



COP26 Policy Brief:

How do we make COP26 deliver for adaptation in fragile urban environments?

Investigating how non-conflict violence risks and climate change risks overlap in cities, and what this means for adaptation

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATION:

Embed adaptation in climate change safely and effectively in local contexts to ensure violence is not triggered, exacerbated, or cascaded in fragile areas.

Background

Among the world's most vulnerable contexts to climate change are low-income urban areas, often informally settled. 'Fragile' urban areas have been so termed to describe contexts where states are unwilling or unable to provide basic infrastructure and services. This includes those necessary to reduce risks and build capacities to adapt. While fragility does not always connote violence, in such areas people also live with the direct effects of many forms of non-conflict violence (such as crime, evictions and gender-based violence). Fragility is rising across cities, while non-conflict violence is increasingly urbanised. Yet very little research has explored through grounded, empirical enquiry how the impacts of climate change and of urban violence inter-relate as risks for people, and how to deliver adaptation in these contexts.

Research at Nottingham

At the University of Nottingham, GCRF-funded research project – 'Addressing the 24-hour cycle of urban risk' – has been investigating how non-conflict violence risks and climate change risks overlap and compound vulnerability. We have been working in low-income communities in Nairobi (Kenya), Karachi (Pakistan) and Colombo (Sri Lanka) that are sited in vulnerable ecological zones (such as along riverbanks and drainage canals) affected by risks of flooding, and where residents experience multiple forms of violence in the context of little support from government or outside agencies.

The interaction effects between governance, violence and climate-related risks have emerged from both our qualitative and quantitative survey-based work and are particularly marked for women. Our research indicated increases in gender-based violence triggered or exacerbated by flood events. Heightened tensions in communities followed the inadequate distribution of flood relief. Violence cascades were seen, with women taking on vulnerable employment and living conditions following insecurity from living in partial housing structures.



Implications for Climate Change

Inter-sectional social identities are important to the ways in which violence and climate risk interact, and climate impact influences the forms of violence that may manifest. This kind of nuanced data will be needed to embed adaptation safely and effectively in local contexts. There is a need for 'do no harm' principles for adaptation investments to ensure violence is not triggered, exacerbated or cascaded. It is also crucial to acknowledge the pro-active role of community networks and organisations in otherwise fragile areas, and the need to support their activities. Responsible bodies must invest in multi-purpose infrastructures to tackle the need for sustainable *and* safe cities. It is imperative to integrate adaptation investment at the local level with development-oriented investments that tackle the wider sets of inequalities and insecurities that create vulnerability in fragile urban contexts, such as in water and sanitation and housing infrastructures.

Further Reading

Read about the [24-hour cycle of urban risk project](#)

Read the [COP26 blog](#)

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