

CITIES AT RISK

Developing Adaptive Capacity for Climate Change in Asia's Coastal Megacities



Asia is undergoing unprecedented urban growth that will add substantially to the population residing in its coastal regions. Much of this rapid population and economic growth is occurring in large coastal cities at high risk from sea level rise and climate change. Asia's densely populated deltas and other low-lying coastal urban areas are among those described in the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report as “key societal hotspots of coastal vulnerability” with many millions of people potentially affected. The potential for loss in the region has been amply demonstrated in the recent past by loss of life and property from flooding, particularly when high tides were combined with storm surges and high river flows. The risks posed by climate change to Asia's coastal population will persist, despite any greenhouse gas stabilization, in that future sea level rise and climate change are unavoidable given existing high atmospheric CO₂ levels and projected growth in population and infrastructure.

Physical risks and vulnerabilities in these regions are often accompanied by a deficit of adaptive capacity (i.e., the ability to cope with the risk and vulnerabilities posed by climate change) as the cities generally lack necessary resources - financial, human, and institutional - as well as access to relevant scientific information. Despite urgent threats posed by the combination of sea level rise and climate change, local governments and the international development community have not as yet seriously considered the implications of climate change and sea level rise or location on rapidly growing coastal populations and infrastructure (World Bank, 2007). This argues for urgent attention to risk and vulnerability assessment, awareness raising, and integration of science into planning and policy for the potentially affected areas.

Workshop: Cities at Risk

The Cities at Risk workshop, to be held 26-28 February 2009 in Bangkok, Thailand, will bring together scientists, urban planners and officials, and representatives of disaster management and development agencies to review scientific findings and projections regarding climate-related risks (e.g., sea level rise, extreme climate events, intensification of storms and storm surges) for Asia's coastal megacities. Participants will examine potential vulnerabilities and current coping mechanisms that better integrate science information, planning, development, and disaster management. The workshop will also consider means for improving networking and communication between urban planners/officials and the scientific community in order to enhance urban resilience and adaptive capacities.

The workshop will involve the following cities: Dhaka (Bangladesh), Shanghai and Hong Kong / Shenzhen / Guangzhou (China), Mumbai and Calcutta (India), Jakarta (Indonesia), Karachi (Pakistan), Manila (Philippines), Bangkok (Thailand), and Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam). A team of scientists and urban planners/policy-makers will represent each city and will prepare a brief background report on the state of climate risk management for its city. Additional workshop participants from the international science community, including scientists from the Asia-Pacific region, will prepare background papers and make plenary presentations. Background papers and reports and plenary speakers will provide context for a major component of the workshop - breakout sessions led by facilitators to encourage interaction and discussion between the participants present from scientific, policy, and practitioner communities.

The Cities at Risk workshop will facilitate heightened awareness in official and academic communities of climate risks, vulnerabilities, and potential adaptation options in Asia's coastal megacities and the need to take early action. Other key outcomes include increased integration of climate risk information with urban planning, development, and disaster management and consideration of future steps for developing adaptive management capacity throughout the region. Workshop participants will work together to provide recommendations as to future priorities for policy-relevant research and science-based capacity building. Specific workshop outputs will include a workshop report, a monograph or special journal issue of selected workshop papers, and a policy brief based on workshop presentations, discussions, and recommendations.

The Cities at Risk workshop is an initial step in what is intended to be a longer-term set of activities for developing urban adaptive capacities and integrating science and policy in managing climate risks in Asia's coastal megacities. The workshop is intended to help identify next steps and priorities for subsequent research and capacity building. Future activities may include the development of resource materials, hands-on thematic training courses, and advanced workshops and institutes, as well as coordinated research programs and networking activities.

Program Partners and Sponsors

The Cities at Risk workshop is being organized by the East West Center (www.eastwestcenter.org), the global change SysTEM for Analysis, Research, and Training (START; www.start.org), and Ibaraki University/IR3S (www.ibaraki.ac.jp), in collaboration with many other partners including the World Climate Research Program (WCRP; <http://wcrp.wmo.int>), the Asian Development Bank (ADB; www.adb.org), the ICSU Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (www.icsu-asia-pacific.org), Land-Ocean Interactions in the Coastal Zone (LOICZ; www.loicz.org), the Monsoon Asia Integrated Regional Study (MAIRS; www.mairs-essp.org), and the IHDP Urban Global Environmental Change (UGEC) project (www.ihdp.unu.edu/article/UGEC). The START Regional Center at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand is the local workshop host. The workshop is funded by the Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research (APN), the International Council for Science (ICSU), and Ibaraki University/IR3S, with support from other organizations pending.

For Additional Information

Attendance at the workshop is by invitation only. For additional information, please contact Prof. Roland Fuchs (FuchsR@EastWestCenter.org) at the East West Center or Ms. Clark Seipt (cseipt@agu.org) at START.



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