Urban Africa Risk Knowledge

Briefing

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Communicating risk from the frontline: projecting community voices into disaster risk management policies across scales

Research carried out in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on cross-scalar risk communication and disaster risk governance reveals that, while there is considerable potential for communities to measure and communicate risk and to prioritise actions, there is little scope for them to influence disaster risk governance at this point in time. This is partly because, although disaster risk management (DRM) is devolved in Tanzania, it has not gone far enough to give adequate powers and financing to the lowest level of government at the sub-wards, which are at the frontline of managing the biggest everyday risks that people face. The effective communication of risks upwards from communities to governments, and of DRM policies and opportunities downwards to communities and across sectors is crucial to overcome these gaps. When communication is participatory and collaborative, there is scope for local city actors to reflect on the need for action to be joined across governance scales, and to ensure communication plays a key role at and between all levels.

Introduction: urban risks in informal settlements in Dar es Salaam

Addressing the risk-development nexus requires co-ordinated approaches which interlink various sectors, such as: urban planning and environmental management; public health; disaster management; and climate change adaptation – thereby transcending formal and informal boundaries of governance. Central to this is ongoing and effective communication and co-ordination between all scales of governance, but especially between sub-ward/neighbourhood government and communities. Research carried out in Dar es Salaam strongly reiterates the importance of understanding risk across a spectrum, encompassing everyday, small, and large events and the importance of effective risk communication and co-ordination across scales. Such an overview helps to forge a better understanding of the interactions between multiple hazards and the underlying drivers of risk linked to poverty, poorly planned and managed urban growth, and climate change, particularly pertinent in the context of Dar es Salaam, which is characterised by widespread informality.

People in towns and cities across sub-Saharan Africa are becoming increasingly vulnerable to and impacted by a wide range of hazards, encompassing everyday hazards (such as infectious and parasitic diseases, and road

Policy Pointers

- Cycles of risk accumulation need to be addressed through both effective and participatory bottom-up and top-down communication. This must include adequate community voices in in decision-making processes.
- Policy and funding provisions for disaster risk management need to reach all the way down to the sub-ward/neighbourhood level, given the centrality of sub-ward governments in dealing with everyday experiences of risk and developmental challenges.
- City planning and policies require greater consideration of informal settlements, which bear disproportionate burdens of extensive and everyday urban risks.
- Local-level decision makers need to work collaboratively with communities to capture experiences of risks and measure the burdens arising from these risks so that they can make informed planning decisions.

Box 1: Mtambani and Bonde la Mpunga sub-wards – key characteristics and risks identified by the communities

Mtambani:
- Located in Vingunguti ward, Ilala municipality;
- Population 13,900;
- Houses 960;
- Households 3,557, and
- Informal settlement (uniformly unplanned) with poor infrastructure, poor services.

Bonde la Mpunga
- Located in Msasani ward – Kinondoni municipality;
- Population 17,553;
- No. of houses 1,659;
- Mixed planned and unplanned area; and
- High water table.

The main risks identified in the two settlements include:
- Crime;
- Poor solid waste management;
- Lack of storm water drainage infrastructure;
- Lack of waste water (and toilet) infrastructure;
- Lack of basic health services/hospitals;
- Flooding
- High living costs; and
- Drug abuse.

traffic injuries), small disasters (such as structural collapse and flash floods), and large disasters (such as tropical storms, earthquakes, and floods). The impacts of everyday events can have a considerable and, in some cases, an even higher aggregate impact on human health and wellbeing than catastrophic events. This leads to cycles of risk accumulation that trap individuals and communities in conditions of vulnerability, which need to be better understood and properly addressed in urban development policy and planning.

This briefing reflects on findings from two related research initiatives undertaken in Dar es Salaam between 2015 and 2018, namely: 'AXA Outlook metrics for policy action in urban areas: Characterising risks facing low-income groups'[1] and 'Urban Africa: Risk Knowledge Programme (Urban ARK).[2] Broadly, both projects focused on understanding cross-scalar risk communication and governance in Dar es Salaam. The findings of these research projects are presented consecutively in the two sections below and key observations across the two studies are brought together in the conclusions.

Capturing community experiences of risk and risk management

Two sub-wards in Dar es Salaam were selected for the AXA Outlook study: Mtambani and Bonde la Mpunga (see Box 1). These sub-wards were selected based on their risk profile and the presence of an active federation, in this case the Tanzanian Urban Poor Federation (TUPF).[3] Using the 'Action at the Frontline' methodology,[4] a local NGO, the Centre for Community Initiatives,[5] undertook interviews and focus group discussions with the communities to capture and then rank the threats/risks and effects experienced. They also looked at some coping initiatives being undertaken and the perceived barriers to action. The community-generated data was presented and discussed at a series of policy workshops with the communities, sub-ward governments, municipal and national DRM government counterparts, and other stakeholders in 2017 and 2018.

The threats/risks identified by the communities emphasise small-scale disaster events, such as flash flooding and persistent inundation of stagnant water, and reveal the potential correlation between the precarious socioeconomic and everyday living conditions of residents, which are underlying driving factors for some of the risks. For instance, low income levels and lack of employment opportunities have an influence on crime levels and drug abuse. Likewise, the lack of storm drainage and poor solid waste management are closely tied to flood events. The participants thought that the most common impact of these identified risks to be the incidence of water-borne diseases such as cholera, typhoid and malaria (vector-borne diseases that use stagnant water as a breeding ground). Other impacts, such as persistent pungent smells in the area, a sense of insecurity and fear, loss of sleep, and damage to property, all underscore the challenges that these risks pose for everyday living for community residents.

The threats affect all residents of the community; however distribution within the households showed that in Bonde la Mpunga, children were most affected by these threats, followed by women and men. One of the notable reasons for this was the periodic flooding of the large local primary school which disrupted attendance during the rainy season. In Mtambani households, women were found to be the most affected, followed by children and men. This trend is likely to be linked to the widely held observation of women bearing the burden of household domestic tasks and responsibilities, which are significantly exacerbated during these events.

However, these everyday risks are inadequately accounted for in DRM policies at national and local levels, where the major focus is on large intensive events and disasters. Furthermore, the DRM policy structures are not devolved below the ward level in urban areas in Tanzania, and have no specific provisions recognising or covering informal settlements. Additionally, there is limited financing and awareness of the prominence of these everyday risks at the high levels of decision making. Moreover, while most government policies are translated into Swahili, many community residents were unaware of provisions and felt that they had not been adequately consulted or involved in the preparation of such important documents. The high turnover of government officials across scales also hindered the formation of lasting relationships and communication channels between community actors

and DRM officials. It was felt that more dedicated and structured communication efforts are needed to create awareness and build relationships. Moreover, there is inadequate funding for proactive planning for disaster risk, and disbursement of funds is politically filtered and historically does not target urban residents occupying informally settled areas that have been declared hazard prone. Consequently, the most vulnerable, particularly those residing in informal settlements, may not be prioritised or receive support in the event of a disaster, nor are they supported in planning for disasters.

Both communities have an active presence in the TUPF, whose activities are sometimes done in partnership with the Mtaa (street and neighbourhood level) government, thereby demonstrating some local level action and coordination of DRM activities at the sub-ward level, albeit with significant resource challenges. Well-functioning community-based organisation, action and governance structures through the support of the federations and others can be a major determinant of disaster risk reduction (DRR) capacity.[6] Responses can be very effective when there are joint initiatives by residents and city government or other public agencies. However, as detailed below, such collaborative initiatives face multiple constraints and more emphasis is required for building local government capacity for concurrently developing city-wide systems for risk reduction and addressing underlying structural causes of risk, beyond individual communities.

Support for local- and urban-led action and risk communication/co-ordination across scales

Like many other African countries, Tanzania has adopted a framework that promotes a decentralised governance approach to DRM. However, implementation of the complex devolved structures has been challenging, as articulated above. Research from the Urban ARK project found that empowering the lowest level of DRM actors in communities can help to address key operational and implementation deficiencies in these elaborate structures.[7] Collaboration between local governments and groups at risk is key to promoting equitable dialogue and solutions. For example, as shown by the efforts of member of the TUPF, people have significant capacity to mobilise and mitigate everyday risks, but their efforts need to be acknowledged and their rights recognised to strengthen their actions for DRM. While there are a number of collaborative governance initiatives that have emerged across the city involving communities in informal settlements, NGOs, researchers, local government and other actors, these remain limited in scope and fragmented, which has hampered their ability to scale up efforts.[8]

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Increased active cross-level collaboration and information sharing is required between diverse stakeholders, for example with ward executives and the municipal officers through structured regular meetings and planned initiatives, not only after disaster strikes. As well as high government staff turnover, major challenges identified for sustained interaction and impact for resilience building include a lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities and relevant representatives to engage at various levels. There is also poor coordination between departments and sectors responsible for addressing related issues for risk reduction, such as between health, environment and water and sanitation and engineering. Government representatives involved in the study recognised this issue, but highlighted the need for capacity building and guidance on how to achieve greater collaboration, which is restricted by various issues such as departmental funding structures and specific remits and responsibilities.

Risk communication channels do exist but these are not being used effectively for bottom-up communication of risks, due to various reasons, such as community fatigue and frustration regarding ongoing challenges and unresolved issues previously reported but not acted upon or responded to through formal communication channels. According to research participants, monthly and quarterly meetings for the development committees and DRM at the ward level are often poorly attended or not regularly organised in some areas.

The Disaster Management Act of 2015 operationalised a DRM structure that is devolved from the national to the local, requiring a DRM committee to be set up at each level.[9] However, in urban areas, the lowest level of the structure ends at the ward level, yet in rural areas it extends further down to the village level (which would be the equivalent neighbourhood and street/Mtaa level in urban areas). There is thus a disconnect between the formal DRM structure and the practical realities of addressing disaster risk in informal settlements. Actors at the Mtaa level are key

as they straddle the informal-formal interface of community members and local government in dealing with everyday experiences of risk and developmental challenges. Together with local communities, they are often the first responders during times of crisis and are at the frontline of risks faced by communities. Yet, within the current formal structure, there are inadequate explicit formal provisions for DRM as well as inadequate funding deployed at this level both pre- and post-crisis.

Concluding reflections

To break cycles of risk accumulation and prevent or reduce the effects of disasters, a better understanding is needed of how knowledge of risk can lead to action. This requires collaboration and ongoing communication between state and non-state actors in partnership with local communities, transcending both formal and informal sectors. Local governments, universities, research centres, and local civil society organisations working in partnership with local communities can help address the need for sustained local action and collaborative relations in informal settlements. This will help strengthen capacities, including technical and practical knowledge, and provide sustainable long-term support through partnership arrangements. Moreover, this will also support community voices on risk experience in informal settlements to be better heard and feed into policy action, particularly through the inclusion of decision makers at the Mtaa level and above.

A key insight from this research is the significant opportunity that comes from deploying both community-based (bottom-up) and structural (top-down) analysis – and when both are participatory this provides scope for local city actors to reflect on the need for action to be joined in this vital middle governance space. Effective and ongoing communication is a key part of this – at and between both levels. Community-based risk information is valuable and needs to be prioritised through more effective channels for this information to travel upwards. Moreover, DRM policies do not currently enable the sub-ward to be meaningfully involved in key decision making, and communication between levels and across sectors remains patchy.

Given the diversity of actors and institutions involved in DRR across scales in Dar es Salaam, it would be highly beneficial to develop a platform for information sharing both through regular fora and face-to-face interactions, and virtually such as through centralised data repositories. Ongoing funding and support mechanisms will be key to operationalisation and sustained momentum. Recognition of the centrality of participatory approaches and community-led approaches for accounting for everyday risks is key, as well as consideration of how the broad spectrum of risks faced by communities can be better captured in policy. At the same time, the wider DRM policy environment needs to address the challenges of devolution, duplication of responsibilities, and institutional inertia such as ongoing delays in signing off DRR and related policies.

Authors

Emmanuel Osuteye, Development Planning Unit, University College London. Email: e.osuteye@ucl.ac.uk
Hayley Leck, Geography Department, King's College London.
Cassidy Johnson, Development Planning Unit, University College London.
Tim Ndezi, Centre for Community Initiatives (CCI), Tanzania.
Festo Dominick Makoba, Centre for Community Initiatives (CCI), Tanzania.
Mark Pelling, Geography Department, King's College London.

Notes

1. Cassidy Johnson and Emmanuel Osuteye are beneficiaries of a financial contribution from the AXA Research Fund, under the project 'AXA Outlook metrics for policy action in urban areas: Characterising risks facing low-income groups'. The project seeks to bring into public and policy debate a discussion of how to measure the impacts of environmental risks on people living in informal settlements and how to get policy and community action on addressing these risks in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
2. Urban Africa: Risk Knowledge (Urban ARK) is a three-year research and capacity building programme funded by DFID and ESRC which seeks to open up an applied research and policy agenda for risk management with the main objective of reducing disaster risk in urban sub-Saharan Africa by breaking cycles of risk accumulation. This briefing draws from research findings from Work Programme 3 focused on urban DRR governance (www.urbanark.org/work-programmes/wp3-risk-root-cause-analysis-and-historical-urban-trajectories).
3. The Tanzanian Urban Poor Federation is comprised of community-based organisations that are based on savings groups, and works to address members' and communities' needs for basic services and infrastructure.
4. This is the methodology developed by the Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction (GNDR) (www.gndr.org).
5. www.ccitanzania.org
6. Satterthwaite, D (2017) The possibilities and limitations of community-based disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation; findings across the city studies. Available at: www.urbanark.org/possibilities-and-limitations-community-based-disaster-risk-reduction-and-climate-change-adaptation
7. The Urban ARK data for this briefing was acquired primarily through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with key state and non-state actors across scales.
8. Pelling, M, Leck, H, Pasquini, L, Ajibade, I, Osuteye, E, Parnell, S, Lwasa, S, Johnson, C, Fraser, A, Barcena, A and Boubacar, S (2018) Africa's Urban Adaptation Transition under a 1.5 Degree Climate, *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 31, 10-15. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2017.11.005
9. www.preventionweb.net/english/policies/v.php?id=48822&cid=184

Urban Africa Risk Knowledge

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Urban Africa: Risk Knowledge (Urban ARK) breaking cycles of risk accumulation in sub-Saharan Africa

A three-year programme of research and capacity building that seeks to open up an applied research and policy agenda for risk management in urban sub-Saharan Africa. Urban ARK is led by 12 policy and academic organisations* from across sub-Saharan Africa with international partnerships in the United Kingdom.

* Abdou Moumouni University; African Population and Health Research Centre; Arup; International Alert; International Institute for Environment and Development; King's College London; Mzuzu University; Save the Children; UN-Habitat; University of Cape Town; University College London; University of Ibadan; University of Portsmouth

Contact: Mark Pelling
mark.pelling@kcl.ac.uk

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