

## **Climate change: an urban perspective - Margot Rubin, independent consultant**

### *a. The climate change-urban nexus: an introduction*

Margot Rubin, who completed a position paper for Urban LandMark in 2011 on the vulnerability to climate change of people living in slums in South Africa, began by asking a key question: why is it necessary to look at the issue of climate change from an urban perspective? The answer is that cities will be the most affected sites, as well as the greatest contributors to climate change; therefore, the city is a site of intervention.

There are three main trends coalescing:

1. High levels of migration and natural growth,
2. Poor planning, lack of land and poor service provision,
3. Climate change.

There will be further marginalisation and increased vulnerability of poorer and marginalised people throughout Africa. One fact is that by 2020, between 75 and 250 million people will be exposed to water stress due to climate change, and in some countries there may be up to 50% reduction in agricultural yields.

Climate change is affecting surface temperatures, creating rising sea levels and changed weather patterns, and most importantly for urban areas, there will be an increase in natural disasters. There will be warmer summers and generally drier year-round climates. These factors will contribute to changing the location disease vectors, e.g. malaria areas will shift, and other diseases may increase. However, part of the problem is that predicting changes around precipitation has proven to be an inexact science.

### *b. Urban growth and management: not a good news story*

In relation to urban growth, the majority of the world's population now live in cities and by 2030 there will be two billion new urban dwellers. By 2030, Africa, currently the world's least urbanised continent, is predicted to have most of its population living in cities, and cities on the east of the continent will reach a population of 10 million. It is assumed that between 2040 and 2050, migration to cities will slow down. However, the dynamics of migration are complex and not completely understood, and different forms of migration occur, including circular migrations, non-linear migrations, multi-nodal households, rural areas used as social safety nets and environmental refugees where agriculture is no longer sustainable.

Urbanisation issues have not been addressed very well to date. For example, 70% of the African population are living in slums, as access to land is poor and most slum dwellers live in situations of insecure tenure and inadequate housing. Contributing to these vulnerabilities of land access, costs and lack of secure tenure is the refusal by some governments in Africa to acknowledge the legitimacy of informal settlements, which often results in a lack of services and lack of planning. Demographic factors also increase vulnerability; communities are not homogenous but have different needs for each demographic such as age, gender, homelessness, migrants, poverty and

assets. Africa has been acknowledged to be the most affected by climate change, through poverty, corruption, limited access to capital, disasters and conflicts.

There are other issues that will be exacerbated by climate change such as poor quality housing, poor sanitation, lack of services or planning, lack of tenure security. Women will be more affected than men and the elderly more than youth, with some areas also more affected than others, resulting in a decreased asset base, and those affected by ill health will experience increased ill health.

The global average consumption of resources, including water, food, energy, is 2.63 hectares per capita per year; however, the problem is that 1.8 hectares is a realistic figure of what is available. High-density cities such as New York are incredibly efficient, as opposed to sprawling sub-urban areas. Therefore cities need to find ways of putting the energy that is used back into the city, e.g. through recycling products and goods.

*c. Making the worst off, worse off*

In conclusion, Rubin argued that climate change will make the worse off far worse off. Africa will be the hardest hit and least able to resist. To address the effects of climate change, cities need to understand the nature of migration, and address baseline urban vulnerabilities, which cannot be done without addressing existing vulnerabilities.

**Open discussion:**

Rubin's presentation was followed by an open discussion.

**Mark Napier (chair):** The question is whether urban growth automatically translates into vulnerability.

**Professor Leduka, National University of Lesotho:** An interesting point was made in the presentation of the migration levels. A recent article by Debra Potts stated that she felt that many of the statistics were suspect. In her abstract she mentioned that the natural increase for the past couple of years has been quite normal. To complicate this fact, some people say there are high levels of migration, some people say low levels of migration, some people say circular migrations.

**Mark Napier (chair):** Debra Potts looked at only some countries, and in the first instance pointed out that the data was very thin, and in the second instance found countries where migration growth was different to the rest of the continent. Overall, there is not migration to the bigger urban centres as is sometimes thought, so it cannot be assumed that people are automatically going to the bigger cities, but it does raise the issue that where bigger infrastructure is provided is not necessarily where it is assumed it will be required. The climate debate has led to some belief that cities could be facing collapse due to problems to be encountered in food supply and water production, however, this was also stated in the 1960s, and cities have not yet collapsed and have not yet stopped hitting populations of 20 million people. It is daunting to try to help African ministers plan for urbanisation when the London School of Economics says there will be no such thing.

**Margot Rubin:** It is far easier for cities to state that they 'won't plan for growth'; however cities have to be very careful in trying to understand what the issues will be.

**Kathryn Ewing, SUN Developments:** Posed questions of whether crime was considered in the research. Also, a question about whether consideration was given to migration between countries, and conflict between nationals and non-nationals was considered.

**Andrew Nethercott, DFID Southern Africa:** If someone had a pot of money, where would you spend it?

**Margot Rubin:** Responding to Kathryn, the study did not deal with issues of crime but did deal with conflict and the nature of things that would contribute to issues of conflict. Resource scarcity will increase, creating conflict between wealthy and poor, between older nationals and newer nationals, between nationals and non-nationals, and food insecurity conflict will increase, with every indication that the people with the least amount of clout and support will be on the losing side.

All the issues are interrelated, however, coping with disaster and disaster management is clearly linked to location, planning and land use management, as well as deeply entwined with land tenure, and the ability of those living in those environments to make claims on the state (if one is seen as non-legitimate, it decreases one's claim and access to services, plus it affects one's ability to source assistance from the state). Thus, money and efforts should be directed to issues of land governance and urban governance, which will in turn help to reduce vulnerability and improve resilience.