

# 16th Global Forum on Human Settlements on resilient and carbon-neutral cities

Loretta Hieber-Girardet

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)

Keynote Address

Leave No Cities Behind

10:50 CET, 27 October 2021

Thank you very much for that warm introduction.

On behalf of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, it is my great pleasure to deliver this keynote address for today's session of this 16<sup>th</sup> Global Forum on Human Settlements.

The theme of my presentation – Leave No Cities Behind – will perhaps have a familiar ring for many of you in that it takes up the call of inclusion; this time in terms of cities rather than individual people.

I will focus my remarks on disaster and climate resilience, in particular. I will also speak to both the challenge and the opportunity to hand at this late hour in the Climate Emergency coupled – not least – with the ongoing global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While we continue to grapple with COVID-19 it is important to remind ourselves that climate change remains *the* great risk driver.

It amplifies disaster losses, both in terms of human lives and livelihoods as well as the overall economy. And these losses are increasingly concentrated in urban areas.

Over the past 30 years, 90% of all disasters have been related to climate change and extreme weather events. Climate change is generating more powerful storms,

exacerbating coastal flooding, causing more deadly heatwaves, and prompting greater water shortages and more protracted drought.

And, these disasters are now coming to cities which historically have not previously been disaster prone.

As urban areas face up to escalating exposure to climate risk many are continuing to wrestle with a host of largely unaddressed vulnerabilities.

The result is a series of often inter-related bad outcomes, not least increased poverty, rising gender-based violence, and widespread displacement.

At the same time, critical infrastructure systems and services, including health, education, transport, telecommunications, and water and power supplies, are either struggling to cope or, at times, failing completely.

Such municipalities can be found everywhere. They are in the world's Least Developed Countries (LDC) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

They can also be found in the world's bigger countries, both in terms of the smaller cities beyond the capitals, as well as the rapidly growing peri-urban/informal settlement areas of some of the world's biggest cities.

Yet, if we pause and reflect for a moment, we can also glimpse a huge opportunity amid this extremely challenging context.

We all know that if we do more before hazards strike then fewer people die and fewer people are hampered in their lives and their livelihoods. Homes remain dry and standing. Roads stay clear. Bridges remain standing. Power and water supplies keep working. Schools and hospitals stay open. In other words: **the more cities do now in terms of resilience, the less they will suffer – and the less they will pay – in the future.**

This is an ambition that requires scaling up and rolling out on a global scale. And in this year of the Olympics, I very much believe it can be achieved through what I would term a **Triple Jump To Resilience**.

First, we need to scale up support for cities to increase their **capacity to implement**. This will help cities to establish inclusive governance mechanisms that effectively coordinate resilience policy and action across sectors and between levels.

Second, we need to scale up support for cities to develop their own local project pipelines and their ability **to access and manage finance** to resource their resilience policy and action.

Third, we need to scale up support for cities to broker and manage **genuine and durable partnerships** to enable their resilience policy and action.

Imagine the positive impact such a scaled up, rolled out **Triple Jump To Resilience** would have. Let me take infrastructure as just one key area of urban development to make the point.

In the next 20 years more infrastructure is set to be built than in the previous 2000 years. The vast majority of this will be in cities.

Ensuring that this new infrastructure withstands the adverse effects of natural hazards and is indeed largely 'fit for purpose' in this era of climate change would represent by far the biggest example ever of disaster risk reduction being an investment and not a cost.

This approach very much reflects the so-called 'Localization Agenda' which I was closely involved with through my engagement with the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.

The experience of COVID-19 has only revalidated the fact that there is no better formula for humanitarian **and** development cooperation than national and international partners working with and through local leadership and capacity that is inclusive and integrated. It supports local solutions. It leads to local impact.

Effective international cooperation was the theme of International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction two weeks ago, on 13 October. Progress in this regard is linked to Target F) of the Sendai Framework, the global blueprint for national and local governments and their partners to prevent and reduce disaster risk.

The International Day's main message is compelling: while the hour is late in terms of the Climate Emergency, there is still time for real action on climate in the next decade.

Taking such action will have a very real result: it will mean that extreme weather events will still very much challenge cities but **not** overwhelm them.

Effective international cooperation is also the cornerstone of the United Nations' newly launched Common Agenda for the next 25 years. This Agenda represents the Secretary-General's vision of a future of reinvigorated, inclusive, and networked global cooperation which very much includes effective multilateralism.

One such reinvigorated, inclusive, and networked global partnership is the Making Cities Resilient 2030, widely known as MCR2030.

MCR2030 was launched earlier this year by UNDRR and a collaboration of 10 core partners with experience and expertise in urban development. I believe MCR2030 is an important avenue for cities to make that **Triple Jump To Resilience** referenced a minute or so ago.

MCR2030 a **long-term** and **inclusive partnership** that supports cities to identify and **own** their vision of disaster resilience. Throughout, it aims to leave no city behind **or** alone.

It is a partnership that is proving increasingly attractive to an inclusive and diverse range of local governments. Let me quickly reference three quite different municipalities to make the point.

First there is the prefecture of Olimpia, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, with a population of just 54.

Moving up the scale in terms of population there is the city of Arua, in Uganda, with a population 360,000, one of several in that so-called mid-city range.

And finally, there is the mega-city of Khartoum, in Sudan, with a population of more than 8 million. This is the equivalent of almost 150,000 Olimpias in terms of population but in the world of MCR2030 both are regarded with the same importance on their respective journeys of resilience.

An online Dashboard provides a market-place for all these cities to access knowledge, experience, networks, tools, resources, and services provided by development partners, academia, and the private sector.

Current available services include technical support for climate scenario planning, green bonds, revision of building codes, the integration of health hazards into risk assessments, among others.

Such innovative partnerships are calling time on the traditional narrative that looks backwards and focuses on responding to disaster losses to a new narrative that looks forwards and focuses on creating significant economic and social dividends as a result of investing in disaster resilience.

To be fair, the long-standing response-rebuild model taps into the laudable desire of governments, development partners, and people to help others whose lives and livelihoods have been devastated from disaster. This humanitarian tradition is something I was proud to be a part of for a large part of my own career.

However, this approach – which sees the vast majority of resources channeled to response rather than prevention – is failing to keep up with the rising tide of disasters. It is failing in terms of us achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11.

Simply put, cities and human settlements cannot be inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable with disasters constantly chipping away at hard-earned local development gains and continually locking people into poverty.

It is a case of supplementing rather than supplanting our proud humanitarian tradition. And what a powerful supplement we should take: **Nothing less than a transformative shift in policy and action based on that Triple Jump To Resilience that sees cities increase their capacity to implement, attract finance, and manage supportive partnerships.**

This new narrative will showcase how investing in risk reduction is a benefit - even if a disaster does not occur. It protects and diversifies existing and new livelihoods, strengthens environmental protection, boosts community engagement and empowerment, and attracts more investment and partnership to a city.

It is now widely accepted that for every dollar invested in preventing and reducing disaster risk, a significantly bigger amount is saved on reduced expenditure on

response and rebuilding. We often say for every \$1 spent on risk reduction \$3 or more is saved on response and recovery depending on the context.

With only four days to go before the critical discussions at COP26, I would like to conclude with one final message: The road to Glasgow is short. The road from Glasgow, meanwhile, is much longer and in many ways more important. Let us take that road together and let us transform it into a sustainable pathway to urban resilience that **Leaves No City Behind**.

Thank you very much.