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Additionally, one project was funded through Cities Alliance's existing Community Upgrading Fund (CUF) in Liberia. Each of these countries is considered highly vulnerable to climate change. Residents are already experiencing extreme heat events, severe storms, drought and flooding – as well as the loss of economic opportunities.

CREATING INCLUSIVE CLIMATE-RESILIENT CITIES: SIX KEY LESSONS

The following sections elaborate six key messages for actors and decisions makers in climate policy and funding arenas. The sections explore how community-driven action in low-income and informal settlements can reduce the effects of climate change and can strengthen the resilience of residents.



1.

PRIORITIZE BUILDING RESILIENCE WITH THE URBAN POOR

People living in low-income informal settlements face increased climate risks as a result of structural inequalities and policy choices that tend to ignore or exclude the urban poor. And as the number of urban residents – and residents of informal settlements – grows in the coming years, many more people will be exposed to these hazards. Local governments urgently need to respond to climate change impacts threatening the lives, livelihoods and homes of low-income residents living in informal settlements.

There is an increasing degree of certainty both about the nature and the severity of future climate impacts. The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment report² concludes with high confidence that “With global warming, urban areas and cities will be affected by more frequent occurrence of extreme climate events, such as heatwaves, with more hot days and warm nights as well as sea level rise and increases in tropical cyclone storm surge and rainfall intensity that will increase the probability of coastal city flooding”.



Photo: Cities Alliance



Photo: Hope Raisers Initiative

As well as the direct effects of higher temperatures, flooding and urban water scarcity, the effects of climate change on urban infrastructure will particularly affect residents of low-income informal settlements, where infrastructure is of poor quality or badly maintained. This group will also be particularly susceptible to compound and cascading risks – for example, when localised flooding causes pit latrines or other inadequate sanitation systems to overflow.

Informal settlements face significant climate risks for several reasons:

- › **Location:** Without access to affordable housing, many informal settlements are built in high-risk areas to avoid eviction or to be closer to livelihood opportunities.

- › **Absent or inadequate infrastructure:** Most informal settlements lack piped water or adequate provision for sanitation, drainage or public services.

- › **Quality of housing:** Houses are often constructed with readily available low-quality materials that provide little protection from heavy rainfall, flooding or extreme heat.

- › **Vulnerability of residents:** Residents of informal settlements cope with intersecting disadvantages of poverty, uncertain livelihoods, insecurity, high burdens of disease and political exclusion due to migration status, gender or belonging to a minority group. Vulnerabilities hinder residents' ability to take actions that reduce their own risk or to relocate homes to relatively safer areas.

In the geographies where Cities Alliance grantees operate, residents of informal settlements are already paying the price of a warming climate. Along the shrinking coastlines of Liberia, increasingly severe and frequent storms wash away precariously built homes and threaten communities dependent on small-scale fishing. In low-income and self-built settlements in the cities of Myanmar, rising mean temperatures are exacerbated by the urban heat island effect and can increase morbidity and mortality. In the Bangladeshi cities on the Bay of Bengal, 'unmapped' residents of informal settlements struggle for basic services, infrastructure and to be included in local climate change adaptation plans. Droughts and floods hit the poor in Somalia particularly hard, who are caught between political and economic crises and often reliant on international aid. And in the densely populated low-income neighbourhoods of Nairobi and Kampala, Kenya, residents attest to the cascading impacts of inadequate infrastructure stressed by a changing climate.

The underlying drivers of risk for residents of low-income and informal settlements are shaped by structural inequalities and policy choices that ignore or exclude their residents. Fundamental rights are denied to residents when city governments refuse to recognise informal settlements and ignore the contributions of workers in the informal economy. As such, the interests of residents of low-income and informal settlements are often a low priority for municipal and national officials. This results in limited investment for building resilience. Even when adaptation projects are put in place, they may directly harm the interests of the urban poor, for example through displacing them to locations that are equally hazardous or that prevent them from accessing livelihood opportunities. In other cases, they may prioritise the interests of elite groups at the expense of the poor.³



2. TACKLE BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

Political and financial barriers keep risks high for the urban poor. Resources rarely reach informal settlements and most city governments lack both local knowledge and trusting relationships with local communities. Decisions taken by political actors at different scales have significant implications for climate adaptation and resilience in informal settlements. These can result in a near-total failure to address adaptation needs in cities.

Many programmes also fail to take into account the specific needs of low-income groups. There is widespread misrecognition of poverty in cities by national policies and government statistics that decreases the visibility of the urban poor. Governments and international organizations too often treat poverty as a flat category across rural and urban geographies. But misrecognition also results from national identity and concern over what cities should and should not look like.⁴

In Bangladesh, for example, the urban poor find themselves deprioritised or all together ignored in national climate strategies and adaptation plans.⁵ At the urban scale, even when municipal governments are aware of informal neighbourhoods and their residents, they often consider them as 'illegal' and plan for their removal rather than committing resources to resilient upgrading. Basic services and infrastructure in informal settlements are often piecemeal and unreliable, if provided at all. This increases vulnerability to climate shocks and decreases the potential of constructive partnerships between residents and local governing offices.

Systematic approaches to urban informality must recognize the rights of residents and respond to their needs. Yet both national and local governing officials charged with climate action and urban planning often lack the necessary knowledge and competencies. In the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh, Badabon Sangho, a women's rights and women-led group, works to address this challenge through the collection of data at the household level in informal settlements. As a Cities Alliance grantee, Badabon Sangho piloted an innovative GIS data-collection method carried out with youth volunteers targeting women and Indigenous-led households. The data is far more detailed than current municipal information and can be used by local planning and environmental officers to identify climate-proofed basic services and include the communities in local climate adaptation plans.

A lack of municipal resources, financial tools and technical capacity are consistently cited as barriers to urban and local climate action.⁶ This is especially true in low-income countries where cash-strapped municipalities are often dependent on national budget transfers to operate. This hits poor neighbourhoods and informal settlements particularly hard. Local governments struggle to pay for the provision of basic services and have little left over for resilient upgrading. Where municipalities can access traditional finance mechanisms, climate projects prioritizing community resilience in poor and informal areas are rarely considered 'bankable'. While this has been recognised in global policy arenas, the major climate funders have focused on large-scale investments while deprioritising community-driven and local projects. Between 2003 and 2016, less than 10 per cent of global climate funds prioritised local climate action.⁷



Photo: Tree Adoption Uganda

Finally, it is important to recognise that climate action is rarely a specific demand of urban populations in low-income countries. Especially in informal settlements, issues such as land tenure, urban infrastructure and basic services, inclusion in government social programmes, and economic opportunities often take precedence. However, all of these contribute significantly to reducing vulnerability. Therefore, climate initiatives must frame project objectives within existing community priorities, to increase knowledge of how climate change is already affecting daily lives and to facilitate interventions that increase resilience and the quality of life of participants.

BOX 2. UNDERSTANDING DIVERSE ACTORS, INTERESTS AND RELATIONSHIPS

In the neighbourhood of Bwaise, a poor informal settlement in Kampala, Uganda, residents vented their frustration at local government for failing to collect waste from the streets. The rubbish obstructed drainage pits and caused flooding even after modest rains. These floods increased health risks, damaged homes and disproportionately affected the daily lives and work of women. Local officials, in turn, were tempted to place blame on the residents for dumping waste inappropriately. When waste was collected by private companies paid for by the municipality or by independent recycling companies, it was irregular and inefficient. This led to tensions and mounting animosity.

However, flooding decreased significantly after a community intervention led by Tree Adoption Uganda (TAU), a youth led social enterprise. TAU worked at the local level to organize community clean-ups. It provided resources and training to ensure that organic and inorganic waste were separated either for recycling or to produce biomass briquettes. TAU engaged local government officials to problem solve waste collection and then refined and improved a plan of action with community leaders. Rather than trying to 'fix' the relationship between community and government or risk aggravating the existing private actors in the waste-collection system, the project addressed the pressure points and added value to the waste-disposal chain. As a result, residences were provided with both increased economic opportunities and a more resilient drainage system during rains.



3. BUILD LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR RESILIENCE

Boosting community resilience requires people-centred approaches that co-produce solutions through cooperative and trusting relationships between local government, residents' associations, community-based organizations (CBOs) and other stakeholders. Projects led by organizations with strong ties to community groups and a deep knowledge of local territories benefit from existing relationships with key stakeholders. This builds trust around the project's objectives and approach.

This is especially true in informal settlements and other low-income and neglected neighbourhoods. To outsiders, including government offices and larger non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or aid agencies, these territories may seem like densely populated, chaotically organized, hard-to-reach places. But for well-connected local actors, informal settlements can be understood as tightly woven, highly resourceful and efficient communities. These organizations – local NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) – have worked for years to establish trusting relationships with community leaders and influential members of trade and social groups representing informal workers, women, youth and others.

For example, many of the staff of Badabon Sangho in Bangladesh are from local communities. They draw on decades of experience working in the target communities and liaising with local government. Similarly, in Nairobi, Kenya, Hope Raisers Initiative is a CBO formed by young creatives and artists living in the Korogocho informal settlement. They use the arts to engage their community and have built partnerships with city-wide NGOs, government offices, and international organizations. Such trust is fundamental to leverage the considerable human resources that informal settlements can offer to projects for the benefit of the community.

Another important factor of success is the quality of partnerships and the processes that bring together different stakeholders in informal housing settlements, local government and private business. Projects with high buy-in from residents will often emphasise participatory methods from the project's inception. For example, the Cities Alliance Community Upgrading Fund places decision-making in the hands of community members. Such approaches can have an extended lead-in phase, where stakeholders deliberate on appropriate objectives and interventions. Nonetheless, these incremental projects can continue to pay dividends after the project ends. Residents will often have identified a variety of priority areas and potential interventions for future projects.

But co-producing projects with both communities and local governments also presents challenges. Multiple grantees cited historical and socio-economic tensions between community members and local government as a barrier to effective collaboration. Solution-focused projects, moderated by a civil society group and with real benefits for the community are an important opportunity to build trust between residents of informal settlements and local governing offices.



Photo: Women for the World

BOX 3. UNDERSTANDING LOCAL SOLUTIONS TO GLOBAL CHALLENGES

It is hot in Yangon, Myanmar. Among participants in a community-led housing initiative, the heat is a regular topic of conversation. But what can one do about the heat? Residents relocating from informal housing settlements agreed that proper sanitation infrastructure, storm drainage and waste management were priorities that would prevent flooding and increase their quality of life. But the increasingly hot summers, on the other hand, seemed like a common burden to bear.

With the support of the local NGO Women for the World, residents took thermometers to different points in the city and observed higher temperatures in poorer and informal districts compared to more affluent areas with more green space and tree cover. This created a common understanding that extreme heat was an actionable problem and a question of environmental justice. Simple and low-cost solutions involve integrating green landscape design into infrastructure plans and increasing local knowledge on home-building techniques that can moderate temperature without electric air conditioning.

A shared understanding of climate impacts and priorities strengthens cooperation between partners. This is true both within communities as well as across stakeholders in informal settlements, government, civil society and private business. All of the projects financed through the Cities Alliance people-centred resilience initiative included educational workshops, where residents received information on the effects and impacts of climate change as well as potential ways to increase resilience at the household and community levels. Importantly, participants are also given the opportunity to speak from their own experiences of local climate change and how it impacts their lives. This approach is useful not only to secure buy-in and participation from local residents. It also helps to identify local priorities for maximum impact and leverage local creativity and innovation.

For example, Tree Adoption Uganda cultivated relationships with local elected representatives and community leaders (see also Box 2). Leaders advised them to take note of the existing private waste collectors already operating in Bwaise. Coordinating efforts with local waste collectors and recyclers increased project efficacy and helped to institutionalize good practices. Engaging new private business actors to buy the fuel briquettes that community members manufactured from organic waste was important to add value to the waste supply chain and provide new economic opportunities.



4. CO-PRODUCE LOCAL SOLUTIONS FOR ADAPTATION

People-centred solutions have the potential to address many of the risks faced by residents of low-income and informal settlements in the face of climate change. Locally led, incremental solutions can address underlying drivers of vulnerability, boosting household and local resilience while supporting city-wide planning and action. As well as playing an important role in responding to shocks and stresses, they can also address the underlying drivers of risk and thereby build longer-term resilience. The effectiveness of these solutions can be greatly enhanced if these are implemented through partnerships with local and municipal governments.

BUILD COMMUNITY CAPACITY TO ADDRESS RISKS

Effective adaptation requires individuals and households to have the capacity to address risk at the household scale. Building the capacity of individuals and households to improve local adaptation can be achieved through increasing understanding of the nature of climate risk and how it is expected to change over time. It also requires appropriate support from programmes and initiatives at different scales. These include efforts to:

- › Strengthen livelihoods (and make them more resilient to climate shocks and stresses),
- › Improve public health (including improving the conditions for informal sector workers), and
- › Implement effective social protection schemes.

For example, the project financed through the Liberian Community Upgrading Fund (CUF) works in two informal coastal settlements in Monrovia, Liberia. To increase the resilience of the artisanal fishing supply chain, the CUF ran a series of educational trainings and workshops with representatives of social and economics groups. These influential community members could then strategically disseminate key messages about climate change effects and risks within their social groups.

Adaptive social protection measures in low-income and informal settlements also need to recognise the multiple dimensions of urban poverty (including the higher financial costs of living in many towns and cities). Coverage will often need to be expanded to prevent the 'near poor' from falling into poverty, and to respond rapidly when circumstances (such as food price shocks associated with disruptions in agriculture and/or supply chains) require it.

PROVIDE APPROPRIATE INFRASTRUCTURE

Effective adaptation requires appropriate infrastructure of different forms. For low-income and informal settlements, this can include both 'physical' and 'nature-based' infrastructure, such as green landscaping to alleviate extreme heat and increase surface absorption capacity. Most housing in informal settlements is constructed by residents themselves or by local artisanal builders. Improved techniques can make structures more resilient to temperature swings and severe weather. Incentives also need to be provided to encourage landlords to invest in improvements, while still maintaining affordability.

At the community scale, much infrastructure can be constructed using low-cost techniques and community labour. However, it requires coordination and partnerships with local governments, and integration into city-wide infrastructure (such as sewerage and drainage networks). Nature-based solutions are increasingly proposed as a means to address conservation and ecological goals while simultaneously reducing risk and supporting livelihoods. While they certainly have potential, their implementation needs to be sensitive to the distribution of costs and benefits, including their effects on low-income groups.

DEVELOP EFFECTIVE AND RESPONSIVE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

More effective and responsive institutional arrangements are required. Better institutional arrangements can coordinate action between households and communities, and can help in creating a stable environment for investment in other programmes and infrastructure. Institutional arrangements that involve partnerships between local communities and local governments

can be particularly effective in guiding the individual and community-based responses indicated above.

In addition, locally driven, people-centred responses to climate challenges can strengthen community institutions such as CBOs and federations of the urban poor and specifically increase their capacity to respond to climate change. Federations of the urban poor, such as those associated with and supported by SDI (Slum/Shack dwellers International) and the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights have extensive experience organising community projects. These can generate precise community data down to the household level and help develop good working relationships with local populations.⁸ These are capacities that can complement technical expertise coupled with adequate resources from municipal government to successfully implement interventions ranging from green upgrading and community disaster risk reduction and management to resilient economic opportunities.

TACKLE THE DRIVERS OF RISK

Taken together, building local capacity, providing appropriate infrastructure and developing appropriate institutional support can help to tackle the drivers of risk in informal settlements:

- › **Location:** When communities and local governments form partnerships they can identify appropriate and affordable land for housing. This may require rezoning land or providing additional protective infrastructure so that communities can remain safely in place. If the risks from climate-related hazards are too great, partnerships can help identify new locations that fulfil the requirements of households that need to be relocated.

- › **Absent or inadequate infrastructure:** Community residents can play a significant role in planning, constructing and maintaining local infrastructure. However, local authorities can help ensure that suitable standards are met that are both affordable and safe. They can provide linkages to trunk infrastructure (such as water and sewerage) and basic services (such as waste collection) to ensure that this infrastructure serves needs at scale.

- › **Quality of housing:** Much housing in informal settlements does not meet building standards or regulations. However, meeting current standards may be unaffordable to low-income residents. Partnerships between community organisations and local authorities can identify appropriate and affordable building standards that provide greater safety to residents, as well as providing them with the benefits of having formally recognized shelter.

- › **Vulnerability of residents:** Local governments often have responsibility for services such as public health and basic education which are critical to resilience. Yet they may lack the resources to implement them effectively.

Partnerships with community groups can help to ensure that these services are provided and target the necessary individuals and groups.

All of these responses require the rights of low-income urban residents as citizens to be fully recognized by relevant authorities. Recognizing rights includes removing the threat of eviction, the provision of basic infrastructure, and the provision of services to all residents regardless of where they live. Public authorities can and should continue to work with organized residents' associations if and when environmental, climate or other hazards are used as evidence to support removal and resettlement. For example, Cities Alliance and other civil society actors supported the Liberian National Housing Authority to draft gender-responsive guidelines on the voluntary relocation of households living in informal settlements. The guidelines were drafted in partnership with representatives from twelve informal settlements experiencing diverse environmental, political and socio-economic hazards. Partnerships between community organisations and local governments can help to build tolerance and understanding, which form the basis of reducing marginalization and building resilience.



Photo: Tree Adoption Uganda



5. PRIORITIZE INCLUSIVE CLIMATE ACTION

The Sustainable Development Goals commitment to ‘leave no one behind’ requires meaningful participation of marginalized social groups and taking a gender-transformative approach to inclusion. Diverse and inclusive climate planning and action increases community resilience and the potential impact of projects.

To reach whole communities, adaptation and resilience projects targeting informal settlements should recognise local heterogeneity, gendered inequalities and socio-political vulnerabilities that youth, people with disabilities and other minorities face. Tools like the Cities Alliance guide to Gender Mainstreaming in Projects⁹ can help projects to understand gender differences within the field of intervention and to promote women’s empowerment and include disadvantaged minority groups.



Efforts to drive gender-transformative approaches and include youth and minority groups are necessary to improve resilience outcomes. This priority responds to social, cultural and political drivers of vulnerability. Women, and in particular poor women, are not inherently more vulnerable than men to climate change. However, they suffer disproportionate consequences due to prescribed gender roles and inequalities. Women living in poverty and informal settlements are acutely aware of gendered inequities and their needs, and are necessary to include as participants, decision makers and leaders. Moreover, a diversity in participation leads to richer creative thinking and better decision-making. When climate planning committees can draw on the experiences of many different community members, they are able to see the problem from diverse perspectives and respond comprehensively.



Photo: Action for Women and Children Concern

BOX 4: FIVE EXAMPLES OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN PEOPLE-CENTRED RESILIENCE PROJECTS

Partner with women's community groups:

Seeking out and working with women's groups can increase project impact and strengthen the capacity of local CBOs. Recognizing the proven transformative power of women's savings groups, a project in Myanmar led by the NGO Women for the World complemented an ongoing community-driven housing initiative with a project to mitigate extreme heat using strategic building practices and landscape design.

Include disempowered groups in governing partnerships:

Working in two cities in the Bay of Bengal to produce local climate-resilient plans informed community-generated data, a project led by the local NGO Badabon Sangho ensured equal participation of women throughout the project and

facilitated a workshop with local authorities to increase awareness of the needs of women, Indigenous people and impoverished households in informal settlements.

Engage men and boys:

Transforming the roles of women in society also means transforming the expectations and roles of men. The NGO Tree Adoption Uganda trained women to generate income through sustainable waste-management practices. The project learnt that including influential male participants is useful to constructively confront patriarchal attitudes about 'women's work' and empowerment.

Mainstream accessibility and safety:

In addition to ensuring gender parity and creating 'safe spaces' for women participants to discuss issues such as gender-

based violence, the NGO Action for Women and Children Concern in Somalia implemented a disaster risk management project that was accessible and relevant to people with disabilities. It made sure venues were accessible and project language was inclusive. This created space for participants with disabilities to take part and shape project activities.

Beyond mainstreaming, gender transformation:

The project Future Yetu (Our Future) in Korogocho, Nairobi, pushed for a gender-transformative approach in how public space is used and claimed in informal neighbourhoods. Women were trained in digital storytelling and gained skills that encouraged them to amplify their voices and challenge traditional patriarchal power relations within the household and community.



6. MAXIMIZE LOCAL IMPACT THROUGH BETTER FUNDING AND SUPPORT

Institutionalizing and maximizing innovative solutions and community-government partnerships require sustained support to ensure capacity development, enable replication, integrate innovations into governing operations and address unforeseen challenges.

People-centred and community-led projects can be highly cost-effective investments. Due to their deep knowledge of local territories and high capacity for practical implementation, local organizations are highly efficient. In addition, resident leaders and CBOs can often leverage additional in-kind support through community volunteers and local partner groups (such as schools, religious centres and women's and youth groups). Yet formal funding mechanisms are often not tailored to the required processes or priorities. Local capacities are rarely fully tapped due to a lack of sustained support. There are too few funding opportunities and financing often comes in small pots of money over relatively short periods of time. Moreover, grant regulations and reporting requirements often exclude local organizations and end up favouring larger and more traditional organizations that lack community ties.

Pilot projects can demonstrate the potential of innovative good practices. But building technical capacity and scaling up requires follow-through funding. Similarly, trusting partnerships between communities and local governments and other stakeholders may take years, not months, of cooperation and skilled facilitation. Many of these challenges have existed with urban development funding for decades, and climate finance has not yet responded to the challenge to do things differently.¹⁰

Facilitated exchange and peer-to-peer learning are valuable tools to share capacities between organizations and encourage the adoption and replication of innovative technologies and approaches in new geographies. Global events and conferences stimulate creative thinking and provide a platform to showcase local innovation and activism. Equally important are smaller learning networks where actors can provide in-depth feedback, share capacities, troubleshoot unforeseen challenges and maintain enthusiasm. Priorities such as how to initiate partnerships with private businesses, managing tension with government officials or creating educational tools for community engagement can all be addressed in peer-to-peer networks.

Local government and civil society often find themselves responding to near constant crises in and around informal settlements, whose physical and social conditions increase the risk of and vulnerability to flooding, storm damage, fire, earthquakes, landslides, political violence, environmental health hazards and transmissible disease. Community groups and local government offices are often overwhelmed by the immediate survival needs of residents and lack the resources to strategically plan and implement resilience initiatives. Long-term crises, such as epidemics and pandemics, can present specific challenges to implementing projects. The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected the urban poor based on health and economic indicators. The slow roll-out of vaccines to low-income countries and mutations of the virus mean that climate action will continue to operate in a state of pandemic for the foreseeable future.¹¹ This will be a challenge for community-based initiatives, which may need to ensure participants are able to meet their basic needs before asking communities to think about future climate risks.



Photo: Hope Raisers Initiative

Donor must be flexible when it comes to activities, timelines and budgets. This will allow project implementers the agility to respond to on-the-ground challenges and, if necessary, pivot project activities to achieve impact. Donors can offer additional support by listening to community organizations' needs and responding with targeted capacity-sharing activities or additional resources. Multiple Cities Alliance grantees designing and implementing people-centred adaptation projects encountered pandemic-related challenges that required such flexibility. The methodology, outputs and timelines were adjusted and budgets reallocated when needed.

BOX 5: SMALL PROJECTS CAN CREATE AND STRENGTHEN BIG NETWORKS

In October of 2020, residents of Korogocho – once a shantytown on the outskirts of Nairobi, now a dense and bustling settlement of more than 200,000 people – boarded a matatu commuter bus as part of an art exhibition. Inside the colourful bus, riders watched video storytelling featuring local residents reflecting on how climate change is already affecting their lives. The exhibition was an output of the project Future Yetu (Our Future), which increased knowledge of climate change in the community and connected local advocates to wider networks. The project partnered with a local school to reactivate a student environmental club, created a learning eco-lab in the form of a 'pocket park', and

connected the school to other local and international climate change educational projects. Future Yetu also supported the development of the Korogocho Climate Change Adaptation Committee and leveraged an existing partnership with the governing initiative Safer Nairobi to connect the committee to the county environmental department. Through a Nairobi network of local grassroots environmental groups, the committee contributes to a growing movement pressuring local governments for more climate action.



Photo: Badabon Sangho

CONCLUSIONS

The urban poor are on the frontlines of climate change and need targeted support to cope with the impacts. Many of the barriers to increased climate resilience in informal settlements can be addressed with better policy choices and funding mechanisms that restore ecosystems, preserve sustainable livelihoods and use

innovative technologies to create new economic opportunities and increase residents' quality of life. The projects supported by Cities Alliance referenced in this report demonstrate how local governments, community organisations and other stakeholders (such as private businesses) can effectively collaborate on sustainable

development and climate adaptation projects. Providing appropriate flexibility and capacity-sharing activities, small-scale projects can strengthen institutions, build trust between local communities and local government, and influence decision makers towards sustainable governance.

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Images

- Front page.** © Cities Alliance. 'Women participate in a backyard session to raise awareness for climate resilience. Residents of vulnerable communities lack understanding on climate risks, and these sessions aim to inform and engage women – one of the most affected and vulnerable groups – in the fight for climate resilience.'
- Page 4.** © Cities Alliance. 'Children stand atop an elevation near the water in Mongla Port, part of Bangladesh's Bay of Bengal.'
- Page 6.** © Cities Alliance. 'Parvin Begum/ Putul Begum is a resident of the Mongla Port, Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh. She lives in the slum of ward 5 of the municipality.'
- Page 7.** © Hope Raisers Initiative.
- Page 9.** © Tree Adoption Uganda. 'Rental units cut off by flooded compound in Bwaise.'
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CITIES
WITHOUT
SLUMS