

# Transforming Adaptation to Climate Change in Coastal Cities

HO CHI MINH CITY AND JAKARTA

**Flooding is increasing in frequency and magnitude in coastal cities around the world, causing tremendous human and material losses. In many cities of the Global South, inequalities and informality represent further urban development challenges that compound the impacts of climate change. Transformative adaptation is one possible pathway forward, taking climate change as an opportunity to tackle root causes of poverty, inequality and environmental degradation. Towards this end, policy and decision makers must ask: What does transformative adaptation look like on the ground? What are the visions, opportunities, and challenges for policy change for transformative adaptation in coastal cities?**

## Moving Towards Transformative Adaptation

Despite the knowledge of the scale and urgency of climate change, current climate action is insufficient to tackle its impacts. Poor and marginalized people often suffer disproportionately from climate change and, in some cases, climate adaptation measures. In Jakarta and Ho Chi Minh City, dwellers of slums and informal settlements along waterfronts and canals are especially vulnerable to increased flooding. As a result of urbanization driven by private development and adaptation driven by “hard” solutions, they are also subjected to displacement and relocation, and hence livelihood disruption.

Transformative adaptation involves fundamental changes. Its approach goes beyond technical solutions to reduce hazard exposure and addresses processes and structures that exacerbate vulnerabilities. Transformative adaptation requires inclusive visions for the future, justice-driven values, and diverse voices; its processes involve practical, technical and personal solutions. For Jakarta and Ho Chi Minh City, it would include just and sustainable processes ensuring that dwellers of informal settlements receive recognition, access to public services, and the rights to housing. However, much effort in adaptation and urban development in both cities has resulted in the displacement, and hence livelihood disruption, of informal settlement residents. Transformative adaptation recognizes positive aspects of urban informality and sees relocation only as a last resort.

## Current Adaptation Approaches

Spatial and socio-economic planning in Jakarta and Ho Chi Minh City have built in climate change adaptation. With past and current adaptation strategies focused on reducing hazard exposure, much investment has gone into hard infrastructure such as dykes, sluice gates and seawalls. In Jakarta, adaptation also takes the form of mega-projects. The proposed Great Garuda project in

North Jakarta, a mixed-use complex on reclaimed land, is an example. This project was canceled after a variety of protests and concerns regarding its feasibility.

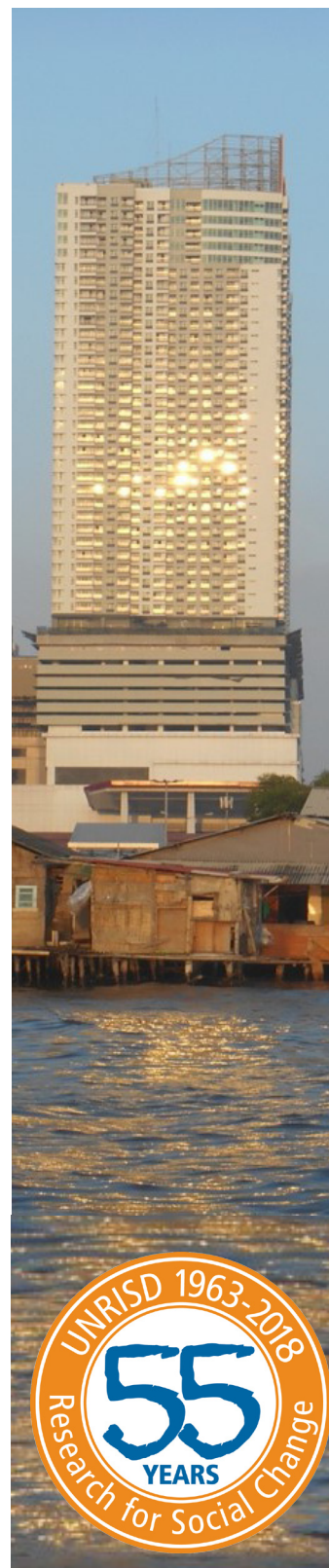
Highly vulnerable to floods, informal settlements have received little attention in these planning and adaptation efforts. In many cases in both cities, informal dwellers have benefited little from hard infrastructural development. In others, they have suffered from its adverse impacts. They are often left to improvise their own short-term and spontaneous coping strategies at the household and community levels.

### Transformative Adaptation to Climate Change in Coastal Cities

On 23–24 June 2019, the Transformative Adaptation in Coastal Cities workshop in Bonn, Germany, brought together local and international experts to discuss transformative adaptation in Jakarta, Indonesia and Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam. Participants presented the initial findings of case studies on the two coastal cities illustrating current adaptation strategies, followed by an in-depth discussion of the visions, opportunities and challenges for transformative adaptation.

The workshop was organized jointly by UNRISD and the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung as part of the project Transformative Adaptation to Climate Change in Coastal Cities, carried out in 2019 and funded by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung with support from the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. The case studies presented at the workshop will be expanded and published individually, and will also feed into a synthesis report to be launched in December 2019.

For more information, please see [www.unrisd.org/climate-change-coastal-cities](http://www.unrisd.org/climate-change-coastal-cities) and UNRISD Research and Policy Brief 27 (“Transforming Coastal City Adaptation: From Idea to Practice”) at [www.unrisd.org/rpb27](http://www.unrisd.org/rpb27)



## Challenges and Opportunities

Both cities face numerous challenges in implementing transformative adaptation. One is a lack of public engagement in decision-making processes; existing public consultation, though required of project implementation procedures, tends to be cursory, done only as a matter of form. Sectoral competition, administrative inefficiencies, leading role of private development, and lack of financial resources further hinder the progress towards transformative adaptation. In the case of Jakarta, lack of consultation and cooperation across sectors and agencies led to misalignment between municipal adaptation strategies and community-level coping mechanisms, causing strong political tensions.

Yet the case studies also revealed some reasons for hope in both Ho Chi Minh City and Jakarta. Opportunities for change in Ho Chi Minh City include Resolution 54/2017/QH14 on self-governance, recently adopted by the Vietnamese National Assembly, and funding from the World Bank for institutional reform for urban development in the city. The municipal government has also shifted from flood mitigation to a more people-centered approach of flood risk mitigation. In Jakarta, a consortium of non-profit organizations and government agencies is working with communities to adapt and transform, via the participatory, multistakeholder design of a risk management and sustainable development plan.



### Marunda and Waduk Pluit, Jakarta

Marunda, a densely populated coastal settlement in Northern Jakarta, has set an example for effective public-private coordination in climate adaptation. In response to frequent flooding and its cascading impacts on the area's informal dwellers, public agencies and civil society organizations have come together with local residents to identify solutions. These actions, carried out through the Marunda Urban Resilience in Action Consortium, have resulted in sustainable improvements in the livelihood and resilience of this highly exposed community.

Northern Jakarta is also the location of Waduk Pluit, a reservoir once encircled by informal settlements as well as informal trash dumps. As a response to flooding issues, the city piloted a reservoir restoration project, evicting households on the banks of Waduk Pluit and rebuilding an open, green space. But the lack of social protection as well as institutional and technical capacity have hindered transformative adaptation here.



### Tan Hoa–Lo Gom and Xuyen Tam, Ho Chi Minh City

Tan Hoa–Lo Gom, a major navigation channel, had become a heavily polluted, neglected canal in Ho Chi Minh City. A canal sanitation and urban upgrading project between 1998 and 2006 was an innovation and success, with important lessons for implementing transformative adaptation in the city today. From the very beginning of all components of the project, there were efforts to engage the community in decision making in order to minimize livelihood disruption. Citizens had an active voice in the location or relocation of their settlements.

Xuyen Tam, another canal cutting through Ho Chi Minh City, currently suffers from severe pollution. Informal settlements along both banks experience frequent inundation. The city is proposing to relocate households along the canal, to restore the waterbody, redevelop the banks and prevent flooding. Upgrading of Xuyen Tam can benefit from financial resources and institutional reform due to increased interest from international institutions such as the World Bank, as mentioned above, as well as increasingly frequent public-private financing mechanisms. Limited political will and insufficient legal frameworks to adopt more rights-based approaches are persistent barriers, however. Current leadership is driven by a desire for growth through private development, while legal provisions suffer from numerous loopholes and implementation gaps when it comes to resettlement and social protection.

## Conclusion

The case studies presented at the workshop show that transformative adaptation is much needed, not only to cope with climate change risks but also to ensure justice for all. But transformative adaptation is a complex process involving a multiplicity of stakeholders with diverse visions and voices. Transformative adaptation may look different in each locality. The kind of successful innovative change seen in Tan Hoa–Lo Gom and Marunda may not work in Waduk Pluit, Xuyen Tam or elsewhere. However, these examples demonstrate that both Ho Chi Minh City and Jakarta are capable of planning and implementing adaptation in a way that is just and sustainable. Comprehensive studies in both Jakarta and Ho Chi Minh City, essential for an in-depth understanding of the issues and possible pathways forward, are under way.

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This brief was prepared by Minh Tran. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of UNRISD.

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