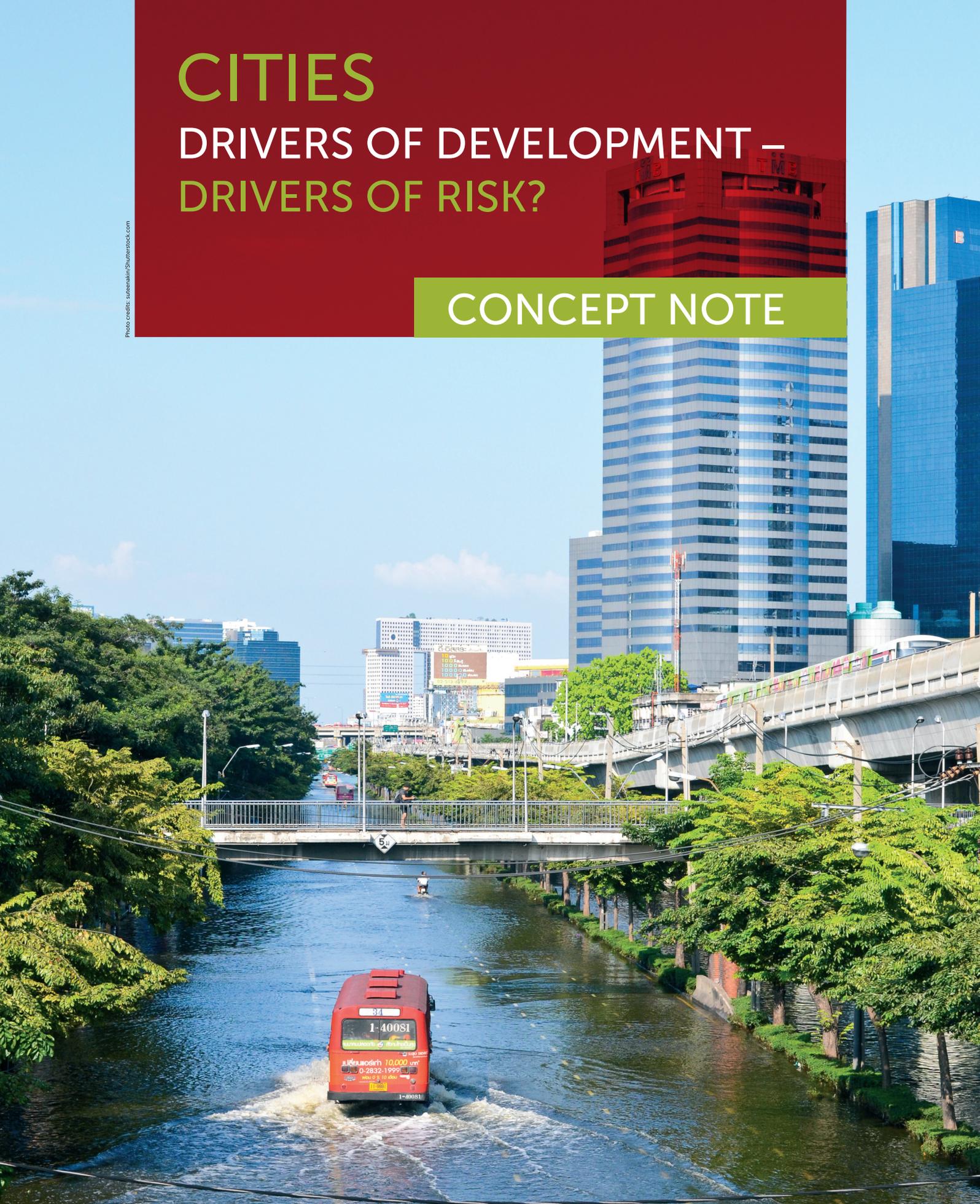


CITIES

DRIVERS OF DEVELOPMENT – DRIVERS OF RISK?

CONCEPT NOTE

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Cities: drivers of development – drivers of risk?

Urbanization offers significant opportunities to reduce poverty and gender inequality, as well as to promote sustainable development. On the other hand, if cities persist in the uncontrolled expansion of urban perimeters, indiscriminate use of resources and unfettered consumption, without regard to ecological damage, the environmental problems associated with cities will continue to worsen.
(UNFPA, 2007, p. 67)

Drivers of development...

The United Nations marked 31 October 2011 the global population reaching 7 billion. It is expected to grow to 9 billion by the middle of this century, or even a few years earlier – by 2043 (United Nations, 2011).

In addition, we live in an urbanized world. By the mid-20th century, 3 out of 10 people on the planet lived in urban areas. Today, half the world's population lives in urban areas and by the middle of this century all regions of the world will be predominantly urban, with the tipping point in Eastern Africa anticipated slightly after 2050. According to current projections, virtually the whole of the world's population growth over the next 30 years will be concentrated in urban areas (UN-HABITAT, 2008, p. IX).

Today's urban population generates more than 80 per cent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). 600 urban centres, with a fifth of the world's population, generate 60 per cent of global GDP. Across all regions, 23 megacities – metropolitan areas with ten million or more inhabitants– generated 14 per cent of global GDP in 2007 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2011).

Reasons for this rapid urbanization are diverse and reach from expectations of improved income options of immigrants to overall better access to health, education, basic infrastructure, information, knowledge and opportunity. Accordingly, it has been a driver of growth in many countries.

...drivers of risk

On the other hand, with global urbanization more risk accumulates in cities. There is an increasing recognition that preventing and responding to urban crises is fundamentally different from rural contexts. Cities, with their concentration of people, buildings, infrastructure and hazards, are a much more complex operating environment than rural areas (UN-HABITAT, 2011).

Cities are highly vulnerable to natural hazards: Sudden supply shortages, heavy environmental burdens or major catastrophes can quickly lead to serious emergencies. The consequences of such crises are multiplied by poorly coordinated administration and planning (UNFPA, 2007, p. 59). Major cities in Asia, Latin America and Africa as well as in North America and Europe are located close to the sea, such as Ho Chi Minh City, New York, Colombo, Hamburg, etc. – just to name a few – and thus potentially affected by sea level rise, coastal storms and flooding. Additionally, poorly planned urban development in risk areas combined with factors of social vulnerability (e.g., high population density or a lack of basic infrastructure – especially for the poor) leads to a rapid increase in disaster risk – particularly in developing countries.



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To manage risks and vulnerabilities in urban areas that are highly exposed to natural hazards and climate change-related stressors, such as sea level rise or flooding, vulnerability assessments and respective planning strategies are thus important tools for risk mitigation. This is even more important as natural hazards in these urban agglomerations do not only affect major amounts of people, infrastructures and economic sectors, but might also lead to regional and global “spill-over” effects, e.g. through economic interdependencies of production and consumption chains¹ as well as overall losses². Due to the location of many cities along the coastline, urban flooding is thereby a natural hazard of major importance that adds additional pressure. To buffer these pressures in coherence with development strategies, respective disaster management strategies can encompass technical measures as well as planning and development tools or civil protection strategies, including shelters or evacuation and preparedness strategies. Particularly, there is a need to go beyond the development of structural measures. New concepts for monitoring and assessing various vulnerabilities in urban areas – including the assessment of critical infrastructures – are needed.

In this context, this *Bonn Dialogues* event will address drivers of development and risk as well as potential disaster risk management strategies towards natural hazards in urban areas with a special focus on flooding.

The panel will address the following questions:

- What are drivers for development and risk?
- Will it be possible to avoid a further increase of disaster risk?
- What are the main effects of upcoming global changes on development and risk?
- Is there a blueprint for resilient city development?
- Are changes in severity and frequency of extreme events a major driver of risk or do vulnerability factors, such as informal settlements, play a more important role in this context?
- Compared to other hazards, why is the role of urban flooding so important in this context?
- What are best practice disaster risk management strategies for urban flooding?
- What are important constraints of existing approaches?
- How should guidelines for vulnerability assessment of different social groups and critical infrastructures be designed?

¹ The 2011 floods in Thailand provide one example of global effects of a local event: “The economic impact from the flooding disrupted the global supply chain, especially in the automobile and computer industries. This widespread supply chain disruption happened by surprise, especially as floodwaters inundated parts of Bangkok and the nearby sites for manufacturing. Analysts believe the automobile and computer industries could experience a slowdown well into next year as a result of the floods.”

(Business in Asia.com. Available from http://www.business-in-asia.com/thailand/flood_disrupt_supplychain.html).

² Economic consequences are enormous: „Last year, the direct and indirect losses attributed to the Great East Japan Earthquake in March and the October floods in Thailand contributed to a record amount of losses – estimated by Munich Re to be US\$ 378 billion – with the latter disaster alone setting back global industrial production by 2.5 percent“ (The Economist, 2011. Natural disasters: Counting the cost of calamities. 14 January 2012).



11th Bonn Dialogues event
15 May 2012, 7 p.m. * Deutsche Welle, Bonn

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About the organizers

United Nations University, Bonn

The **United Nations University (UNU)** is the academic and research arm of the UN. It bridges the academic world and the UN system. Its goal is to develop sustainable solutions for current and future problems of humankind in all aspects of life. Through a problem-oriented and interdisciplinary approach it aims at teaching, applied research and education on a global scale. UNU was founded in 1973 as an autonomous organ of the United Nations General Assembly. The University comprises headquarters in Tokyo, Japan, and more than a dozen Institutes and Programmes worldwide. In **Germany (Bonn)**, UNU is represented by the Vice Rectorate in Europe (UNU-ViE), which is part of the Rector's office, and the Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS). UNU-ViE hosts the Secretariat of the International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change (UNU-IHDP), the UN-Water Decade Programme on Capacity Development (UNW-DPC) as well as the United Nations University Institute for Sustainability and Peace, Operating Unit SCYCLE (UNU-ISP SCYCLE). www.bonn.unu.edu

German Committee for Disaster Reduction (DKKV)

The DKKV is the national platform for disaster reduction in Germany within the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction of the United Nations (UN/ISDR). It is the focal point to organizations and initiatives involved in disaster reduction. It is also a centre of expertise in all matters relating to national and international disaster reduction. It supports relevant research; development and implementation of instruments for disaster reduction; enhancement of risk awareness; and dissemination, on all educational levels, of findings from the field of disaster reduction. www.dkkv.org