

PAYNE INSTITUTE COMMENTARY SERIES: VIEWPOINT

URBAN RESILIENCE: THE CASE OF THE MIDDLE EAST
AND NORTH AFRICA REGION

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As the World becomes predominantly urban, cities are increasingly emerging as the center field where the main challenges for sustainable development and growth must be tackled. Globally, 55% of the population lives in urban areas today, and this trend is expected to continue by 2045, the number of people living in cities will increase by 1.5 times to 6 billion, adding 2 billion more urban residents. By 2050, 68% of the world's population will be urban.¹

Urbanization and economic growth move in tandem. However, for growth to be sustainable, the environmental implications of rapid urbanization need to be at the center of the national and cities development agenda.

Collectively worldwide, cities are responsible for 80% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 70% greenhouse gas emissions and global waste, as well as over 60% of global energy consumption.² As cities develop, their exposure to climate and disaster risk also increases. Almost half a billion urban residents live in coastal areas, increasing their vulnerability to storm surges

¹ The World Bank Group. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview>

² The World Bank Group. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview>

and sea level rise. National and local governments have an important role to play to shape the future of development of their cities.

Sustainable cities growth needs to be disaster-sensitive. Several countries have been experiencing catastrophic flooding, drought and extreme heats. There is an increasing trend in disaster incidence, and sustainability of growth and development depends on cities management, firms' and household's ability to prepare, stand and overcome such events.

This policy brief argues that inclusive and sustainable growth is unattainable without better managed cities. Unprecedented urbanization trends would continue to transform our cities into unique hubs for services and housings, and to fulfil the promise of social inclusion and better social and economic opportunities for all citizen. However, if not properly managed and planned, these same trends can put a severe strain on urban, water, waste, housing, energy unleashing long-term stresses on their basic components and service delivery to the citizens and exposing their weaknesses, particularly during disruptive impacts of multiple internal and external shocks when they occur. This policy brief also argues that cities should anticipate impacts in order to prepare for current and future shocks and stresses and in the case of cities in the Middle East and North Africa, they should consider not only foreseeable risks but maximize their financing options, exploit investment opportunities and build the capacity of cities to raise capital.

DRIVING FORCES

The persistent pace of climate change is increasing both in the frequency and intensity of natural hazards and thus augmenting the vulnerability of urban areas by producing economic, physical and social disturbances or provoking major waves of population displacement.

The latter, whether triggered by rapid urbanization, natural disasters or armed conflicts, is putting increased pressure not only on housing and infrastructure, but also on the labor market, urban environment and community cohesion amongst others. Such transformations can contribute to the presence of large areas of urban informality, exacerbated by protracted economic hurdles and consequent social polarizations, and potentially increase vulnerability to urban crises.

Consistent with this context, and amid a growing need to bridge the gap between urbanization and sustainable growth, and in order to turn the former into a driving force for development and inclusivity, 'urban resilience', has gained greater currency over the last few decades.

Many cities have embarked into designing and putting in place policies and actions focusing on issues such as risk reduction, disaster prevention and the sustainable development of urban areas. Such unprecedented momentum for building resilience is coterminous with a perspective shift towards a less sectorial and more holistic understanding of urban environments. Mayors and cities management are increasingly looking at city development especially from a resilience and growth perspective.

THE CASE OF MENA

MENA cities are particularly sensitive to exogenous hazards and shocks, in addition to national social and economic pressures. Most cities in MENA are more and more exposed to natural disaster such as flood, extreme heats or drought and climate-related shocks, and the impact on cities has been aggravated by: (a) the rise in population density (62% of the total population of MENA live in cities and in absolute terms, the MENA urban population is expected to double by 2040); (b) water scarcity; (c) migration to the cities and from countries around; dysfunctional national urban policies affecting cities policies; (d) and impact of climate change.

Moreover, in the MENA Region while the number of natural disasters around the world has almost doubled since the 1980s, in MENA countries it has almost tripled with over 370 natural disasters affecting 40 million people over the last 30 years, and costing US\$20 billion³. For instance, the 2008 floods in the governorates of Hadramout and Al-Mahara in Yemen caused US\$ 1.6 billion in damages and losses, the equivalent of six percent of the country's GDP. Earthquakes are the second most prevalent disaster in the region, but equally damaging. Droughts also cause significant economic stress. As an example, the 2008 to 2011 drought in Djibouti caused the economy to contract by 3.9 percent of GDP each year.⁴

With greater integration into global markets, MENA cities are also increasingly exposed to broader sets of adverse shocks and conflicts beyond natural risks, which can also jeopardize hard-won gains and affect cities' stability, their enterprises, households and individuals.

What we are also observing is that the migration flows generated has significant social, economic and financial impact on the stability and sustainable growth in several MENA cities such as Amman and Beirut.

CONFLICTS AND DISPLACEMENT IN MENA

In 2016, there were an estimated 65.6 million people forcibly displaced around the world, of which about one quarter were living in countries across the MENA region.⁵ Over 80 percent of forcibly displaced people from the region (Syria, Iraq, Yemen) now live in towns and cities.

The urbanization of forced displacement means the displaced are no longer in isolated areas, but now blend into existing urban populations. Their move to cities is often based on a perception that cities offer better economic opportunities, increased security, a degree of anonymity, greater access to services, and closer proximity to markets.

³ <https://www.gfdrr.org/sites/default/files/publication/NDMENA14.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/11/17/disaster-risk-management-in-the-arab-world-is-critical-and-cost-effective>

⁵ <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/318401518187141211/pdf/123352-PN-P159868-PUBLIC.pdf>

In fact, the urban spatial footprint can increase rapidly as a result of the displacement influx as observed in Beirut or Amman. A large influx of displaced people into cities and towns can double or triple population growth rates in months or weeks, expanding the urban footprint. While primary cities such as Amman will grow somewhat, expansion is most visible in smaller municipalities such as Mizyara, or Zahle in Lebanon, or Mafraq, Zaatari and Ramtha in northern Jordan, where populations have in some cases doubled and new settlement development drives rapid expansion of the urban footprint.

WHAT LEADS TO RESILIENT CITIES?

Urban resilience is a concept that only recently has been actively undertaken by cities around the world. Even though the concept exists in the literature since the 1970s and research on urban ecology has engaged with the concept mainly for introducing thinking on complexity, social-ecological systems and their vulnerabilities, it is only to a limited degree informed plans and policies at city level.

Urban Resilience is the measurable ability of any urban system, with its inhabitants, to maintain continuity through all shocks and stresses, while positively adapting and transforming toward sustainability.⁶ A resilient city assesses, plans and acts to prepare and respond to hazards—natural and human-made, sudden and slow-onset, expected and unexpected—in order to protect and enhance people’s live, secure development gains, foster an environment for investment, and drive positive change.

Most MENA governments have embarked on resilience and spatial interventions – cities are developing Strategic Development Plans linking development and urban renewal and resilience plans under a broader vision. But to implement these plans successfully and manage increasingly large and complex urban systems, there is a need for: (a) better coordination between central and local level; (b) increase participation of private sector in urban development; and (d) devolution of responsibilities to local authorities and local budgets for implementation.

Major challenges to Cities resilience in MENA include economic, environmental, cultural, civic and disaster mitigation and recovery. MENA cities should anticipate impacts in order to prepare for current and future shocks and stresses. It should build robustness by incorporating coping mechanisms to withstand disturbances and protect people and assets.⁷

However, MENA cities should consider not only foreseeable risks, but also accepts and adapt to current and future uncertainty. It should diversify its services, functions and processes. It needs to be flexible and able to absorb, adjust and evolve in the face of changing circumstances, dynamically responding by turning change into opportunity.

⁶ UN Habitat. <http://urbanresiliencehub.org/what-is-urban-resilience/>

⁷ UN Habitat. <https://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Final-World-Cities-Day-Concept-Note.pdf>

THE ROLE OF DONORS

For far too long, the donor and international community has taken a reactive approach to addressing city resilience and shocks. They haven't done enough to support cities in their efforts to build resilience by investing in preparedness and prevention. This is visible in MENA region.

Things are starting to change. It's clear that governments are now focusing much more on shifting toward what we're calling a culture of resilience. The private sector as well. We see new forms of Private Public Partnerships emerging.

The World Bank Group and other development partners are now putting disaster and climate resilience front and center and they have committed to fully integrating risk considerations. The World Bank has changed and has doubled their investments in disaster risk management now investing on average \$2.3 billion per year. In partnership with UN and major donors under the framework of the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), the World Bank Group is assisting disaster-prone countries around the world to invest in mapping hazard-prone areas, develop tools and methodologies for disaster-sensitive development, and enhancing emergency preparedness and response capacities.⁸

100 Resilient Cities was created by the Rockefeller Foundation in 2013.⁹ 100RC supports the adoption and incorporation of a view of resilience that includes not just the shocks—earthquakes, fires, floods, etc. Through 100 Resilient Cities, selected cities receive: (a) financial and logistical guidance for establishing an innovative new position in city government, a Chief Resilience Officer (CRO), to lead the city's resilience efforts; (b) technical support to develop a holistic resilience strategy that reflects each city's distinct needs; (c) access to an innovative platform of private sector and NGO services to support strategy development and implementation; and (d) inclusion in the 100 Resilient Cities Network to share knowledge and best practices with other member cities.

While such initiatives are supporting MENA efforts, more is needed. We need to make sure that fast growing cities are properly designed so they don't lock in high rates of carbon emission or put people at further risk of disaster. We must work between the public and the private sector and we must build resilience in all cities in MENA across sectors.

Moreover, many MENA cities lack the capacity to maximize their financing options and exploit investment opportunities. City governments need assistance in structuring investments and building the capacity of cities to raise capital through PPPs, concessions, and land value capture transactions.

⁸ <https://www.gfdr.org/en>

⁹ <https://www.100resilientcities.org>

LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned from resilient city development worldwide point to the need for MENA cities to pursue six parallel tracks:

1. *Provide Mayors*, urban leaders, planners and developers with the necessary tools and information to calibrate and measure their city’s resilience in order to make informed governance and investment decisions;
2. *Mobilize* transformational, sustainable improvements to the physical, spatial and functional elements of cities to safeguard against multiple hazards and ensure continuity of urban processes and services;
3. *Empower* cities to ‘do more with what they have’ and catalyze new finance opportunities by promoting resilience as criterion for investments;
4. *Conduct* a set of diagnostics and City Creditworthiness Assessments to assess the city’s enabling environment for private capital mobilization through Debt, PPP and Land Value Capture;
5. *Improve* accountability in local level policy and budgetary decisions; and
6. *Provide* a common, global understanding of urban resilience through the development of indices and performance standards.

CONCLUSION

MENA Cities are centers of innovation and investment and are pivotal for economic growth and development. At the same time, cities are vulnerable to severe impacts from a range of challenges, shocks and stresses that can be both natural and human made. Urban resilience is about development and development is about urban resilience. One cannot exist without the other. From emergency planning to infrastructure investment, from adaptations in urban planning to risk financing, and countless other areas.

Resilience and sustainability are two complementary paradigms of urban development in MENA and we should go beyond conventional approaches to ‘risk reduction’ and advocates for a forward-looking approach to these cities, encompassing the spatial, physical, functional, resilience and organizational dimensions of any human settlement.

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