

**Making Cities Resilient: Role of the Local Government**

**Findings and Policy Messages**

**Background**

The concept of resilience is now widely adopted across academic and policy debates as a way of reducing society’s vulnerability to threats posed by natural and human induced hazards. The ‘resilient city’ is a comparatively new term, but is now increasingly used in disaster related literature and policy documents. The ‘resilient city’ can be defined in different ways. One such definition is that it is “a sustainable network of physical systems (constructed and natural environmental components) and human communities” (Godschalk, 2003). It can be further elaborated by identifying physical systems as built roads, buildings, infrastructure, communications, and energy facilities as well as waterways, soils, topography, geology, and other natural systems.

Local governments are the institutional level closest to the citizens and to their communities. They play the first role in responding to crises and emergencies and in attending to the needs of their constituencies. They deliver essential services to their citizens (health, education, transport, water, etc.), which need to be made resilient to disasters. There is a need for national governments, local government associations, international, regional and civil society organisations, donors, the private sector, academia and professional associations, as well as every citizen to engage in the process of making cities safe from disasters. Cities and local governments need to get ready, reduce the risks and become resilient to disasters.

The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) campaigns together with its partners for this to happen. *"I call for the need of world leaders to address climate change and reduce the increasing risk of disasters- and world leaders must include Mayors, townships and community leaders"*, stated UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2009. UNISDR launched the Making Cities Resilient campaign - My City is Getting Ready - in 2010 with many partners engaged with cities and local development. This 2010-2015 World Disaster Reduction Campaign addresses issues of local governance and urban risk while drawing upon previous ISDR Campaigns on safer schools and hospitals, as well as on the sustainable urbanizations principles developed in the UN-Habitat World Urban Campaign 2009-2013. Making cities resilient to disasters is an opportunity to improve local governance, increase participation, and foster a culture of safety and sustainable urbanisation. The overall goal of the campaign is to achieve resilient, sustainable urban communities,with a growing number of local governments that are taking actions to reduce the risks to disasters, based on common standards and tools. One of the longer-term objectives is to empower local governments with stronger national policies to invest in risk reduction at a local level, as part of urban and regional development plans.

The world is experiencing a rapid urban growth with increase in urban poverty and slums. As a result of rapid urbanisation, the world’s population is increasingly concentrated in large cities with poor housing and lack of basic protective infrastructure (Red Cross, 2010; UN-ISDR, 2010a). This excessive unplanned urban growth leads to various physical, social and economic vulnerabilities. Consequently, the impacts of disasters are highly detrimental when they occur in urban environments. Thus, it is important to strengthen the urban cities by increasing city’s resilience to disasters. This requires a serious effort to be made by various stakeholders including governmental and non-governmental institutions. The local governments being the one responsible for local area development has a key role in achieving the resilience of the cities under their jurisdiction. As such there is considerable research interest on strengthening local governments to facilitate development of city’s resilience to disasters. Although there is a growing concern on the role of the local governments in making cities resilient, several incidents have been reported on the inadequate contribution of local governments in taking the lead role of initiating disaster risk reduction. In this context, research based on which this policy briefing is prepared focuses on exploring the role and challenges for local governments in creating a disaster resilient built environment within urban cities.

**What are the main findings?**

* The role of local or municipal levels of government in disaster risk reduction is being increasingly recognised and stressed in international discussions
* Local governments have a significant role to play in contributing to the building of disaster resilient cities in order to avoid or limit the adverse impacts of disasters
* A Team Effort – with Local Governments Leading the Way
* Benefits of Investing in Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience: A Legacy of Leadership; Social and Human Gains; Economic Growth and Job Creation; More Liveable Communities; Inter-connected Cities with National and International Expertise and Resources
* Invest in Resilience as an Opportunity: Not only do disasters set back development processes, disasters have the ability to make a considerable level of contribution to an economy where it took place and also towards the surrounding economies; In the longer term a major natural disaster can generate a construction-led economic boom; Reconstruction be used as development opportunity to help reduce various vulnerabilities. Reconstruction provides an opportunity to reduce vulnerability to hazards.
* A well structured institutional and administrative framework is a pre-requisite for a sound city’s resilience initiatives
* Key *challenges faced by local governments in creating disaster resilient built environment*
* All these require an empowered local government to take up the lead in its city’s disaster resilience activities.

**What are the main policy messages?**

* Adopt a policy to make disaster risk reduction a local priority with strong institutional commitment, decentralize and delegate responsibilities*;*
* Conduct risk assessments and integrate the outcome in the city and urban planning*;*
* Use knowledge, both scientific and local, in disaster risk reduction practices and ensure that local capacities are enhanced and valued*;*
* Integrate disaster risk reduction in the city development plans (***Integration of DRR philosophies*** within urban settings can be done at different levels. Starting from the policy and planning strategies, they can be extended to physical/technical strategies, emergency preparedness strategies, natural protection strategies and knowledge management strategies;
* Strengthen disaster preparedness, response, rehabilitation and recovery plans and practice*;*
* Take a decision to actively participate in national, regional and international networking and sharing of experience for resilient cities

**What did the research involve?**

Even though the role of the local government in making cities resilient to disasters has been widely recognised in the literature, several authors and researchers have identified that gaps exist in the actual contributions made by local governments in disaster risk reduction endeavours. Accordingly, the intention is to study the current practice of local governments in making cities resilient to disasters. This will develop knowledge on existing barriers faced by local governments and would help to explore good practices. Case studies were selected as the most appropriate strategy it enables the researcher to obtain a good understanding of the context of the research and the processes The study also focuses on a contemporary event where existing background knowledge is present to develop an initial conceptual framework which justifies the selection of the case study research strategy. On the other hand, case studies have a unique strength to deal with a full variety of evidence-documents, artefacts, interviews and observations, and this had an impact on the selection.

Within this context, case study was chosen as the Batticaloa municipal council area in Sri Lanka. This city was badly affected by disasters such as 2004 Indian ocean Tsunami and 30 year long conflict and is also prone to future disasters was chosen. Within the case study, a large number of interviews have been conducted to gather valid and reliable data that are relevant to the area of study. The interviews were designed to capture the city’s resilience to disasters and to understand the commitment of the local government in making the city resilient to disasters and associated problems. As such, the data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with the local and other government officials, policy makers, industry practitioners and experts who are engaged in the respective areas of study. In addition, a series of expert interviews were also conducted with the view of gaining background knowledge pertaining to this field of study.

**Who were the research team?**

The project brought together a team of researchers with a depth of experience in research involving disaster risk reduction and resilience, local governments and city resilience. Research team was based at the University of Salford which is an Academic Partner of the UNISDR’s Making Cities Resilient Campaign. In addition, its Professor Dilanthi Amaratunga & Professor Richard Haigh are Advisory Panel Members of the UNISDR Resilience Cities Campaign.

**Where can the full research findings be found?**

* Malalgoda, C., Amaratunga, D. & Haigh, R. (2012), Creating disaster resilient built environment in urban cities: role of local governments in Sri Lanka, International Journal of Disaster Resilience (in press)
* Making Cities Resilient : *How* *Local* *Governments* *Reducing* *Disaster* *Risks* *–* *Sri* *Lanka* *Case* *Study* *2012*. *Centre for Disaster Resilience, University of Salford, UK & Disaster Management Centre, Sri Lanka – August 2012*
* Palliyaguru, R., Amaratunga, D. & Haigh, R. , IMPACT OF INTEGRATING DISASTER RISK REDUCTION PHILOSOPHIES INTO INFRASTRUCTURE RECONSTRUCTION PROJECTS , Journal of Civil Engineering and Management

**What’s next?**

* Empowerment of local governments is proposed as a way of responding to the aforementioned challenges faced by local governments in their attempt to make cities resilient to disasters. This can be proposed by developing the organisational capacities and reforming the governance related to way in which local government is established. In doing so, local governments can effectively contribute to making their cities more resilient to disasters;
* Further reinforcing the concept of resilience at the city level, local government capacity building on DRR and its integration;
* Further test and promote aspects of the Policy such as integration of DRR into infrastructure
* The need for disaster risk reduction policy planning and implementation conducted through a transparent and multi stakeholder approach;
* Explore the scale and range of internal and international accountability mechanisms and the potential for such mechanisms to be applied to the field of disaster risk reduction
* Access to information, particularly information on disaster risks generating social demand for disaster risk management
* A culture of planning and regulation based on partnerships and joint ownership between local and central governments and risk-prone communities;
* Adoption of a participatory approach to risk management representing a more cost-effective and sustainable mechanism for reducing risks
* Develop and provide more guidance, principles and tools on how good practice is achieved in disaster risk management and what works (risk assessments, definitions of disaster and risk; integration of climate change adaptation and disaster risk management; working at national and local levels; and, vulnerability of communities to the impact of hazards);
* Around Governance, Local Level Implementation and Multi-stakeholder Participation as a strong focus;
* Gender perspectives in disaster risk reduction

**Contact details**

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| **Professor Dilanthi Amaratunga** |
| Head, Centre for Disaster Resilience |
| University of Salford |
| Salford, Greater Manchester |
| M5 4WT |
| T: +44 (0)161 295 4471 |
| E: [r.d.g.amaratunga@salford.ac.uk](mailto:r.d.g.amaratunga@salford.ac.uk)  W: [www.dilanthiamaratunga.net](http://www.dilanthiamaratunga.net) |
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