Better cities are possible: responding to the twin crises of climate change and inequality

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The Human Settlements Group works to reduce poverty and improve health and housing conditions in the urban centres of Africa, Asia and Latin America. It seeks to combine this with promoting good governance and more ecologically sustainable patterns of urban development and rural-urban linkages.

Summary

How can cities promote resilient, low-carbon and inclusive urbanisation in a context of increasing climate breakdown and inequality? Here, IIED's urban researchers set out a vision for urban transformation. Building on the Transformative Urban Recovery Framework[1] co-developed with grassroots organisations, national and international agencies, research institutions, international NGOs and city leaders, this paper sets out four specific action areas to build just and inclusive cities for 2022:

Embracing disruptive resilience

To tackle disruptive risks such as the climate emergency and COVID-19, cities must embrace innovative approaches that build resilience.

Urban climate justice: connecting social justice and decarbonisation

To achieve sustainable urbanisation, cities must build inclusive systems that reduce inequality while enabling pathways to net zero.

No climate justice without housing justice

Climate justice in cities must align with efforts to tackle urban poverty and inequality so that the impacts of climate change and efforts to reduce emissions do not deepen but instead tackle housing injustices.

Supporting migration in the context of the climate emergency

Cities should recognise migrants and forcibly displaced people as city residents and incorporate them into planning processes, including climate-resilience planning.

Meaningful and transformative planning for climate change depends on:

- **Not only more data… cities and communities also need data produced and analysed by those at the frontline of risk.** Organised low-income communities have a demonstrated capacity to produce local data that should play a meaningful role in decision-making processes. Scientific data can be used alongside local knowledge and data on poverty and informality to build a more robust response to climate risks and vulnerabilities in cities.

- **Not only participation… cities and communities also need locally rooted institutions and leadership.** To counter historical processes of exclusion and marginalisation, low-income communities should define their own problems and co-produce solutions with other key urban stakeholders through locally rooted institutions. This builds local agency and leadership rather than just tokenistic participation in urban planning.

- **Not only more money… cities and communities also need better-quality and more nimble finance.** To respond to the climate emergency, increasing levels of inequality and to realise the Sustainable Development Goals at scale, communities and local governments need additional forms of nimble and flexible funding for locally controlled funds that support swift, integrated, holistic and equitable investments in urban areas.

Contents

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1. Tackling twin crises in cities: the climate emergency and inequality

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COVID-19 continues to compound risks associated with unequal access to resilient housing and basic services in informal settlements and low-income urban areas.[2] Meanwhile, COVID-related restrictions and subsequent economic downturns have severely challenged households with precarious informal livelihoods and few assets or savings,[3] and pushed many into poverty. Reversals in poverty reduction are projected to continue throughout 2022 as a result of rising inflation and the effects of the conflict in Ukraine.[4] The pandemic has exacerbated often-overlapping disadvantages based on gender, age, class, sexuality, ethnicity or race. In addition, institutionally embedded exclusion means that certain groups have added difficulties in accessing economic assistance programmes. Vulnerable groups such as migrants and refugees have had to bear an especially heavy toll, and in some cases were targeted for increased police surveillance and control during lockdowns and economic restrictions.

The backdrop of these developments is that towns and cities are highly exposed to a wide range of hazards. Currently, 65% of the world's urban population live in coastal zones that are beset by a range of hydrometeorological hazards such as sea-level rise, floods, droughts, hurricanes and tornadoes — and this proportion is likely to increase to 74% by 2025.[5] A range of factors from in-migration and types of housing to land use and population density influence the degree to which urban populations are exposed to disturbances. Urban areas are also highly vulnerable as more than a third of the world's urban population lives in informal settlements that lack basic services and suffer deficits in governance — conditions that challenge people's capacity to adapt.[6] Moreover, almost 750 million urban residents across the world earn less than two dollars a day and lack the financial safety nets needed to bounce back from disruptions. Additionally, a recent survey of cities found that 92.5% of those sampled reported facing the impacts of climate change.[7] In this way, urban areas are highly exposed and vulnerable to a range of hazards and therefore are on the frontlines of climate risk.

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports[8,9] set out the huge inequalities in carbon consumption and the distribution of climate risks and green infrastructure benefits within and between cities. However, the scale of activities and population size means that there are opportunities to decarbonise and develop inclusive and resilient access to basic services and housing at scale, especially in cities in the global South where most urban population growth is expected to happen. The impact of these interventions will depend on a whole range of regulatory and institutional issues including access to technology, local governance capacity, civil society participation and municipal budgetary powers. The report also notes that there are trade-offs and therefore, without a focus on equity, the benefits of infrastructural, mitigation and adaptation investments might not be equally distributed.

Throughout this paper, we contend that effective decarbonisation and adaptation strategies will depend on local institutional development that progresses beyond our existing understandings of partnerships and participatory processes. Instead, local institutional arrangements should enable inclusive leadership and agency so those that are most vulnerable can co-produce affordable and equitable solutions with local stakeholders.

1.1 Cities need transformative change

Throughout 2022, IIED and partners will be exploring how cities can be sites of transformative change through the four interlinked themes of disruptive resilience, connecting social justice and decarbonisation, housing justice and supporting migration in the context of the climate emergency. Each of these action areas builds on the core principles of IIED's Transformative Urban Recovery Framework.[10]

- Recognising that the risks faced by cities are constantly evolving is essential for the design of effective urban resilience approaches. Evidence that cities are facing more extreme, complex and transboundary risks is mounting.[11] Meeting this challenge requires a departure from 'business as usual' to more 'disruptive approaches' that include **better local governance** and **financing** that are flexible, scalable and inclusive.[12]

- Ensuring access to basic services and upgrading low-income and informal settlements presents new challenges and risks in the context of climate emergency. Here, interventions must embrace the adaptation–mitigation nexus. Climate-blind policies and programmes can result in high-carbon lock-ins and mal-adaptation, increasing exposure to climate risks, exacerbating emission profiles, and excluding the urban poor from high-quality sustainable infrastructure and climate-smart innovations.[11] Interventions should strive to balance **green development and post-COVID-19 recovery** with efforts to uphold **human rights and social justice**.

- Housing justice needs to be a critical component of any urban risk-management and resilience approach. **Inclusive housing and associated basic services** for the urban poor need to be truly affordable; **co-produced with the urban poor**; located on land that is safe; and close to livelihood opportunities. Each of these actions can play a major role in reducing exposure and vulnerability of vast sections of the urban population.[13,14] But ignoring these issues will lead to cities and their most vulnerable citizens being put more at risk.

- The foundation of effective approaches to manage risk is acknowledging that some sections of the urban population are significantly more vulnerable than others. Migrants are one such group that due to limited social and financial capital often reside in areas that are more exposed to hazards (such as flood plains). They also have poor access to basic services and are pushed into insecure livelihoods. A first step towards their enhanced resilience is to ensure that governments and civil society **recognise migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)** as urban citizens instead of merely as a transient population. The sector needs positive examples of practices in which migrants are partners in the development of **holistic interventions and programming** as opposed to merely recipients of ad hoc assistance.

1.2 Cities need better data, leadership and finance

During 2021, IIED's urban researchers worked with over 50 grassroots organisations, international agencies and other key urban stakeholders[15] to co-create an inclusive urban framework to inform transformative COVID-19 recovery pathways.[1] The process highlighted the urgent need for radical, systemic, green and inclusive urban policies and interventions to protect against future shocks and stresses, not limited to pandemics. Using the framework as a springboard, we are now focusing on how integrated data, local leadership and more nimble finance can support efforts to tackle multiple risk in cities.

Better data, participatory decision-making processes and more finance are regularly cited as key ingredients for building greener, more resilient and inclusive cities. But in practice, efforts to develop net zero pathways or promote just transitions on all three fronts have not gone far enough. The climate emergency risks social and economic inequality continuing to grow in urban areas. And unequal, carbon-intensive development continues to be the norm in most cities. Transformative change will be dependent on a radical redistribution of power and resources by decentralising flexible finance to local institutions and communities, creating autonomous decision-making powers and leadership at the local level, and recognising more diverse forms of actionable knowledge and local data.

1.2.1 Cities need integrated local data

Low-income and informal urban communities have been systematically excluded from city maps, planning and governance processes for decades.[16] Yet local data has been an effective political strategy used by organised communities and federations of the urban poor to engage with city authorities and planners around basic needs and urban risks.

Making transformative change a reality in cities will require serious commitment. Scientific data and big data must be used **alongside locally controlled knowledge and data** to build a more robust understanding of climate risks and vulnerabilities in cities. We need a deeper understanding of poverty and inequality, migration flows, access to basic service and housing priorities in cities and informal settlements.

This can support efforts to ensure that the needs of the most marginalised are accounted for. Data can inform participatory planning processes and policymaking alongside guiding climate-just investments in urban infrastructure and specifically in informal settlements.

1.2.2 Cities need transformative local leadership

Progressive, holistic interventions are urgently needed to address the complex risks facing urban low-income residents, building on inclusive local initiatives responding to the pandemic.[17,18] Low-income communities have lived experiences of poverty and climate risk but have historically been excluded and marginalised from decision-making processes and planning in the city. Success will be dependent on the institutionalisation of **locally owned processes that go beyond participation** that is managed by external actors. Urban institutions should **foster local agency and leadership** to enable low-income groups to identify and co-produce appropriate solutions with other city stakeholders.

1.2.3 Cities and communities need nimble and flexible funding

Climate finance is inadequate and unequally distributed. Urban areas still tend to receive lower levels of international development and climate finance than rural areas.[19] Climate finance is also often focused on financing large-scale, top-down infrastructure, with little accountability to local communities, particularly in informal settlements. To respond to the climate emergency and increasing levels of inequality and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at scale, cities and communities urgently require additional diverse forms of **nimble and flexible funding** that can support and finance integrated, holistic and equitable investments in urban areas. These resources should be autonomously managed by local communities and local governments. As more climate funding is made available to cities and communities, locally owned participatory processes can ensure that investments also respond to pervasive poverty and inequality in informal settlements.

1.3 Transformative urban recovery:
key action areas for 2022

Building on the transformative urban recovery framework, this paper sets out four specific action areas for 2022. All eight principles continue to structure the action research undertaken by urban researchers at IIED and their partners. However, given our focus on inequality and climate change throughout 2022, we have refined and are prioritising the following four highlighted principles.
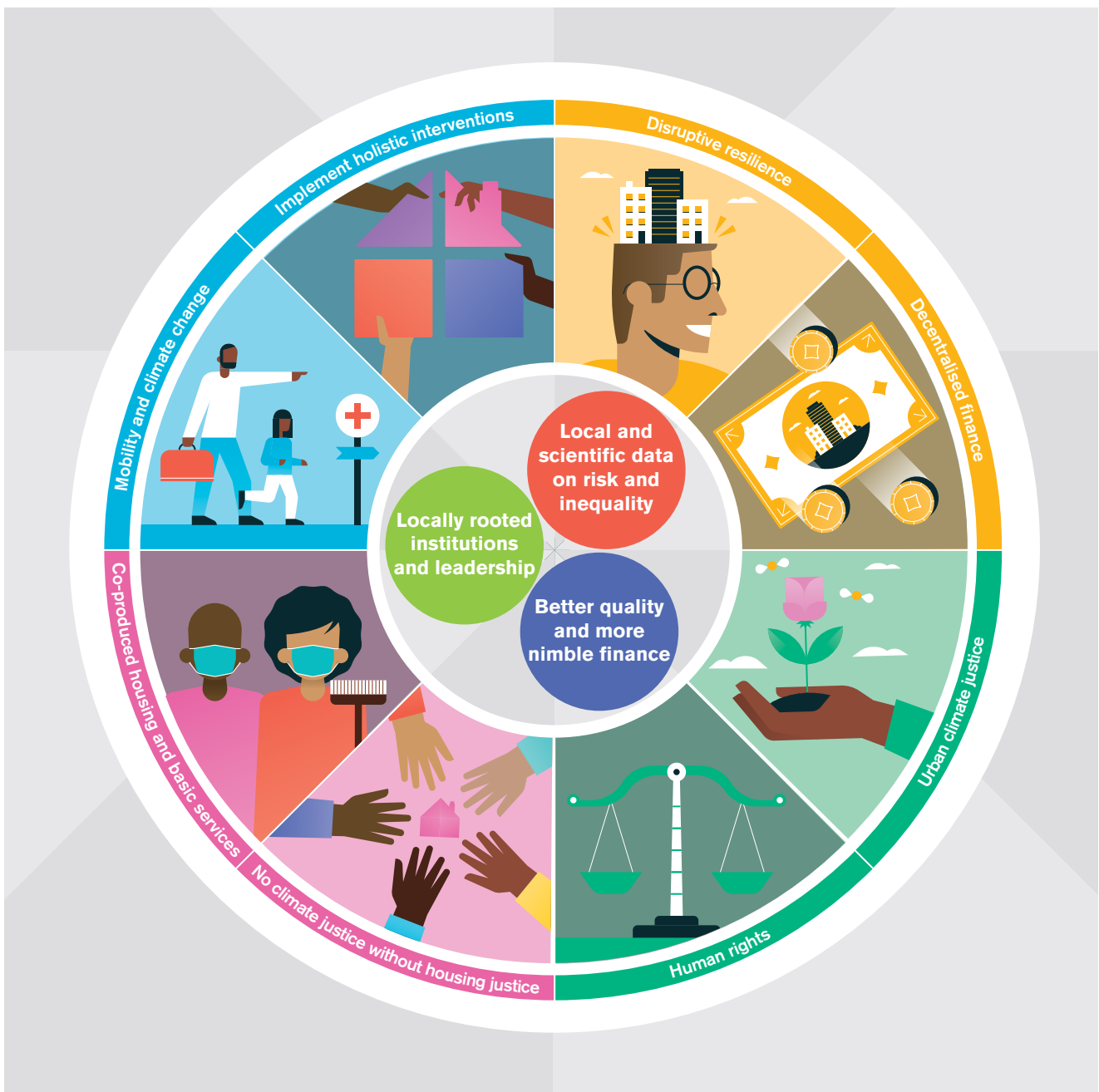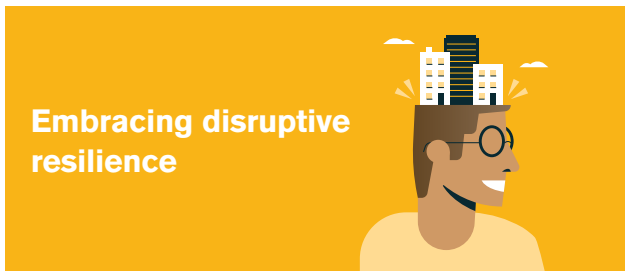

Figure 1. Framework for a transformative urban recovery

Embracing disruptive resilience

The risks that cities face are becoming more extreme (with more outlier events), teleconnected (where events in one place lead to disturbances in another) and complex (multiple hazards are unfolding simultaneously and often in the same location). These disruptive risks affect the poor and marginalised most. Therefore, existing approaches of reducing risk and building urban resilience need to be replaced with newer 'disruptive' methods that are fit for the constantly changing risks that cities face. We need more effective approaches for engaging communities in decision making, using new forms of decentralised data, and novel and nimble finance mechanisms that can be deployed swiftly.

Urban climate justice: connecting social justice and decarbonisation
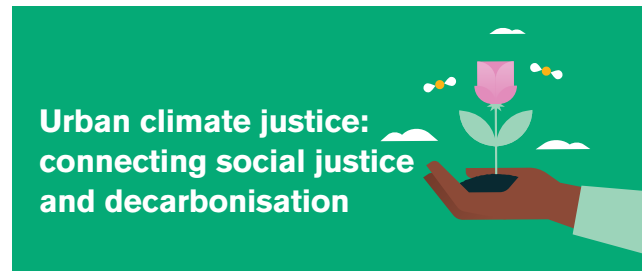
Cities in the global South can leapfrog the carbon-intensive trajectories of the global North by supporting decarbonisation — the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions through the use of low carbon power sources — and responding to longstanding social, economic and environmental inequalities. Green-blue infrastructure and nature-based solutions can deliver on climate targets and health and social benefits. Informal housing settlements should become key sites of interventions, with climate-resilient upgrading delivering increased access to water, clean energy and low-carbon housing. Urban planning must include informal settlements for high-quality, low-carbon public transport and inclusive active mobility (such as cycling and pedestrian infrastructure). Vertically integrated urban policies need to prioritise ending energy poverty via renewable energy generation and electrification and enhance support for the circular economy (especially for informal waste-pickers and other marginalised groups).

No climate justice without housing justice

Advancing the right to adequate housing is a key pathway to make urban development more environmentally and socially just. Ongoing debates about housing justice have emphasised that housing should be recognised as a human right in international agendas, as well as in policy commitments by national and local governments. At the same time, promoting the right to adequate housing can protect and fulfil other human rights in urban areas, such as the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

Supporting migration in the context of the climate emergency

The Transformative Urban Recovery framework includes calls for the inclusion of migrants, refugees and IDPs in pandemic assistance. Building on the notion of an inclusive city, a 'better city' would prepare, where possible, for the arrival of new populations. It would incorporate migrants and forcibly displaced people in neighbourhood and municipal planning processes and take their views on board in decision-making forums, including for climate-resilience planning. In this way, rather than seeing IDPs and migrants as a transient population or a humanitarian caseload, they are recognised as city residents who make positive social, economic and political contributions to urban life. In addition, city actors require greater evidence and data on how flows of people, knowledge and capital between urban and rural areas support livelihoods and resilience-building in both locations.

2. Embracing disruptive resilience

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2.1 What is the problem?

Cities are already suffering the impacts of the climate emergency.[11] These include higher temperatures, more intense rainfall, and coastal and river flooding. There is also a rise in the occurrence of multiple concurrent hazards that lead to compound and complex crises. For instance, in the first year of COVID-19, 92 extreme weather events unfolded in locations that were battling the pandemic. These events disproportionately impacted urban areas, exposing 51.6 million people globally to an overlap of floods, droughts or storms and the pandemic.[20] Another major evolution in the urban context is the growth of transboundary and teleconnected risk. Growth in the density of global economic, political and social networks (that are concentrated in cities) means that disturbance in one part of the globe can easily lead to disruption in another — often in ways that cannot be accurately predicted.

These evolving risks impact low-income and other vulnerable people most acutely. This is particularly the case for the 30% of the world's urban population that lives in informal settlements characterised by poor health indicators, lack of access to basic services and deficits in governance.[21,22] Recent migrants are also highly vulnerable, often because of their exclusion from community-based networks and social services.[23]

These vast, vulnerable and rapidly growing urban populations need support to become resilient to these constantly shifting risks from the climate emergency. But this requires a radical transition to novel ways of understanding climate risk, planning, partnerships and financing.

2.2 What is the solution?

To resolve these challenges, we need new ways of generating data, new models of financing, and innovative mechanisms of citizen participation to build disruptive resilience.[24,25,26,10]

However, evidence shows that existing approaches to collecting and analysing data — such as projections from climate models, satellite pictures, census information or participatory approaches — fall far short. They are not dynamic, cost effective or granular enough to understand the extreme, dynamic risk confronting cities today.[27,28]

Instead, we need to couple these existing approaches with those that capture high-resolution, decentralised local-level data that emanates cheaply, swiftly and regularly from those most at risk, which is essential for dealing with upheaval. This could entail the use of 'big data' — data collected in large volume at high velocity from information and communication devices or insights from bottom-up self-enumeration exercises carried out by those living in informal settlements.

We also need fresh approaches for financing resilience. Existing finance modalities prevent cities from dealing with extreme, concomitant and unpredictable disturbances. For example, international climate finance is too slow and too difficult for cities to access, and rarely reaches the local level. Likewise, national funds are scarce or earmarked for planned activities and municipal resources are severely strained across the global South.[12] Instead, we need endogenous and nimble sources of finance controlled by cities and their most vulnerable citizens to complement existing streams. This includes the need to scale up innovative financing modalities such as urban poor funds (local pooled savings) and municipal resilience bonds.[29] These have helped cities raise the resources needed to reduce risk swiftly and at scale in varied contexts, but more needs to be done to enhance their uptake by city governments.

We also need a new approach for engaging urban residents in planning for risk management. A billion urban residents around the world live in informal settlements, accounting for more than 50% of many major urban centres in the global South. But for the most part, they are not treated as genuine partners in governance and planning. Authorities must shift from encouraging local 'participation' in risk management policies and programmes to ensuring citizen 'partnership' and enabling local leadership.[30,31] Governments must recognise the expertise of residents of informal settlements and use their contextual knowledge as the basis for designing more resilient neighbourhoods by devolving financial and decision-making authority appropriately.[32] This is

Public water pipes in Gangtok, India. Credit: David Dodman

also vital because these vulnerable citizens are inevitably the first responders when unanticipated risks or disturbances — which cities are now increasingly facing — overwhelm formal risk management systems.[33]

2.3 How does the solution build on HSG's work?

IIED's Human Settlements Group (HSG) has been at the forefront of generating evidence to support resilience in cities. We have worked with researchers and practitioners from dozens of cities around the world to document the nature of climate threats to some of the most vulnerable people, and have published many accounts of these in our *Environment and Urbanization* journal.[34] We recognise and champion the value of community-driven data collection, as exemplified by SDI's Know Your City campaign.[16]

We have also documented and developed alternative mechanisms for managing funds in ways that meets the needs of low-income urban residents. We have shown how community-managed funds are more responsive to local priorities, and can often deliver results at a lower overall cost.[35,36]

Involving residents of low-income and informal settlements in a meaningful way in decision making is central to much of IIED's work, whether it is around informal settlement upgrading, water and sanitation, or climate resilience. The necessary solutions to these problems build on our experiences of including all voices in community planning. For example, we are involved in significant ongoing work in Tanzania where communities are leading the examination of multiple risks in informal settlements in partnership with our researchers.[32] Taken as a whole, HSG's work shows how the challenges of informality can be acknowledged, and the opportunities of informality grasped, in making more resilient and sustainable cities.

To ensure that this message is mainstreamed, we work with governments and donors. For instance, in a recent extensive, multi-year initiative undertaken with the Asian Development Bank, IIED's researchers provided technical assistance to governments in South and Southeast Asia to integrate these solutions in national and local policies.

2.4 Myth buster: "urban areas have more resources and are more resilient"

There is a persistent myth that urban areas are better resourced and are therefore inherently more resilient than other contexts. However, historically, non-urban contexts have received much more attention from those financing and delivering programmes to enhance resilience to climate impacts. This is evident from the fact that only 11% of multilateral climate funds have gone to cities.[19] This is partly because there is an assumption that cities have access to more resources and have greater capacity to respond to risks. In reality, urban governments across the world lack the capacity to respond to the climate emergency: a survey of 350 municipalities across five continents found 53% did not understand how they could address the issue of climate change, 51% were unaware of the impacts of climate change and did not comprehend how the issue was relevant locally, only 4% had a team dedicated to dealing with urban climate change issues, and 78% reported the lack of funding lack for implementing projects and programmes on climate change as a significant challenge.[37]

It is time to dispel the myth that urban areas are inherently resilient and recognise cities as a crucial theatre in the battle against climate impacts.

3. Urban climate justice: connecting social justice and decarbonisation

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3.1 What is the problem?

Global climate justice movements and policy research have largely focused on the historical responsibilities for emissions among wealthier and high-emitting nation states, the distribution of climate risks, and the economic and social wellbeing of populations affected by climate policies and interventions.[38] However, we urgently need to deepen our understanding of how decarbonisation efforts can benefit the urban poor, how climate risks are distributed within cities, and how cities can develop resilient, socially just, net zero trajectories in diverse social, political and economic contexts.

One in seven people live in informal settlements globally, most without decent housing, sanitation, water or other basic services.[21,22] Informal settlements have relatively low carbon footprints, and any infrastructural investments that incorporate a focus on decarbonisation will enable these communities to bypass the carbon-intensive trajectories underway in other parts of the city. While sources of finance to upgrade informal settlements are limited, climate finance focused on mitigation could prioritise urban infrastructural investments that also respond to the unmet needs of low-income and informal communities.

There are examples of well-resourced cities that are pioneering climate action linked to adaptation.[39] But many cash-strained local governments in the global South may view the imperative to decarbonise cities as an impossible mandate. There are obvious decarbonisation opportunities linked to housing and basic services provision in informal settlements, but there are few examples of decarbonising initiatives that also deliver on key targets regarding poverty reduction, social inclusion and equity for the poorest communities.

Driving our latest work on urban climate justice for informal settlements is a demonstrated need for more integrated data on climate vulnerability, carbon consumption and poverty to ensure that mitigation investments strive for climate justice. Well-organised participatory processes must be prioritised so that policies, planning and implementation incorporate the specific needs of low-income and marginalised groups, in order to guard against unintended negative social or economic impacts from mitigation investments.

3.2 What is the solution?

Cities present vital opportunities for responding to climate change. However, moving from climate justice talk to action requires responding directly to pervasive issues of inequality and daily injustices faced by the urban poor. Research on locally driven urban development and settlement upgrading demonstrates how technocratic interventions that fail to create adequate space for the leadership of marginalised groups will undermine efforts to develop transformative and just decarbonisation pathways.[40]

Transformative policies and regulatory frameworks are urgently needed to radically alter how people live, consume, work and move about the city. However, unless such changes are shaped around the needs of all citizens, responses will be top-down, fail to respond to local contexts and be more likely to backfire. This would potentially deepen social and economic inequalities.

Climate policy research has identified several priority sectors to decarbonize cities. Many of these opportunities identified are at the national regulatory level but require close collaboration with local government in order to implement.[41] Implementing decarbonisation efforts in many countries will require **working with informality** rather than against it.

There is scope to learn from the affordable housing and upgrading solutions pioneered by local governments and organised communities in informal settlements across the global South. At IIED, we are working with longstanding partners on the following policy demands:

- More decentralised data on climate vulnerability, emissions and poverty/inequality in cities is needed to guide climate-just investments in urban infrastructure and specifically informal settlements.

- Achieving global climate change targets in cities requires actively aligning with community actors and social movements advocating for just and inclusive cities. This is dependent on grassroots organisations being informed and organised around mitigation priorities and forms of finance and what these means for their priorities.

Aerial view of Villa 20 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Credit: Instituto de la Vivienda de la Ciudad (IVC)

- Nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and municipal climate action plans and policies should be aligned with socioeconomic development policies. They should have a specific emphasis on how climate investment priorities address existing social and environmental inequalities across the city. This must be accompanied by well-organised participatory processes or working with well-organised community groups/federations of the urban poor that focus on developing investment-orientated proposals.

3.3 How does the solution build on HSG's work?

IIED's HSG continues to work with local governments and federations of the urban poor who are committed to deepening understandings of urban poverty and risk in informal settlements **and** promoting the development of resilient, inclusive, people-centred slum-upgrading schemes. There is much to build on including the utility of local data collection,[42] scalable pilot projects,[43] co-produced solutions,[44] city-level exchanges[45] and the decentralisation of development and climate finance.[46]

An IIED project[47] funded by the International Climate Initiative and Transformative Urban Coalitions (IKI-TUC) currently provides HSG with a novel opportunity to support the development of practical interventions focused on decarbonisation and inclusive, equitable climate governance in five Latin American cities. In Buenos Aires, an ongoing participatory upgrading intervention in Villa 20 (a low-income informally developed settlement) is the setting for an Urban Lab[48] that is currently exploring the use of green and blue infrastructure and renewable and low-energy technologies.[49] This project has revealed an untapped opportunity for IIED to collaborate with our longstanding partners to develop a broader new programme of work at IIED that integrates efforts to achieve net zero cities with efforts to tackle poverty, inequality and achieve social justice. Given IIED's broader work on global climate justice and beyond, IIED is uniquely positioned to define and influence the policy research agenda on this theme.

3.4 Myth buster: "the urban poor have no role in climate planning for cities"

We want to dispel the myth that the urban poor have no role to play in debates related to mitigation in cities and planning processes focused on decarbonising cities or achieving Net Zero. The urban poor should not be burdened with personal responsibilities to decrease their carbon footprints. But we cannot and must not exclude them from mitigation debates or generation-defining decision making.

There are real concerns about the equity and justice dimensions of investments focused on decarbonisation in cities. Will low-income households be priced out of neighbourhoods that benefit from low-carbon redevelopment? Will marginalised households be forced to live with vulnerable and inefficient housing and basic services? Efforts to establish net zero pathways and implement decarbonisation initiatives are not politically neutral: they have concrete social and economic implications that are often contested.

Without planning processes that involve local governments and low-income urban communities, mitigation investments in the built environment will exacerbate socioeconomic and environmental injustices in cities across the global South.[50] Working with partners, we will demonstrate how mitigation finance can be used not only to respond to climate change but also to respond to local priorities of improving equitable access to resilient and sustainable basic services and housing in low-income settlements.

4. No climate justice without housing justice

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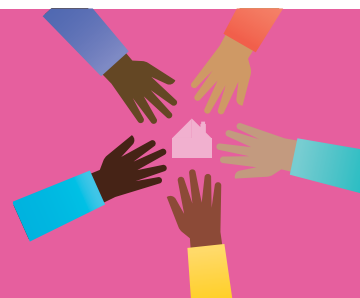
4.1 What is the problem?

Access to adequate and secure housing for all is critical to ensure urban development is more equitable and sustainable. We know, however, that most housing policies and practices are not addressing the pervasive and persistent nature of housing discrimination,[51] whereby particular groups are systematically excluded from housing opportunities.

Currently, 1.6 billion people (20% of the world's population) 'live in inadequate, crowded and unsafe housing.'[52] Recent studies have shown how housing has become increasingly unaffordable, as housing prices are growing faster than people's incomes.[53] Housing injustice intersects with a variety of other challenges including:

- Environmental injustice (as people in poor housing are also exposed to environmental hazards and impacts of the climate emergency)[54]

- Health (including the well-documented connections between housing and the COVID-19 crisis),[55] and

- Access to livelihoods.[56]

Furthermore, current dominant housing policy and practices reproduce social and environmental injustices and lock governments into high-carbon urban development pathways. The spread of large-scale subsidised housing programmes through private contractors has resulted in the production of units in poorly located areas. Such provision neither responds to low-income residents' needs nor advances sustainable urban development. This tendency combined with the growing financialisation of housing has contributed to the deepening of social and spatial inequalities in cities.

The pandemic has reinforced the role that housing plays in urban dwellers' resilience to health and environmental risks. For those living in unsafe and overcrowded housing that is poorly serviced and without access to adequate digital connectivity, staying at home has not been an option. There are clear links between overcrowded housing and the transmission of COVID-19. In addition, rising evictions reflect heavy-handed state responses to the pandemic. Given the increasingly insecure living conditions as well as the pivotal importance of housing to foster health

and wellbeing, equitable and sustainable interventions are urgently needed to advance the right to adequate housing. In other words, **advancing housing justice is a key condition** to ensure that efforts to achieve climate resilience in cities are more effective and inclusive. Housing justice reduces the threat of 'green gentrification'. It also highlights that the transition towards decarbonised and just urban development must require an equitable redistribution of the associated burdens and responsibilities.

4.2 What is the solution?

IIED's Better Cities are Possible agenda recognises that respecting, protecting and fulfilling the right to adequate housing can be a key disruptor of environmental and social lock-ins. The following sections outline three ways through which housing policy and practice can move in this direction.

4.2.1 Location matters

Getting the location right is key to advance housing practices that do not feed into carbon-intensive pathways of urban development: urban sprawl via the eviction of informal settlements and relocation of residents to isolated and poorly serviced high-rise developments at the urban peripheries. Grassroots housing movements and federations of the urban poor have pioneered in situ upgrading and community-led housing initiatives that respond to housing needs and boost resilience. More research is needed to understand how these efforts and enabling policies can integrate climate data and planning, guarantee access to well-located areas in the city and align with long-term sustainability efforts.

4.2.2 Small actions can create big change

Housing policy needs to recognise that the main providers of affordable and well-located housing opportunities in the global South are dwellers engaging with self-help improvements and small-scale developers. In an extremely insecure and unstable environment, they invest and enable housing opportunities through often informal and incremental practices.

If housing policies are to have meaningful impact in urban development pathways, they need to start by recognising

such actors not as 'informal' or 'outlaws', but rather as potential partners for equitable and sustainable change. Further research is needed to examine how to support these actors and enable partnerships that advance locally led adaptation strategies and increase the capabilities of urban marginalised groups to respond to the impacts of the climate emergency. For example, how can we support networks of informal builders and masons to promote resilient building techniques, and affect change in the construction industry at large? How can self-help and local construction practices go beyond adaptation and affect wider and systemic decarbonisation efforts of cities?

By addressing questions such as these, policy and planning can better support the mushrooming of small-scale housing practice in ways that can head towards a tipping point that redirects urban development pathways.

4.2.3 Not for profit but for people and nature

For housing initiatives to address the needs of present and future generations, it is crucial that safeguards are put in place so that housing is not driven purely by market forces. Housing policy and practice need to advance and promote ways to secure, produce and manage housing in non-speculative manners. This can be done through collective land-management and zoning instruments, where the norms that shape land and housing markets are dictated not only by supply and demand, but also by the values of social and environmental justice.

Examples like these are included in the online global database of community-led housing put together by the CoHabitat network.[57] Nevertheless, more knowledge is needed in this field to investigate the financial, institutional and legal conditions needed to replicate and sustain non-speculative housing, such as community-led initiatives.

4.3 How does the solution build on HSG's work?

IIED has a long history of engaging with housing issues affecting the urban poor in cities of the global South. Our work and research on housing has been key to the development and implementation of global urban agendas, such as those promoted at the UN conferences on human settlements.[58]

Some of IIED's recent housing work includes the project Shelter Provision in East African Cities (2017–2020),[59] which has shed light on the power structures shaping the urban poor's access to housing in Nairobi, Hawassa and Mogadishu.

IIED was commissioned by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) to produce a global *Rethinking Housing Policies* report in 2019 that brought to the

forefront the key role that local and regional governments play in addressing housing needs.[60]

Furthermore, in the two special issues of *Environment and Urbanization* on housing published in 2020, IIED explored the various agendas associated with housing[14] and mechanisms to access adequate housing.[13] The different contributions have addressed issues such as struggles against eviction, incremental and government-led housing production, land disputes and informal land investments, and rental housing dynamics.

IIED is currently leading housing studies in Nairobi, Freetown, Lilongwe and Accra as part of the African Cities Research Consortium.[61] This research aims to shed light on potential entry points to make housing systems in African cities more socially and environmentally just.

4.4 Myth buster: "technology will solve the global housing crisis in a context of the climate emergency"

Can sustainable technology advances solve the global housing crisis in the context of the climate emergency? In part, yes. Technology will make the building sector less polluting and sustainable and this is key for climate mitigation measures. And it will be critical to make these transitions in ways that benefit the urban poor in the global South, who are most exposed to the effects of a changing climate.

But technological solutions **must** be accompanied with mechanisms that enhance the security of tenure of those who are most marginalised, that protect land and property markets from speculative and exclusionary dynamics, and that promote adequate access to services and infrastructure, while democratising urban governance.

On its own, access to renewable and sustainable housing products is not enough to change carbon-intensive and exclusionary urban trajectories. The use of these technologies can do more harm than good by devolving the burdens of climate adaptation to the poorest, while leaving their real needs and urban dynamics unaddressed. Technological innovation must be accompanied by and integrated into a process of putting people and diverse urban stakeholders at the centre of the efforts to respond to the global housing crisis.

5. Making the most of migration: mobility in the context of the climate emergency

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5.1 What is the problem?

Academic and policy debates on climate change and migration have tended to centre on international flows of people from the global South to the global North. Less well recognised in public and policy discourse are projections of the huge scale of likely **internal** migration in countries of sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America.[62] The World Bank recently predicted that by 2050, over 143 million people from these three regions will have had to move within their own countries as a result of slow-onset impacts of the climate emergency.[62]

We know that the destination of choice for IDPs and migrants is generally urban. Many settle in new or expanding informal settlements, where they may be at further risk of the impacts of climate change. With limited social capital and local knowledge, these new arrivals are often highly vulnerable to harassment and abuse, and unable to access basic services.

Where cash or in-kind support is made available to those who have been forcibly displaced — as a result of disasters for example — assistance is often emergency focused. This means it is short-term and aims to encourage people to return to their place of origin. But this fails to recognise that many people who are displaced cannot or do not want to return.

While for some the move to a town or city may be permanent, this does not mean that they cease all contact with their place of origin. Indeed, ongoing connections between urban and rural areas may be key for livelihoods and resilience-building in both locations. Examples of these connections between urban and rural areas include seasonal migration, people sending remittances home or visiting family. However, academic studies on migration tend to focus on predictions and modelling, rather than on the nature and impacts of journeys that are already happening. We know little, in general, about the experiences of migrants and IDPs in cities, or how they adapt to urban life while maintaining contacts with their places of origin. Depending on the political context, they may choose to live 'under the radar' and avoid contact with the authorities. Opportunities are often limited for new arrivals to benefit from local community organising, or contribute to discussions on the future of their neighbourhood or city.

5.2 What is the solution?

This situation calls for a policy response — from national governments and international agencies — to provide much-needed support to local authorities in urban receiving areas to prepare for and manage the arrival of migrants and IDPs. Governments and international agencies must also work with grassroots groups and civil society to extend support to migrants and IDPs, overcoming perceptions that they are transient populations and instead work towards integrating them into the city as residents. This approach should build on promising practices, where progressive mayors have sought to incorporate displaced people into responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis.[63] But they also need to make greater efforts to connect sending and receiving areas, prepare migrants for their journey, and ensure the benefits of migration are felt in both sending and receiving areas. This support is critical, given that migrants and those displaced by disaster and climate change are among the most vulnerable urban residents.

However, there are crucial gaps in research, knowledge and data on migration 'systems' in the context of climate change. These gaps include insights on points of departure and destination and in understanding how ongoing flows of people, knowledge, goods and capital between rural (sending) and urban (receiving) areas influence decision making — and their potential to make the migration experience safer and ultimately more successful.

As Hunter points out, scholars of environmental migration have typically built quantitative models that predict the likelihood or volume of migration. 'After the prediction, however, we stop. Migration is clearly part of a system, one that influences sending and receiving areas beyond the immediate term.'[64] New studies are needed that explore migration through a systems framework and that investigate feedback loops and remittances.

Understanding these systems is particularly critical given the climate emergency. Migration is likely to increasingly serve as an adaptation strategy. However, Adger et al. argue that migration has always been part of the evolution of society and should be considered 'a long-term contribution to climate resilience and adaptation'.[65]

Flooding in Bentiu, South Sudan, in December 2021. It is estimated more than 200,000 people were displaced following the worst floods in 60 years. Credit: UNMISS via Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

In a similar vein, Black et al. highlight that migration should not only be seen as 'a reaction to environmental change but also as a part of adaptive response to change'.[66]

5.3 How does this solution build on HSG's work?

IIED's HSG aims to explore how support for urban IDPs and migrants can be strengthened and how overall governance of internal migration can be improved for the benefit of both sending and receiving areas. This requires new research in collaboration with local governments and civil society in sending and receiving areas to strengthen positive linkages, improve flows of knowledge, and ultimately help both locations prepare for changes in population structure.

Research on urban-rural linkages from IIED has investigated the ongoing relationships between sending and receiving areas in contexts of economic migration,[67] and stresses the importance of the spatial distribution of economic opportunities as a key determinant in migration flows.[68] New research would build on this body of IIED work by exploring urban-rural linkages in a context of climate change and forced migration. It would respond to Tacoli's call for greater recognition of the role of local and national institutions in making sure migration is 'part of the solution rather than the problem' and for policies that accommodate changes in migration flows, rather than attempt to curtail them.[68]

IIED is already working with federations of the urban poor and university partners in sub-Saharan Africa on urban displacement issues. For example, SDI Kenya is engaging with urban refugee issues with city and national governments through the Protracted Displacement in an Urban World project.[69] Their sister organisations in coastal cities of Tanzania, Liberia, Ghana and Sierra Leone are working with the New School for Social Research, a graduate institute in New York, with advisory support from IIED, on incorporating data on migrants and migration patterns into their enumerations with residents of informal settlements. This work seeks to understand how migrants are impacted by climate change — and are potentially at risk of secondary displacement — in their new places of residence. All of this research builds on IIED's history of working with residents of informal settlements to strengthen resilience to climate change. By adding the lens of migration and mobility, we aim to build a full picture of vulnerability and co-produce new practical policy recommendations.

5.4 Myth buster: "climate refugees threaten the peace, security and wellbeing of wealthier nations"

A commonly held myth is that the exodus of millions of climate migrants from poor countries in Africa, South Asia and Latin America will threaten the peace, security and wellbeing of wealthier nations. Projections of hundreds of millions of 'climate refugees' moving from the global South to the global North have been picked up by media outlets. UN and European policymakers posit displacement caused by climate change as a security risk and are entrenching a securitisation agenda, focusing on preventing migration.[70] However, scholars consider the evidence for these claims 'varied and patchy' and made in an absence of 'coherent frameworks for thinking about, and testing hypotheses on, environmental change and migration'[66] and 'without an empirical scientific basis'.[70]

In addition, much academic research is being driven by policymakers who are concerned about the potential numbers of people migrating internationally for environmental reasons now and in the future, where they are headed, and with what social and economic consequences.[71] This has generated a significant body of work that focuses on identifying environmental risks and modelling potential scenarios. IIED's new engagement on this topic seeks to dispel the myths driving the current research agenda, and refocus attention on the vital here-and-now of internal migration systems in a context of climate change.

A house in stilts above the water in Banjarmasin, Indonesia. Credit: Alexandre Apsan Frediani, IIED

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Many urban residents live in precarious settings, such as these houses on steep slopes in Gangtok, India. Credit: David Dodman, IIED

Toolkit
June 2022

Knowledge Products

How can cities promote resilient, low-carbon and just urbanisation, in a context of increasing climate breakdown and inequality? Here, IIED's urban researchers set out a vision for urban transformation to build just and inclusive cities. Building on the core principles of IIED's Transformative Urban Recovery Framework co-developed with grassroots organisations, national and international agencies, research institutions, international NGOs and city leaders, this paper sets out four key action areas for 2022: embracing disruptive resilience, connecting urban climate justice with social justice and decarbonisation, promoting housing justice while advancing climate justice, and supporting migration in the context of the climate emergency.

Effective decarbonisation and adaptation strategies in cities will depend on developing local institutions in ways that go beyond our existing understandings of partnerships and participation. Meaningful and transformative planning that tackles the twin crises of inequality and climate change will depend on local and scientific data on risk and inequality, locally rooted institutions and leadership, and better quality and more nimble finance.

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