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Outlook and Way Forward

Building resilience against disaster risks in Arab cities is of utmost importance. The question remains how to select the optimum pathway towards building capacities among multiple stakeholders and thus adequately execute resilience-building interventions. The cases provided in this report illustrate how different cities are addressing this question. Practice shows that this work is very much evolving, along with our improving awareness of what is important and what is feasible.

Across the Arab region, there are multiple initiatives aimed at building resilience in the urban context. They vary in size, thematic focus, implementation modality, level of engagement with different state and non-state stakeholders, duration, etc. In all interventions, the most important prerequisite is the commitment by local actors to resilience-building, as well as the support they receive from the national governments and international development partners. This commitment comes with enhanced awareness of the importance and benefits of resilience-building. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that further investment is made in awareness-raising among all stakeholders and in developing their capacities in the performance domains referred to the analytical framework outlined in this report (Table 12).

The report has identified several contextual aspects of resilience-building in Arab cities.

1. The region is exposed to significant hydrometeorological hazards, whereby the nexus of water-energy-food security is of prime importance for the region. Some cities in the region are facing up to 5°C temperature increases, which is far above average projections. Since water stress is a particular challenge throughout the region, governance and capacities for urban resilience are often seen through the lens of sustainable development and climate change adaptation, which provide a strong entry point for increased synergy across thematic sectors. These links need to be further strengthened through programmatic activities on the part of all donors.
2. The seismic risk is also highly articulated in some cities in the region. Ensuring adoption and, more importantly, enforcement of the building codes remains a high priority task, as well as developing appropriate risk transfer mechanisms. The insurance industry in the Arab States remains underdeveloped due to the weak culture of buying insurance policies. Therefore the option of risk transfer is not available to most of the vulnerable segments of society.
3. Many cities in the region are subject to both hydrometeorological and geophysical hazards. The complex nature of the evolving risk landscape is most articulated in coastal areas, which are particularly susceptible to both flood, seismic and climate risks.
4. The region is home to a growing number of large agglomerations with populations of more than one million people. The total number of such agglomerations is expected to increase to 18 by 2030, accounting for 24 per cent of the total population of the region (128 million people). Therefore, building resilience in cities with high concentrations of people, assets and infrastructure is a task of mounting complexity and absolute importance.

5. The growing population of young people in the region need to become more engaged in resilience-building activities. New ways have to be found to engage young people in resilience-building in their home cities.
6. Large numbers of people reside in slums and informal settlements in many Arab cities. More attention should be given to resilience-building activities for and among the poor. Some countries have provided better quality of housing to the slum dwellers, however vast numbers of people still continue to stay in the informal settlements. Safer construction, better access to emergency responders, risk awareness and community preparedness remain key issues to be addressed in the informal settlements.
7. Reducing vulnerabilities is one of the most important strategies for addressing resilience. It is most important therefore to identify the risk landscape of each target city and coordinate donor efforts to the extent feasible, and address these priority risks either by reducing vulnerabilities or by mitigating the hazard itself.
8. It is of particular relevance for the Arab region to explore the nexus of disaster, climate, food-security and conflict, and the role of cities as stabilizing factor in potential conflict.
9. The region is home to many world cultural heritage sites and critical infrastructures. Building resilience to natural hazards requires particular efforts in this context.

The analytical framework on urban governance for building resilience to natural hazards as proposed in this report, suggests the performance areas where resilience at urban level can and should be built and measured. From the governance perspective, there are several important learning points that could be mentioned:

1. The lack of risk governance regime in the region and the cities is immense. Effective resilience-building depends on how enabling the environment is.
2. The largely hierarchical public administration system in the region leaves little room for municipal level autonomy in the political, institutional and fiscal domains. This impedes effective risk identification and assessment, and the deployment of adequate risk response strategies in the urban environment.
3. A lack of adequate levels of fiscal autonomy and fiscal capacity is another major impediment to resilience-building.
4. The role of the international donor community could be instrumental if it can harmonize its activities and align them more closely to the local risk landscape.
5. Resilience-building activities are emerging and being formulated in various Arab cities. It could potentially be beneficial for local authorities to have a forum where they can engage,

FOOTNOTES

¹ UNDP 2013.