

Resilience of African Cities and Post – 2015 Development Agenda

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Abstract

Africa, like many other continents of the World is not spared from the impacts of devastating disasters triggered by nature and human activities. These adverse impacts, combined with poverty, poor policy and institutional frameworks, make Africa one of the most vulnerable continents to climate change, climate variability and other forms of disasters. The development of the continent is seriously challenged due to its inability to make cities within the continent resilient to the adverse effects associated with disaster impacts. The impacts no doubt, destroy development gains and still pose a serious challenge to future development. This leaves many African countries struggling for development. There cannot be any meaningful development in any country if its cities are not resilient to disasters. This paper tries to examine the situation of African cities already inflicted by the impact and threats of climate change and other forms of disasters using secondary data sourced from relevant literatures. It also assesses the continent's level of resilience and concludes that for Africa to be relevant as a continent in the Post-2015 Development map; its cities must be resilient to the impact of climate-related and other disasters because sustainable development cannot be achieved unless cities are safe and resilient.

Keywords: Africa, development, sustainable development, resilience and climate change

Introduction

Africa is one of the most spoken about continents across the globe today. There are many issues about the continent that interests people in other continents which makes Africa a force to be reckoned with. The rate of its economic growth, political and social activities, environmental composition and the level of poverty among its people are all subjects of concern to theorists, scholars as well as observers from within and other climes. Although, the continent is not stagnant, the rate at which it is developing triggers the consciousness of its people and also calls for a repositioning on the global development agenda. African leaders have over the years made concerted efforts to place the continent in the fore of development agenda but the challenges that militate against such laudable efforts are enormous.

For instance, many development efforts within the continent have been destroyed by unchecked rate of disaster occurrence triggered by both natural and human induced hazards. The conditions of vulnerability of the people and their communities are obvious, with low resilience to the impacts of disasters. Ayuk (2012:153) recently noted that if there is any continent in which the interfaces among social, economic and environmental spheres are very important, it is the African continent. The continent is endowed with huge amounts of different types of natural resources. Despite impressive economic growth during the past ten years, these gains are threatened by climate change and other challenges. The threats posed by the changing climate which is a reality today to communities and cities in Africa cannot be over-emphasized.

Climate change poses a big threat to Africa's economic growth (due to changes in natural systems and resources), long-term prosperity, as well as the survival of the already vulnerable populations. Agricultural production and food security in many regions of Africa will likely be severely compromised by climate change and climate variability. Climate change will worsen the water stress currently faced by some countries, while some countries that are not at risk will also be at risk of water stress. Changes in a variety of ecosystems are already being detected faster than anticipated, particularly in southern African ecosystems. Climate change and variability could also result in the inundation of low-lying lands, including coastal settlements. Human health could be further negatively impacted upon by climate change and climate variability, for example,

there has been an increase in the prevalence of malaria in southern Africa and in the East African highlands. These adverse impacts, combined with poverty, poor policy and institutional frameworks, make Africa one of the most vulnerable continents to climate change and climate variability (AMCEN, 2011:3). There is no doubt about the urgency with which African leaders need to champion the course of making African cities and communities resilient to the impact of climate change and other disasters in the Post-2015 Development process.

This paper tries to examine the situation of African cities inflicted already by the impact and threats of further climate change and climate variability. It assesses the continent's level of resilience and proposes that for Africa as a continent to be relevant on Post-2015 Development agenda; its cities must be resilient to the impact of climate related and other disasters. This is because sustainable development cannot be achieved unless disaster risks are reduced, cities are safe and resilient (UNISDR, 2015: V).

The Concept of Resilience and its relevance to Africa

The term 'resilience' originated in the 1970s in the field of ecology from the research of C. S. Holling (Pisano, 2012:8). Holling defines resilience originally as a measure of persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables (Holling, 1973:14). Resilience is a relatively new concept in disaster risk management. Disaster risk management experts and development workers globally believe making cities resilient to impact of disasters is a prerequisite to sustainable development. This informed the theme of the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005 - 2015) 'building the resilience of communities and nations to disasters'. The framework which was signed by 168 countries in 2005 (including African countries) at the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, Kobe, Japan has become the key global instrument for guiding the implementation of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters.

The term resilience has featured prominently in literatures recently. Many scholars have offered insightful and practical definitions of the concept resilience. Walker and Salt (2006:1) defines resilience as the ability of a system to absorb disturbances and still retain its basic function and

structure. In other words, resilience is the capacity to change in order to maintain the same identity. (Folke et al., 2010:20). In a report, Rockefeller Foundation (2009) defines resilience as the capacity of individuals, communities and systems to survive, adapt, and grow in the face of stress and shocks, and even transform when conditions require it. Also, UNISDR (2009) defines resilience as the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions. And most recently, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2014) defines resilience as the capacity of social, economic, and environmental systems to cope with hazardous events or trends or disturbances, responding or reorganizing in ways that maintain their essential function, identity, and structure, while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning, and transformation.

In a trend, most of these definitions posit that a system should have the capacity to survive and grow in the face of adverse and negative events such as hazards which have potential to create disturbances in the system. Our understanding of disaster as an event that overwhelms or disrupts the capacity of an individual, household, community, city, province or country to resist or recover from the impacts without outside assistance. Peripheri (2002:196), brings to the fore the question of how many cities in Africa have such capacity to resist and recover from the impact of disaster without outside assistance? Even those that have access to external support recover in a manner that is not timely and efficient. A resilient city should be able to cope with shocks and stresses and coordinate itself in such a way that the normal functioning of the city is retained and adaptive capacity is ensured.

Resilience as an African agenda in the Post-2015 Development process is inevitable. The impact of climate change is real and already manifesting in many African cities. The resultant effects of climate change and other forms of disasters have the potential in the future to destroy development gains in Africa. It is not impossible for many cities in the continent that are already poor to become poorer because they tend to be more vulnerable. African cities must be resilient to the impact of disasters in all its forms to be well positioned in the global development agenda. Disasters have shown to be inimical to development, as development creates opportunities for disasters to happen except in situations where the cities are resilient.

Causes and impacts of disasters on cities in Africa

Africa, like many other continents of the World is not spared from the impacts of devastating disasters triggered by nature and human activities. The nature of its increasing population, rapid urbanization and poor management, weak institutions and political instability, struggling economy (in many of the states), trade-centric and other cultural beliefs are among the factors that contribute to the continent’s increasing vulnerability and exposure to hazards. German Committee for Disaster Reduction (2012:38) in a report identifies the inherent negativities in the areas of development, governance, awareness and perception, political environment and physical and environmental conditions as the root causes of disasters (Table 1). These conditions are however, prevalent in many African countries.

Table 1: Disaster root causes

Development	Governance	Awareness and Perception	Political Environment	Physical and Environmental Conditions
Lack of resources and capacities (human, financial, technical)	Inflexible donor and funding mechanisms	Failed perception	Post civil war and conflict impacts	Natural climate variability
Inadequate Equipment	Corruption and leadership	Ignorance of humanitarian standards	Political Instability	Climate change
Lack of education and knowledge	Legal framework and law enforcement	Culture, tradition and religious norms and beliefs	Centralized government structures	Geophysical conditions
Missing building codes	Lack of governmental commitment to DRM and development			
Inadequate urban and land use planning	Lack of DRM coordination mechanism			
	Lack of communication across scales			
	Land ownership structures			
	Missing consideration of basic needs / Missing involvement of civil society			

Source: German committee for disaster reduction (DKKV, 2012)

The impact of climate related disasters and other forms of disasters are tremendous especially in the last one decade. UNDP (2015:10) in a report affirms that climate and hydrological hazards, in particular drought, floods and cyclone, dominate the disaster profile of the African region, affecting on average around 12.5 million people each year. It states further that in the last 10 years of the HFA (Hyogo Framework for Action), Africa has seen substantial flooding, such as in Nigeria in 2010 and 2012, Mozambique in 2007 and Namibia in 2009 and 2011, and recorded extreme temperatures across the Sahel. Drought is perhaps the dominant hazard. The 10 countries globally with the highest percentage of their population annually affected by drought (Kellet et al, 2014) are all African: Malawi, Niger, Swaziland, Somalia, Kenya, Eritrea, Djibouti, Zimbabwe, Mauritania and Lesotho. All these have had more than 5% of their entire populations annually affected by drought. The Huairou Commission (2015:24) in a survey conducted among 402 community women in Africa affirms that all the respondents have been affected by at least 2 types of disasters or climate change impact, such as drought (49%), extreme heat (44%) and floods (42%). This is obvious since community women are among the most vulnerable elements in all countries of the World.

An EM-DAT record between 2005 - 2014 shows that 711 disaster events occurred in Africa leading to the deaths of over 40,000 people while another 137million people were affected one way or the other with total damage cost of \$2.9 billion (EM-DAT, <http://www.emdat.be>). This development is not healthy for a continent that has not really occupied a desired position on the global development agenda. The resilience option is thus inevitable for Africa to be able to mitigate the negative impacts of disaster which tend to delay the continent's development.

Assessment of the level of resilience in African cities

There are many tools available for assessing level of resilience of cities and nations to disasters worldwide. This paper makes use of John Twigg's Characteristic of Resilient Cities. Twigg in 2009 provided 5 thematic characteristics of resilient cities and the various component of each theme that is suitable for assessing city's level of resilience as presented and discussed in Table 2.

Table 2: Characteristics of a resilient city

Thematic Areas	Components of Resilience
1. Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy, planning, priorities and political commitment • Legal and regulatory systems • Integration with development policies and planning • Integration with emergency response and recovery • Institutional mechanisms, capacities and structures; allocation of responsibilities • Partnerships • Accountability and community participation
2. Risk Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hazards/risk data and assessment • Vulnerability/capacity and impact data and assessment • Scientific and technical capacities and innovation
3. Knowledge and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public awareness, knowledge and skills • Information management and sharing • Education and training • Cultures, attitudes, motivation • Learning and research
4. Risk Management and Vulnerability Reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental and natural resource management • Health and well being • Sustainable livelihoods • Social protection • Financial instruments • Physical protection; structural and technical measures • Planning régimes
5. Disaster Preparedness and Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational capacities and coordination • Early warning systems • Preparedness and contingency planning • Emergency resources and infrastructure • Emergency response and recovery • Participation, voluntarism, accountability

Source: John Twigg, 2009

From table 2, only very few African states can pass the resilience test looking at the present situation of cities in Africa. Majority lacks institutional capacity to reduce risks and make the cities resilient to disasters. 'Political will' is a major challenge in many African states while there are no functional regulatory systems that will enhance preparedness and response which are all prerequisite to resilience building in the cities. Scientific and technical capacities are still very scarce which hinder qualitative and quantitative risk assessment in African cities. Public awareness is still on low ebb, while culture and attitudes of the African

people are yet to be proactive on issues of preparedness and resilience. The conditions that make African cities to be susceptible to the impact of climate change, climate variability and other forms of disasters are conspicuous in many African cities. Capacities to prepare, prevent, mitigate and response to shocks and stresses associated with disaster impacts are not visible among the people and institutions that should serve as agents of resilient building. This suffices to say that the level of resilience of cities in Africa is still very low even when many of the countries in Africa were signatories to HFA (2005 – 2015) which already expired and have also signed and agreed to implement the new framework known as Sendai Framework Action (2015-2030).

Ensuring the resilience of African cities in post-2015 development process

The journey to resilient African cities ought to have started earlier but the gap in Millennium Development Goals whose life span ended in 2015 which did not really address resilience as a goal, might have been a setback. Such challenge has therefore, been addressed in the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (2015 – 2030) ratified by the United Nations in September, 2015. The proposed goal 11, ‘make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’ (ICSU, ISSC, 2015:55) will provide opportunities for willing cities and African states to achieve resilience in the stipulated period of time. Although, the fear of financing resilience is always there, African cities should see this as opportunity for insuring their development. The goal should be pursued religiously based of the fact that resilience is prerequisite to sustainable development. To ensure resilience to impacts of climate change and other forms of disasters, African cities should provide the following as the post-2015 development agenda is being unveiled, buffer capacity, self organization and adaptive capacity (Okali, 2012:179).

Ifejika (2010) cited in Okali (2012:179) highlights certain factors that contribute to resilience which African cities can benefit from to include:

Buffer capacity

- Diversity of livelihood options;
- Raised human capital endowments;
- Improved rights access to livelihood resources;

- Improved incomes;
- Enhanced site specific knowledge;
- Policies that serve as incentives;
- A tendency towards stewardship, rather than just exploitation; and
- Enhanced environmental benefits;

Self organization

- Dependency on local resources;
- Cooperation and networking among components of the system;
- Ownership resources;
- Degree of dependence on indigenous knowledge; and
- Flexibility in decision making.

Increase adaptive capacity

- Opportunities for knowledge combination, promoted by existence of variety of learning platforms;
- Functioning feedback mechanisms: especially among stakeholders;
- Narrowing of power differentials; and
- Reliance on indigenous knowledge.

Conclusion

The only way to enjoy and ensure sustainable development in many African cities is to place resilience to impact of disasters as regional priority in the Post-2015 development process, which will afford the continent a proper place in the Post-2015 Development map. This is because the continent cannot be insulated from the negative impacts of disasters especially those related to climate change and climate variability. Climate change is a global threat whose impact is already manifesting in many continents including Africa. These impacts if not checked through resilience mechanisms will always destroy huge investments on development in the continent.

The onus of making African cities resilient to impact of disasters is the responsibility of the individual state within the continent but a serious commitment and drive should be provided by regional actors as well as sub-regional actors. Just as the United Nations is ever ready to pursue development process globally, although acting locally, African Union (AU),

Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) and many other sub-regional bodies in Africa should set resilience building in African cities as priority. This should, however be pursued religiously with financial support to implement key activities and policies to make a resilient Africa visible.

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