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Assessing transformative adaptation in Southeast Asian coastal cities

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

Coastal impacts and risks

Source: Figure SPM2

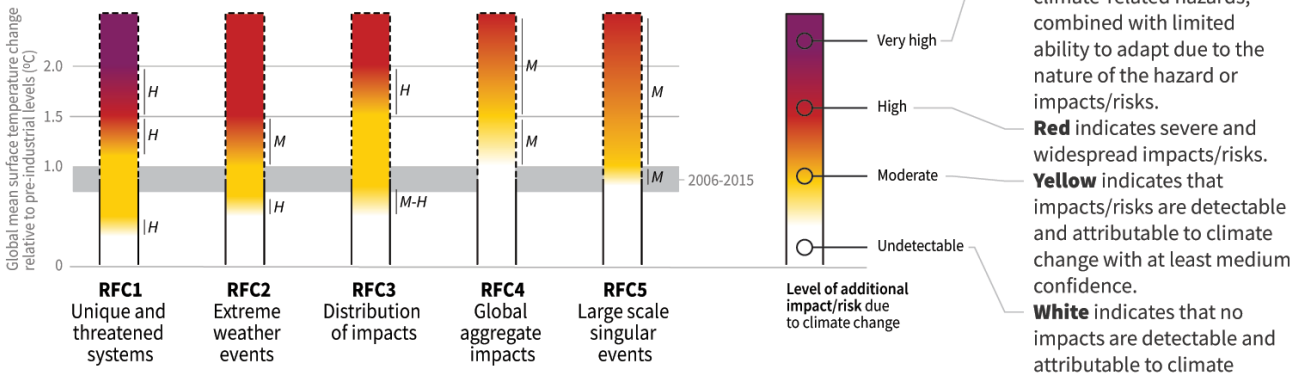
IPCC, 2018: Summary for Policymakers. In: Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, H.-O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J.B.R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M.I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, and T. Waterfield (eds.)]: p. 11.

https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/summary-for-policy-makers/b/spm2-13102018/

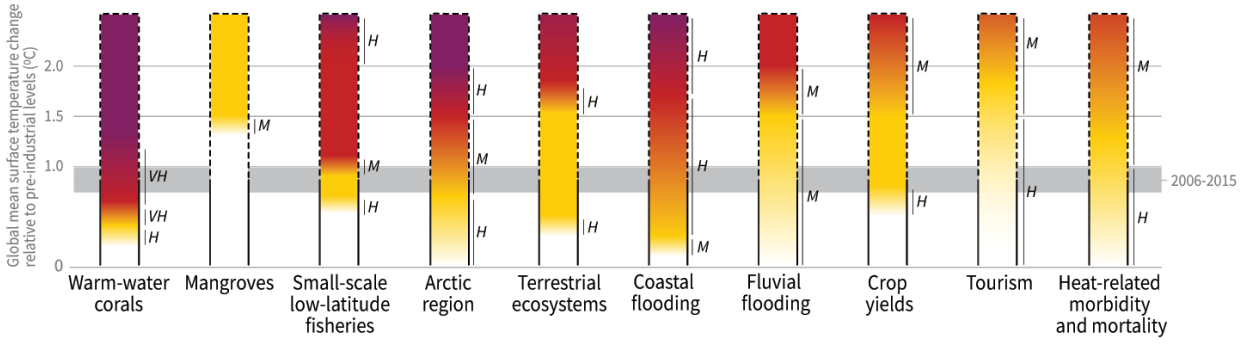
How the level of global warming affects impacts and/or risks associated with the Reasons for Concern (RFCs) and selected natural, managed and human systems

Five Reasons For Concern (RFCs) illustrate the impacts and risks of different levels of global warming for people, economies and ecosystems across sectors and regions.

Impacts and risks associated with the Reasons for Concern (RFCs)



Impacts and risks for selected natural, managed and human systems



Confidence level for transition: *L*=Low, *M*=Medium, *H*=High and *VH*=Very high

Transformation and justice

IPCC 2018:

Path dependency reinforces dominant political-economic structures and processes

Exacerbates inequalities, erodes adaptive capacity

“Adaptation pathway approaches to prepare for 1.5°C warmer futures would be difficult to achieve without considerations for inclusiveness, place-specific trade-off deliberations, redistributive measures and procedural justice mechanisms to facilitate equitable transformation.” (IPCC 2018: 459)

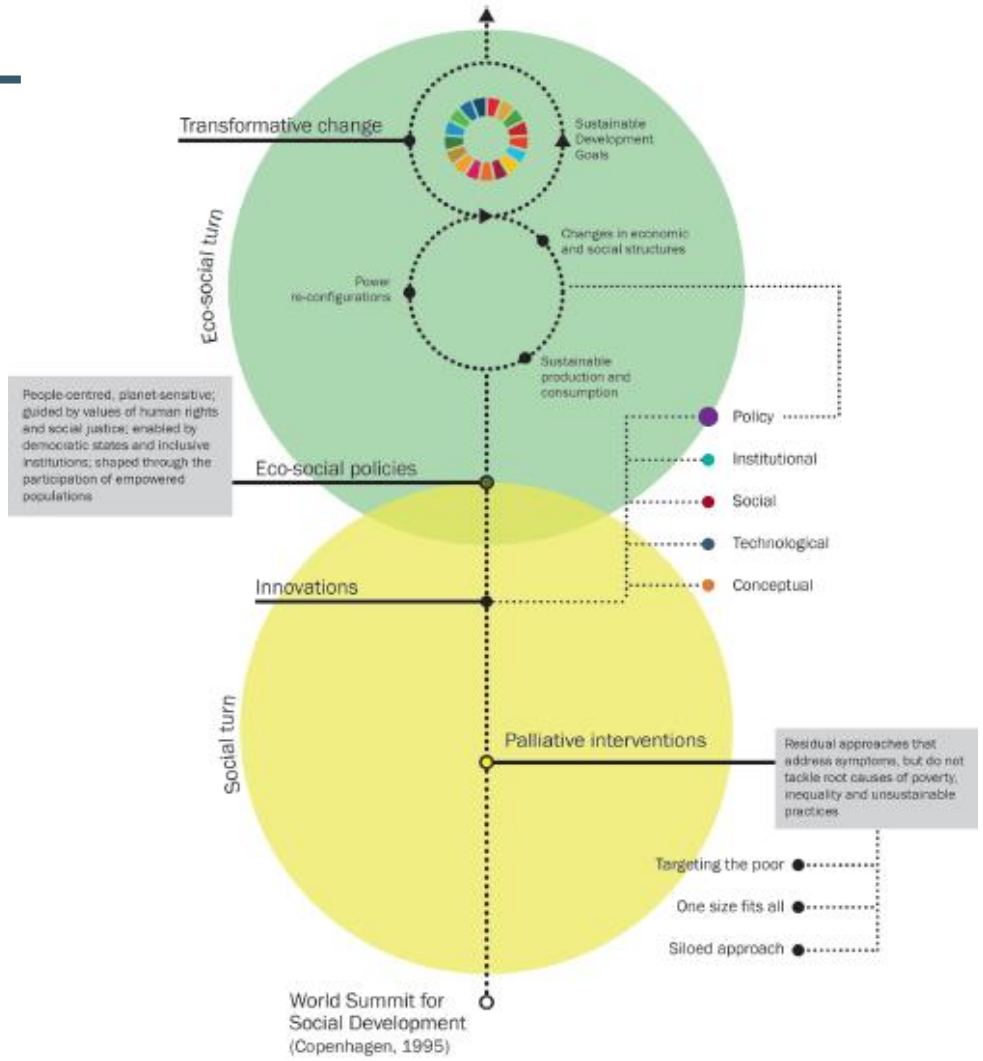
Image: Dunja Krause

Transformative adaptation

Not just large-scale measures, but qualitative shift

Tackles root causes of poverty, inequality and environmental destruction

Can be driven by innovative policies that are grounded in normative values of social justice and environmental sustainability



www.unrisd.org/flagship2016

Visions

- Modern, global city
- Waterfront city
- Centers of wealth and capital accumulation

→ Informal settlements usually not part of these visions

Values

- Inform visions and urban development planning
- Planning often based on ideas of limited number of experts/elites
- Social justice concerns?

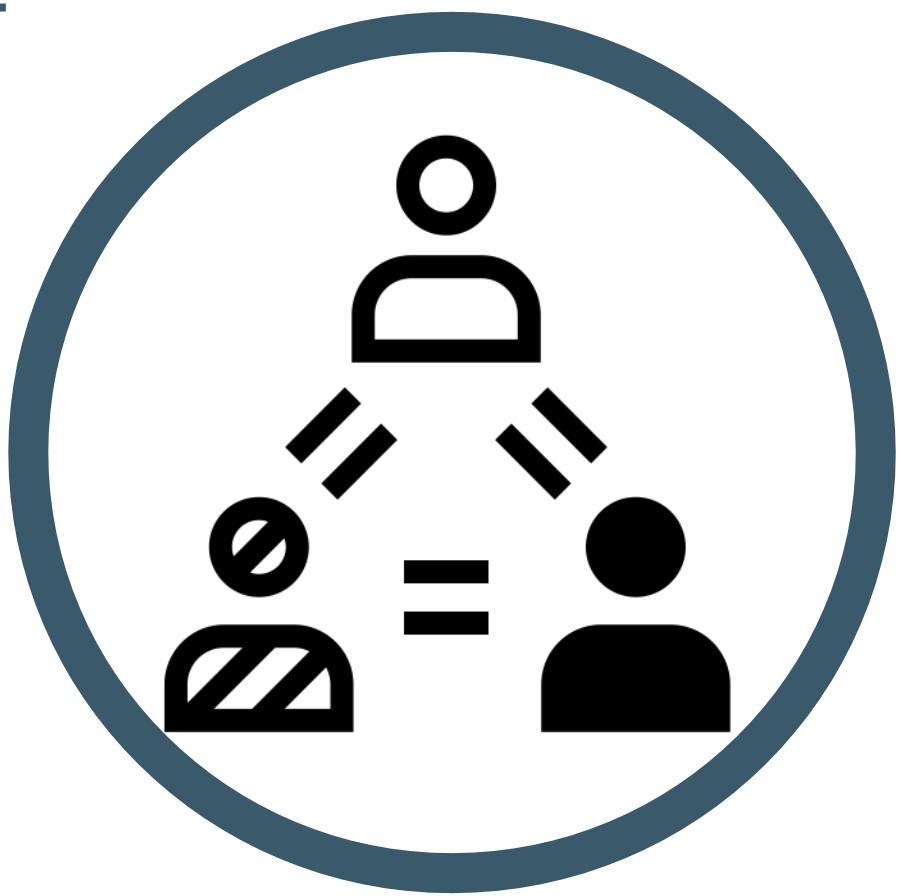


Image: Yu luck, for the Noun Project

Voices

- Leadership – to guide inclusive transformation process
- Participation – to foster mutual understanding
- Recognition – of informal dwellers, their individual strategies and needs

Image: Peg Hunter via Flickr, https://flic.kr/p/28rwgm1

From idea to practice

- Rights-based approach
- Linking climate change related needs with immediate needs, e.g. WASH, health, housing

- De-idealize the concept to ease translation into practice
  - «transformative enough» adaptation
  - Build on incremental adaptation and push for more radical solutions where feasible

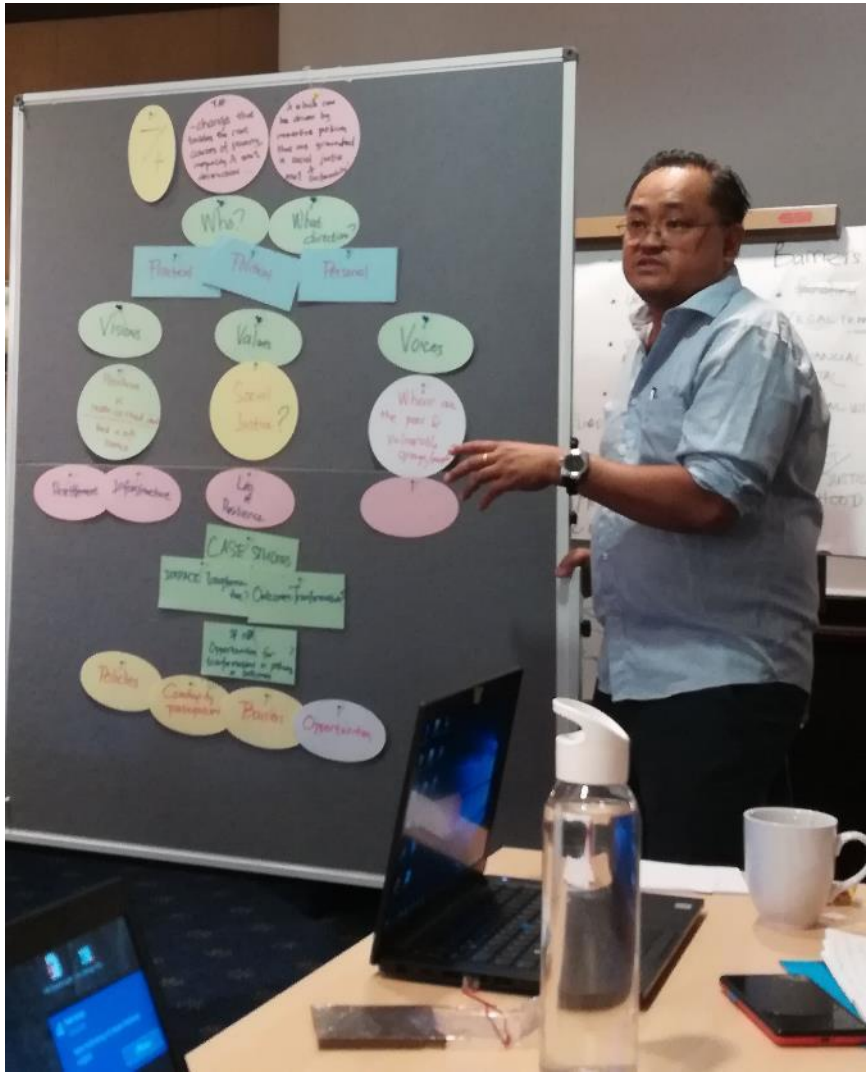


Image: Dunja Krause

Thank you!

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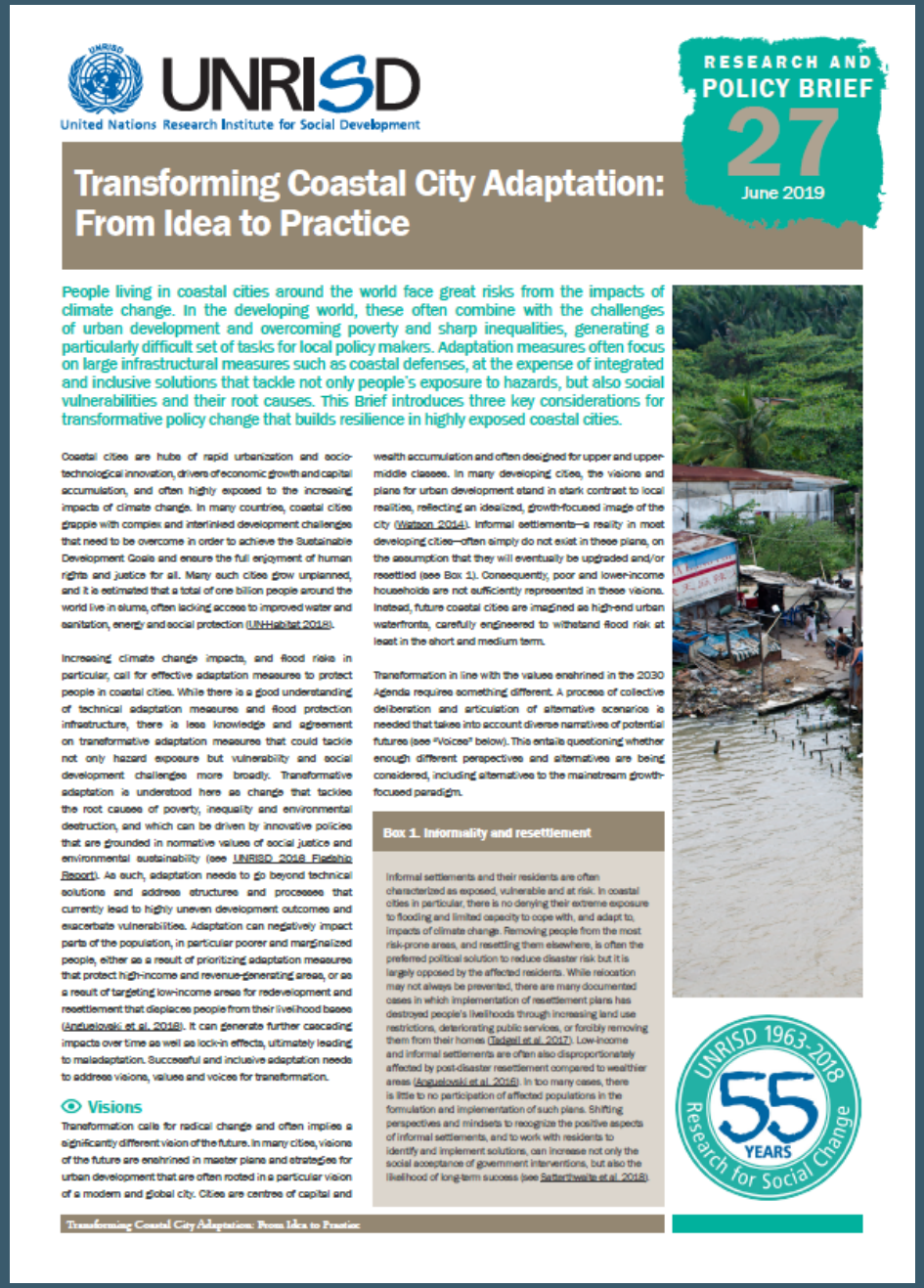

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RESEARCH AND POLICY BRIEF 27

June 2019

Transforming Coastal City Adaptation: From Idea to Practice

People living in coastal cities around the world face great risks from the impacts of climate change. In the developing world, these often combine with the challenges of urban development and overcoming poverty and sharp inequalities, generating a particularly difficult set of tasks for local policy makers. Adaptation measures often focus on large infrastructural measures such as coastal defenses, at the expense of integrated and inclusive solutions that tackle not only people's exposure to hazards, but also social vulnerabilities and their root causes. This Brief introduces three key considerations for transformative policy change that builds resilience in highly exposed coastal cities.

Coastal cities are hubs of rapid urbanization and socio-technological innovation, drivers of economic growth and capital accumulation, and often highly exposed to the increasing impacts of climate change. In many countries, coastal cities grapple with complex and interlinked development challenges that need to be overcome in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights and justice for all. Many such cities grow unplanned, and it is estimated that a total of one billion people around the world live in slums, often lacking access to improved water and sanitation, energy and social protection (UN-Habitat 2018).

Increasing climate change impacts, and flood risks in particular, call for effective adaptation measures to protect people in coastal cities. While there is a good understanding of technical adaptation measures and flood protection infrastructure, there is less knowledge and agreement on transformative adaptation measures that could tackle not only hazard exposure but vulnerability and social development challenges more broadly. Transformative adaptation is understood here as change that tackles the root causes of poverty, inequality and environmental destruction, and which can be driven by innovative policies that are grounded in normative values of social justice and environmental sustainability (see UNRISD 2016 Flagship Report). As such, adaptation needs to go beyond technical solutions and address structures and processes that currently lead to highly uneven development outcomes and exacerbate vulnerabilities. Adaptation can negatively impact parts of the population, in particular poorer and marginalized people, either as a result of prioritizing adaptation measures that protect high-income and revenue-generating areas, or as a result of targeting low-income areas for redevelopment and resettlement that displaces people from their livelihood bases (Anguelovski et al. 2018). It can generate further cascading impacts over time as well as lock-in effects, ultimately leading to maladaptation. Successful and inclusive adaptation needs to address visions, values and voices for transformation.

Visions

Transformation calls for radical change and often implies a significantly different vision of the future. In many cities, visions of the future are enshrined in master plans and strategies for urban development that are often rooted in a particular vision of a modern and global city. Cities are centres of capital and wealth accumulation and often designed for upper and upper-middle classes. In many developing cities, the visions and plans for urban development stand in stark contrast to local realities, reflecting an idealized, growth-focused image of the city (Watson 2014). Informal settlements—a reality in most developing cities—often simply do not exist in these plans, on the assumption that they will eventually be upgraded and/or resettled (see Box 1). Consequently, poor and lower-income households are not sufficiently represented in these visions. Instead, future coastal cities are imagined as high-end urban waterfronts, carefully engineered to withstand flood risk at least in the short and medium term.

Transformation in line with the values enshrined in the 2030 Agenda requires something different. A process of collective deliberation and articulation of alternative scenarios is needed that takes into account diverse narratives of potential futures (see "Voices" below). This entails questioning whether enough different perspectives and alternatives are being considered, including alternatives to the mainstream growth-focused paradigm.

Box 1. Informality and resettlement

Informal settlements and their residents are often characterized as exposed, vulnerable and at risk. In coastal cities in particular, there is no denying their extreme exposure to flooding and limited capacity to cope with, and adapt to, impacts of climate change. Removing people from the most risk-prone areas, and resettling them elsewhere, is often the preferred political solution to reduce disaster risk but it is largely opposed by the affected residents. While relocation may not always be prevented, there are many documented cases in which implementation of resettlement plans has destroyed people's livelihoods through increasing land use restrictions, deteriorating public services, or forcibly removing them from their homes (Tadgell et al. 2017). Low-income and informal settlements are often also disproportionately affected by post-disaster resettlement compared to wealthier areas (Anguelovski et al. 2018). In too many cases, there is little to no participation of affected populations in the formulation and implementation of such plans. Shifting perspectives and mindsets to recognize the positive aspects of informal settlements, and to work with residents to identify and implement solutions, can increase not only the social acceptance of government interventions, but also the likelihood of long-term success (see Satterthwaite et al. 2018).

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