

Climate Resilient Cities

A Primer on Reducing Vulnerabilities to Disasters

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Foreword

Climate change is no longer a distant possibility but a current reality. Global temperatures have recorded unprecedented increases. The length and timing of seasons are changing. The frequency and severity of floods and cyclones accompanied by rising sea levels are increasing. In short, climate change has become one of the defining challenges for policymakers, industry, and civil society in this century, and it is a development, investment, economic, and social issue, which affects most sectors.

The East Asia Region will face the brunt of climate change impacts. A stark example of the future is the timing and intensity of the May 2008 Myanmar cyclone that left around 85,000 dead and many others missing, with millions homeless and food production severely affected. More recently, in August 2008, torrential rains in Laos led to flooding caused by the swelling of the Mekong River to its highest levels in 100 years, flash floods in Japan led to the evacuation of nearly half a million people, and Typhoon Nuri in the Philippines and floods in Vietnam and China led to deaths, displacement, and losses.

Loss from flooding and hurricanes is an all too frequent occurrence in many countries in the region, particularly in cities where people and assets are concentrated. Urban centers must be prepared with specialized tools to deal with climate change impacts and early warning systems. Moreover, given the potential devastation associated with future climate change-related disasters, it is vital to change the way we build and manage our cities, which account for 80 percent of greenhouse gas emissions today.¹

The 13th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at Bali in December 2007 affirmed the increased willingness of city governments to take action in addressing climate impacts. The World Mayors' and Local Governments' Climate Protection Agreement lays out direct principles for adaptation and preparedness, in addition to concrete targets for mitigation. Similarly, the C40 Climate Leadership Group of large cities—including Bangkok, Hanoi, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Seoul, Shanghai, and Tokyo from East Asia—are cooperating to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Other natural disasters, beyond those that are climate induced, also add to the challenges facing East Asian cities. The *ring of fire*—composed of 75 percent of the world’s active and dormant volcanoes and located at the borders of major tectonic plates (prone to seismic activity)—follows along the eastern edge of Asia as well as Southeast Asia. China’s Sichuan earthquake in May 2008, the August 2008 earthquake in Indonesia, the tsunami that hit the Region in 2004, and the volcanic eruption from Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines in 1991 have all resulted in devastating economic damage and loss of lives.

Now is the time, therefore, for policymakers to take an integrated look at reducing vulnerabilities to climate change and other natural disasters in a comprehensive disaster management system.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keshav Varma". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

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