Climate Adaptation in Emerging Urban Africa:
Assessing Equity in the ‘Making Cities Sustainable and Resilient’ UN Action

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ABSTRACT

Climate change has increasingly threatened sustainable urban development in sub-Saharan Africa, aggravating socioeconomic inequities in chronically under-resourced and overstrained cities. Global institutions and networks, such as the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction’s (UNDRR) ‘Making Cities Sustainable and Resilient’ (MCSR) initiative, have offered their expertise to build resilience. However, a number of critical scholars have cautioned that resilience frameworks fail to embody principles of authority, equity, and justice, providing misguided solutions to rapidly developing regions. Building on the emerging scholarship exploring equity in the context of urban environments, this paper evaluates the form of resilience pursued throughout MCSR’s engagement with crisis-prone sub-Saharan African cities. I draw on interviews with UNDRR officials and disaster management actors from Kisumu, Kenya to qualitatively map MCSR’s introduction and implementation within participant cities. I find that MCSR failed to prioritize equity in its city engagements and was significantly constrained by financial and political factors, resulting in a piece-meal range of actions and outputs prioritizing equity. I conclude by making recommendations relevant to planning equitable urban transformations in sub-Saharan Africa.

KEYWORDS:

Urban Resilience; Justice; Social Equity; Rapid Urbanization; United Nations; Sub-Saharan Africa; Secondary Cities; Kisumu; Dire Dawa; Kampala

RESEARCH QUESTION:

How do primary actors in sub-Saharan cities assess the pilot rollout and the social impact of the United Nation's Making Cities Sustainable and Resilient initiative?
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Climate Change - A change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.

Disaster - A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.

Disaster management actor – Individuals involved in the management and reduction of disaster risk at the community, organization, and/or government level(s).

Disaster risk - The potential disaster losses, in lives, health status, livelihoods, assets and services, which could occur to a particular community or a society over some specified future time period.

Global South – Referring broadly to the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. It is one of a family of terms, including “Third World” and “Periphery,” that denote regions outside Europe and North America, mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalized.

Hazard - A dangerous phenomenon, substance, human activity or condition that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption, or environmental damage.

Informal settlement- Areas where groups of housing units have been constructed on land that the occupants have no legal claim to, or occupy illegally; unplanned settlements and areas where housing is not in compliance with current planning and building regulations (unauthorized housing).

Resilience - The ability of an urban system-and all its constituent socio-ecological and socio-technical networks across temporal and spatial scales-to maintain or rapidly return to desired functions in the face of a disturbance, to adapt to change, and to quickly transform systems that limit current or future adaptive capacity.
Slum - A slum household is defined as a group of individuals living under the same roof in an urban area who lack one or more of the following: durable housing of a permanent nature that protects against extreme climate conditions; sufficient living space which means not more than three people sharing the same room; easy access to safe water in sufficient amounts at an affordable price; access to adequate sanitation in the form of a private or public toilet shared by a reasonable number of people; security of tenure that prevents forced evictions. A neighborhood is classified as a slum if more than half of the households in the area suffer from one or more shelter deprivations.

Socio-ecological system – The interactions and feedback loops between humans, the biophysical environment, and other non-human biological units, which together create a system.

Socio-economic - Relating to or concerned with the interaction of social or economic factors.

Transnational municipal network – Organizations which aim to foster and support cooperation between cities to improve their climate change adaptation and mitigation work.

Vulnerability - The characteristics and circumstances of a community, system or asset that make it susceptible to the damaging effects of a hazard.
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1. Introduction

“Are we as urban planners as good at fostering belonging (recognition, reconciliation, difference, diversity, inclusion) as we are at developing prescriptions for what our cities can become (smart, sharing, resilient, sustainable, etc)?” – Dr. Julian Agyeman, italics added

1.1. Background

If one seeks to determine where the future of humanity’s growth, development, and challenges lie, look no further than sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The United Nations projects that the region’s population will double by 2050, with a vast majority of development taking place in its cities (UN 2019). Massive developmental challenges accompany this growth; informal settlements are growing at unprecedented rates alongside poverty and inequality alongside weak government capacities to address these problems (Saghir and Santoro 2018). Moreover, the sub-Saharan African region is highly vulnerable to climate change and variability, exacerbating growing stressors on urban systems and services (IPCC 2014; Epule et al. 2017). Flooding is an especially pressing issue for cities on the continent, surpassing the impact of droughts with the rise of unplanned urbanization accompanied by low levels of investment in flood-resilient infrastructure and flood management (Lumbroso 2020; Tazen et al. 2018). However, emerging sub-Saharan African cities, especially mid-tier settlements predicted to capture a majority of future growth, embody enormous opportunities and potential for innovation. While the risk profiles, structures of governance, and socioeconomic climate vary greatly among emerging African cities, the key with which international organizations can help tackle structural urban injustices and challenges are workable, flexible frameworks through which cities’ most vulnerable populations can be heard, included in, and uplifted by governance arrangements and processes.

With the intention of addressing the intersection between global disaster risk, climate change, and stark socioeconomic inequalities in sub-Saharan Africa and other Global South regions, transnational municipal networks (TMNs) and governing bodies have pursued resilience-building at the city level. TMNs related to climate change are defined as organizations which aim to foster and support cooperation between cities to improve their climate change adaptation and
mitigation work (Heikkinen et al. 2020). Many of these efforts base their efforts on the array of 2015 international agreements, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), and the New Urban Agenda. Namely, SDG11 asserts the need to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable (UN 2020).

At present, resilience within and between cities is highly unequal. Numerous studies have demonstrated that hazards disproportionately impact low-income and minority communities and receive fewer resources to recover and exacerbate inequality (Bolin and Kurtz 2017; Meerow, Pajouhesh, and Miller 2019). Thus, for programs to effectively build resilience, they must directly address structural inequity. However, few empirical evaluations have analyzed their effectiveness at embodying the normative principles of justice. Moreover, critical scholars have cautioned that the quest for resilience, if poorly grounded, can aggravate structural inequalities while strengthening the institutional processes which create them (Brown 2012; Fainstein 2015; Fainstein 2018; Fitzgibbons and Mitchell 2019; Friend and Moench 2013; Friend and Moench 2015; Gillard et al. 2016; Joseph 2013; Meerow and Newell 2016; Vale 2014; Ziervogel et al. 2017).

1.2. Research Journey

I believe that the growth of socioeconomic inequality in developing cities stands as one of the most pressing issue of our time. As such, my thesis illuminates the nexus of urban adaptation and justice issues within the context of rapidly growing sub-Saharan African cities. This paper adds to these emerging fields by critically evaluating ‘Making Cities Sustainable and Resilient: Implementing the Sendai Framework for DRR at the Local Level,’ (MCSR), an initiative ran by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) which worked closely with 20 crisis-prone cities to “improve understanding and capacity to address disaster risks and build resilience at local levels,” among other activities (Schofield and Twigg 2019). Five of these cities are in sub-Saharan Africa: Praia, Cape Verde; Yaoundé, Cameroon; Dire Dawa, Ethiopia; Kampala, Uganda; and Kisumu, Kenya.
Critical lessons can be derived from MCSR’s operations and early implementation, as the program began in 2016 and finalized its partnerships with pilot cities early in 2020. Considering the emerging scholarship on social equity within resilience frameworks, my research asks: “How do primary actors in sub-Saharan cities assess the pilot rollout and the social impact of the United Nation's Making Cities Sustainable and Resilient initiative?”

In comparing actors’ perspectives on equity within the program’s interactions and outputs in Kisumu, Dire Dawa, and Kampala, I find a patterned lack of focus on systemic justice issues. I ultimately conclude that MCSR does not inherently guide cities to promote justice through equity. However, contrary to scholars’ conclusions on global resilience frameworks, I argue that efforts to advance resilience and reduce socioeconomic injustices can be accomplished in tandem. Through empirical analysis of MCSR’s interactions with pilot sub-Saharan African cities to address disaster risk, I propose changes to the program’s guidance structure which could have been made and should be adopted in future urban resilience programs. My hope is that the findings of this research aid similar programs in translating the interconnected themes of resilience, justice, and sustainability to the local level. By working for and most importantly with the world’s urban poor through a holistic view of resilience, international organizations can make some of the most significant contributions to humanity’s sustainable development in the modern era.
2. Literature Review

This thesis draws together research on sub-Saharan African urban trends, conceptualizations of resiliency, and the efficacy of resiliency frameworks, furthering the study of socioeconomic equity in these fields (see Figure 1). As sub-Saharan Africa rapidly urbanizes, unfettered expansion has aggravated socioeconomic inequities and strained city resources to adapt to the increasing threat of flooding. The UN and other global organizations have developed apparent solutions to mitigate and adapt to climate risks, however limited scholarship exists on the forms of resiliency it has sought and the in-situ results of their efforts.

Figure 1. Venn Diagram representing research themes explored.

The literature review includes peer-reviewed journals as well as grey literature. A number of search terms were used, as the relationship between justice, resiliency, and urban experiments is an emerging field of scholarship. There was no limitation on date and type of article. Search engines used were Google Scholar, HoyaSearch, and Academic Search Premier.

2.1. Rapid Urbanization in SSA

Sub-Saharan Africa is the world’s least urbanized but fastest urbanizing region. Collier (2016, 1) finds that “by 2050, almost regardless of government policies, its urban population will have
triplled.” In the next 30 years, SSA’s urban population will outnumber rural residents (Saghir and Santoro 2018). Large and very large SSA ‘megacities’ such as Lagos and Nairobi have captured a disproportionate share of economic investment and political attention (UN-Habitat 2014). However, the fastest growing urban centers in SSA are the small and medium cities with less than one million inhabitants, mirroring global urbanization trends (UN-Habitat 2016; Adelina et al. 2020). These cities have transformed SSA’s social, economic, and environmental landscape (Lwasa 2014; Güneralp et al. 2017; Garschagen and Remero-Lankao 2013) and will account for 75 percent of Africa’s urban growth (UNDP Africa 2014). From a climate perspective, half of all potential urban emissions reductions lies in cities with fewer than 750,000 (Coalition for Urban Transitions 2019). However, limited published material exists which focus specifically on SSA’s mid-tier cities; smaller SSA settlements have also received relatively scant attention and financing from donors, NGOs, and international financial institutions. These trends underline the incredible need and potential for sustainable urban planning, as the trajectories SSA’s emerging cities take will determine the present and future qualities of life for millions of urban residents and significantly impact the world’s emissions pathway.

2.1.1. Urbanization Challenges

While certainly diverse in their historic and geographic profiles, regional commonalities are evident in the growth trajectories and risk profiles of sub-Saharan Africa’s cities. Unlike urbanization in many other parts of the world, urban population growth in much of Africa has generally not been accompanied by a concomitant increase in formal employment opportunities (Saghir and Santoro 2018), resulting in growing urban poverty and increased urban vulnerability (Bryceson and Potts 2006; Fox 2012). Generally, government bodies have struggled with planning and managing urban growth in Africa (Myers 2011; Smit 2018). The combination of rapid urbanization and inadequate government capacities to cope has strained financial resources, contradictory governance measures, inadequate services and support for citizens, dualistic forms of ‘pseudo-urbanization,’ endemic poverty, inequality, and informalization in urban economies and settlements (Fraser et al. 2017; Gore 2015). The most visible result of this grim urban cocktail are the region’s informal settlements, in which 56 percent of SSA’s urban population lived in 2014; this statistic has been growing steadily from 1995 to 2015 (UN-Habitat 2016).
The idea of cities as ‘primate’ or ‘secondary’ was first proposed by Jefferson (1939). Primate cities are generally the large centers of economic and political life in their countries, while secondary cities are essentially non-primate cities whose populations range from 50,000 to 1 million (Rondinelli 1983). This range varies, however, as the role such cities play in different countries differs (Adelina et al. 2020). The economic capacities of secondary cities are generally weaker than primate cities and “suffer from weaker institutional and financial bases,” but, simultaneously, “rates of demographic growth are often higher in secondary compared with primate cities” (UN-Habitat 2016, 172–173). As such, secondary cities are typically characterized by “chronic inequality of opportunities, widespread poverty, inadequate capital investments in public goods, and lack of pro-poor social programmes” (UN-Habitat, 2016, 173).

Secondary cities in SSA face particularly difficult challenges. While the literature on smaller African cities is still in its nascence, the little research that is available points to vast deficits in state and local governance among a disorganized array of state and non-state actors and the uneven distribution of private investment (Simon 2010; Silver 2013; Pasquini 2014; Ricci et al. 2015). However, the “smallness” of secondary cities offers additional opportunities for dealing with challenges (e.g., threats posed by natural hazards), a factor which has been noted to help in spreading new environmental norms, knowledge sharing and sustaining institutional coordination (Pasquini et al. 2015).

Flooding stands as an increasingly significant hazard facing rapidly growing SSA cities; its frequency and widespread nature in sub-Saharan Africa (Douglas et al. 2008) has been exacerbated by rapid urbanization, the growth of unplanned informal settlements, and weak governance capacities to respond (Agbola et al. 2012; Eguarioje et al. 2015; EM-DAT 2015). The IPCC has posited with increasing certainty that the frequency and gravity of extreme weather events, which lead in flooding and landslides, are unstoppable due to the human interference with the climate system (Hardoy, Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2013; IPCC 2014; Mitlin & Satterthwaite 2013). While SSA contributes a marginal proportion of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions, it has been predicted that the region will bear an outsize portion of global warming’s
effects in both its urban and rural facets (see Figure 2) (Serdeczny et al. 2017)

![Figure 2](image.png)

**Figure 2.** Multi-sector risk map for 2°C climate. Left column shows the full score range 0–9 (with transparency) and multi-sector risk score, MSR ≥ 5.0, in full color. Right column greyscale underlay is the SSP2 2050 vulnerable populations, with the MSR ≥ 5.0 overlaid (only pixels ≥10 vulnerable persons $km^{-2}$), indicating the concentrations of exposed and vulnerable populations (E&V). Adopted from Byers et al. 2018.

At the local level, the effects of natural disaster exacerbate existing inequalities. Specifically, extreme weather events like flooding disproportionately affect SSA’s urban poor, who are increasingly forced to live in ill-desired urban areas like floodplains and steep hill faces (Baker 2012). Tenements often take the form of informal settlements, which UN Habitat (2011) defines as residential houses where inhabitants lack basic services, security of tenure and non-compliance with building regulations. These living conditions exacerbate residents’ vulnerability to natural disaster, which UNDRR (2017) asserts are “the conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to the impacts of hazards.” Scholarly attention to the risks disproportionately faced by the urban poor in SSA is growing, however the sub-set of literature on unequal urban disaster risks is limited (Ibidun et al. 2015) and was noted as lacking the IPCC’s Urban Chapter of the Fifth Assessment Report (Revi and Satterthwaite 2014).
2.1.2. Building Urban Resilience

Under the new guidelines offered by the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, SFDRR, and the New Urban Agenda, African ministers in 2016 endorsed a more holistic and forward-looking disaster risk reduction agenda (Peters and Lovell 2016) and have made strides towards implementing projects addressing flood risk and its associated consequences in urban areas (Saghir and Santoro 2017). As Gore (2015, 220) notes in relation to climate change, African cities are not “passive bystanders to the global climate challenge” but are actively engaged in international climate change learning and knowledge networks. Local level innovations have emerged, whether these be city-led experiments - generally located in large Southern African cities (Simon 2010; Bulkeley 2013) – or community-based efforts to upgrade and reduce risk (Adegun 2015; Dobson et al. 2015; Broto et al. 2015). In this vein, scholars have found that opportunities for effective risk management in SSA’s urban centers may be best realized through organized civil society efforts executed with the collaboration of supportive city governments and private sector actors, overcoming traditional institutional barriers by tapping into common interests and capacities.

In recent years, cities in the Global South - those in sub-Saharan Africa being no exception – have increasingly engaged with Transnational municipal networks (TMNs) and worked with global actors, whose partnerships are frequently framed around the delivery of one or more Sustainable Development Goals (Adelina et al. 2020). TMNs such as the Rockefeller Foundation’s “100 Resilient Cities,” which was phased out in 2019, focus on building adaptation and resilience in local communities, compared to many TMNs’ earlier emphasis on climate mitigation (Bulkeley and Betsill 2013). However, limited literature exists on the long-term impacts of these experiments, nor in their translations to secondary cities, much less emerging cities within SSA (Fitzgibbons and Mitchell 2019; Adelina et al. 2020).

TMNs provide cities with access to resources, policy learning, profile-building and political leadership which can serve to drive local change (Bulkeley and Betsill 2013; Castán Broto 2017; Fuhr et al. 2018). By engaging in the global resilience policy area, research demonstrates local leaders can trigger government action and more robust policy support SSA (Fitzgibbons and
Mitchell 2019; Adelina et al. 2020). For example, TMNs provided networking opportunities to influence change in Durban, overcoming formal institutional inertia (Bulkeley and Betsill 2013). The role of TMNs in promoting resilience experimentation in cities must be recognized – however, resilience-building programs also frequently arise from local agendas as well.

Indeed, in their study of Asian programs, Bai et al. (2010) find that local governments play the “leading actor role” in city-level resilience programming and hold strong roles in legal and public responsibility, project design and formulation. However, many scholars note the difficulties in replicating cities’ resilience programs without supportive national and regional governments; city networks can help fill the gap left by higher-level governments to drive change (Bai et al. 2010; Fuhr et al. 2018; Johannessen et al. 2019; Shand 2018).

Analyses have also demonstrated the difficulties cities lacking financial and human capital face in implementing a sustainable development agenda (Véron 2010). Consequently, intermediary city actors may often be limited to reactive, rather than forward-looking, preventative measures (Adelina et al. 2020). In many mid-tier cities, there may not be a responsible agency for dealing with local-level climate risks (Sami 2016) or the ward level (Ruszczyk 2019), creating a formal dependency on upper levels of government for financial support and policy direction (Fuhr et al. 2018). According to Cammack (2007, 1), “the use of state resources in many poorly performing states is driven by informal relations and private incentives (including patronage, clientelism and ethnicity), rather than formal state institutions that are underpinned by equity and the rule of law.” Bottom-up efforts at reducing communities’ disaster risk, led by traditional leaders, community members, or local government officials, have achieved mixed results when their efforts have not been supported with funding or a degree of government support (Kareem et al. 2020; Ross 2016). In such cases – where the scale of informality fails to provide incentives for long-term resilience-building programs - global actors such as international funding entities can spur change. For instance, a project involving the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation aimed at informal settlement upgrading in Harare also served to address structural power imbalances between the local community and government (Leck and Roberts, 2015).
The term ‘resilience’ is frequently borrowed in frameworks, used loosely in policy dialogues, and is otherwise left in its abstractions. It is thus imperative to understand how the use of this word has evolved over time and what its use looks like in modernity.

2.2. Critiques of Urban Resilience

Resilience-based thinking is widely cited as introduced in C.S. Holling’s (1973) paper on ecological systems, in which resilience is contextually defined as the capacity of a system to “persist” and continue functioning following an acute shock. The term has since been adopted by several disciplines, including engineering (e.g., Holling 1996; Rahimi & Madni 2014) psychology (e.g., Bonanno 2004, Masten 2001), and international development (e.g., Brown and Westaway 2011, Perrings 2006), among others. Figure 3 depicts Folke’s (2006) interpretation of resilience theory as it has been applied in engineering, ecological, and socio-ecological systems. Research on complex non-equilibrium socio-ecological systems (SES) (Adger 2000, Folke 2006, Olsson et al. 2004, Walker et al. 2004) led to the conceptual development of urban resilience, especially within studies on urban systems (Bulkeley et al. 2013, Collier et al. 2013, Leichenko 2011, Meerow and Newell 2016, Meerow et al. 2016, Vale 2014).

![Comparison between ecological, engineering, and socio-ecological resilience theory as developed by Folke (2006).](image)

It is unsurprising that conceptual tensions persist, given that resilience has been defined in a multitude of ways across and within fields (Da Silva, Kernaghan, & Luque 2012). Meerow et al. (2016) identified 25 different definitions of urban resilience in 2016, and the literature continues
to grow. With aims to incorporate conceptual tensions identified via a bibliometric analysis, Meerow et al. (2016) proposed the following definition of urban resilience:

“Urban resilience refers to the ability of an urban system-and all its constituent socio-ecological and socio-technical networks across temporal and spatial scales-to maintain or rapidly return to desired functions in the face of a disturbance, to adapt to change, and to quickly transform systems that limit current or future adaptive capacity.” (39).

A significant area of debate in the literature has centered around whether resilience can effectively capture justice and other normative principles of social research and practice, given its blurred use within sustainability science and policy (Brand & Jax 2007) and rise to buzzword status. Scholars have consequently sought to examine whose resilience is being prioritized, against what threats, and what (or whose) cost (Bahadur and Tanner 2014, Béné et al. 2018, Bulkeley et al. 2013, Cote and Nightingale 2012, Davoudi and Porter 2012, Cretney 2014, Fainstein 2015, Fainstein 2018, Harris et al. 2017, Joseph 2013, Kaika 2017, Meerow and Newell 2016, Meerow et al. 2016, Vale 2014, Ziervogel et al. 2017); Meerow and Newell (2016) condense this robust literature body into a “5 W’s” framework, petitioning planners and researchers to consider the nuances of urban resilience by asking: whose resilience is prioritized, against what shocks or stresses, when, where, and why?

Efforts by practitioners and institutions to answer these questions by way of implementing resilience-centered policy and infrastructure in cities can result in profound consequences for the lives of residents. Many of the aforementioned scholars also argue that promoting “resilience” within a dysfunctional and unjust urban system may not be beneficial in that the conservative nature of resiliency frameworks – driven by a desire to ‘return to the status quo’ - may divert efforts at social transformation away from disrupting structural inequalities (Béné et al., 2018, Brown 2012, Davoudi and Porter 2012, Fainstein 2015, Fainstein 2018, Friend and Moench 2013, Friend and Moench 2015, Gillard et al. 2016, Joseph 2013, Kaika 2017, Meerow and Newell 2016, Vale 2014, Ziervogel et al. 2017). Empirical research on the in-situ effects of resilience planning is limited. However, initial findings have argued that planning with resilience as the primary driver may promote a neoliberal agenda (Fainstein 2018), fail to effectively target
the root causes of poverty (Friend and Moench 2013, Friend and Moench 2015), is oftentimes applied in insufficiently inclusive or participative ways (Aldunce, Beilin, Handmer, & Howden 2016), and has not advanced the change necessary to steer cities toward social equity (Archer & Dodman 2015, Fitzgibbons and Mitchell 2019). In summation, the limited evidence suggests that resilience thinking in practice furthers the status quo, implying that the SDG objectives of social equity, justice, and resilience conflict, at least in terms of how “resilience” is currently being planned.

Indeed, global policy frameworks around resilience tend to focus on expert-driven input (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012) and ground their arguments on physical infrastructure rather than social capital (Tozier de la Poterie and Baudoin 2015; Kareem et al. 2020). Scholars have found that the forms of resilience often sought by urban frameworks center around government-led initiatives, technocratically driven interventions, and infrastructure needs (Meerow and Stults 2016; Yamagata and Haruyama 2016). Concepts of resilience have then been adapted and transmitted to cities at a global scale (Roberts and Parks 2007), including SSA (Simon 2010), which has led scholars and city governments to question their relevance and applicability. TMNs can reproduce existing inequalities between cities in accessing resilience-building resources, which calls for greater inclusion of underresourced cities lacking political, technical, and financial resources (Fitzgibbons and Mitchell 2019; Geldin 2019).

The limited scholarship on urban resilience frameworks obscures many of their local-level effects. For example, it is difficult to empirically discern the extent to which equity is a part of conversations around resilience as the literature stands. Considering the growing portfolio of local resilience planning and investments, critical examinations are necessary. However, before questioning how resilience planning factors in equity, a definition of social equity must be identified, as the term is also contested.


2.3. Recognition of Social Equity in Urban Resilience

Definitions of social equity and justice have evolved over time within the dimensions of social research and practice, generally trending from a narrower focus on distributional equity to include participative and recognitional components as critical in conceiving of justice. In line with the literature’s development and specifically building on Scholsberg’s (2004, 2007) “widely accepted” theory (Bulkeley, Edwards, and Fuller 2014, 33), this paper adopts a three-pronged framework of social equity which includes distributional, recognitional, and procedural equity dimensions. Influential theorists who have developed this understanding include Young (Young 2001; Young and Allen 2011), Fraser (Fraser 1995; Fraser 1997), Honneth (Anderson and Honneth 2005; Honneth 2004), and Schlosberg (Schlosberg 1995; Schlosberg 2001; Schlosberg 2004; Schlosberg 2007). Emerging scholarship connects these three nodes of (in)justice to conceptions of resilience (Fitzgibbons and Mitchell 2019), which are defined by Meerow, Pajouhesh, and Miller (2019) as depicted in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. Conceptualising social equity in the context of urban resilience planning. Source: Meerow, Pajouhesh, and Miller (2019).](image-url)
2.3.1. Distributional Equity

Following John Rawls’ (1971, 9) commonly cited definition of justice as “a standard whereby distributional aspects of the basic structure of society are to be assessed,” political theorists have traditionally understood justice in terms of the distribution of goods and freedoms. From this basis, just outcomes are generally defined as the fair allocation of material goods to all members of society. Not to be confused with equalitarianism (equal allocation for all), Scholsberg (2007) argues social goods are distributed to explicitly improve the welfare of the disadvantaged. Meerow, Pajouhesh, and Miller (2019, 5) define distributive justice in the context of urban resilience as “equitable access to goods and infrastructure, environmental amenities, services, and economic opportunities.” Equally, the distribution of undesirable land uses or pollutants across urban environments is important and has long been a focus of environmental justice scholarship and activism (Schlosberg 2007).

Recently, several scholars (Chelleri et al. 2015, Meerow and Newell 2019, Fainstein 2018) have raised concerns about the distributional inequities of urban resilience planning, pointing to the inevitable trade-offs in the distribution of benefits and illustrate that beneficiaries are oftentimes not the most vulnerable. Notably, Anguelovski et al. (2016) articulate “acts of omission” and “acts of commission” to articulate how urban climate adaptation or resilience plans can “produce maladaptive outcomes for historically marginalized residents.” Acts of omission refer to aspects of a plan which prioritize economically valuable areas and a society’s upper social strata over disempowered, low-income, or minority neighborhoods. Conversely, acts of commission refer to actions which directly affect or displace disempowered communities in a negative way.

2.3.2. Recognitiona l Equity

Scholars have noted that distributive justice, while crucial, may not be sufficient to ensure equitable resilience outcomes in cities. It is important to call attention to the underlying social structures which result in unequal distribution (Schlosberg 2004), as concentrating on the best means of distribution, other social, cultural, and institutional patterns and contexts may be overlooked (Young 1990). Young (1990) posits that recognitional injustices are the institutions
(beliefs, norms, culture, language) which determine group differences and result in inequitable distributions. Schlosberg (2007, 14) sees recognition in terms of the norms behind social relationships and practices, which may result in distributional inequities “demonstrated by various forms of insults, degradation, and devaluation at both the individual and cultural level.”

Recognitional justice, conversely, refers to the equal acknowledgement and respect of different entities throughout the socioeconomic strata (Schlosberg 2007). Meerow, Pajouhesh, and Miller (2019, 5) insert recognitional equity in resilience planning as follows: “(1) acknowledging community members’ different intersecting identities (e.g. race, gender, class, and age), (2) recognizing that these identities are shaped by historical injustices and can shape individual vulnerability to shocks and stresses, ability to access resources, and capacity to participate in decision-making, and (3) fostering respect for different groups.”

### 2.3.3. Procedural Equity

Procedural equity focuses on the decision-making processes through which goods and services are distributed and recognition is realized. Procedural justice refers to the “fair and equitable institutional processes of a state” (Schlosberg 2007, 25). Procedural equity is inextricably intertwined with distributive and recognitional forms of justice. Enabling marginalized groups to self-identify their own needs, priorities, and portrayals is integral to the equitable distribution of goods and services. Without processes by which to recognize these groups, their unique demands go unrealized. It has been argued that recognitional equity fosters more inclusive, collaborative, and democratic forms of government which better engage and recognize the diverse needs, issues, and equity solutions of communities (Nussbaum 2003). In ensuring equitable participation, Nozick (2000) argues that inclusive processes ensure the recognition of historical contexts which created inequalities in the first place and aggravate resource maldistribution and social misrecognition.

Recent literature arguing for equitable resilience planning approaches stress the advantages of inclusive participatory processes (Meerow and Newell 2019; Shi et al. 2016; Harris, Chu, and Ziervogel 2017; Matin, Forrester, and Ensor 2018). Yet Anguelovski et al. (2016) find that
resilience planning in the form of climate adaptation frameworks often fail to meaningfully include marginalized groups.

Concerning resilience planning, Meerow, Pajouhesh, and Miller (2019) define procedural equity as “equitable participation in decision-making processes.” However, as Cooke and Kothari (2001) point out, inclusion in decision-making structures does not inevitably resolve injustices. Scholars have noted that the dissatisfaction of marginalized social groups to an outcome or event may be ignored on the grounds of their participation (Brownhill and Carpenter 2007; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Moore et al. 2017) Recognizing this tension, Fitzgibbons and Mitchell (2019) argue that procedural justice measures in resilience planning must also include monitoring and evaluation processes.
3. Methodology

This thesis examines how, and to what extent, social equity is fostered in the introduction and execution of resilience programs to secondary SSA cities. To achieve this objective, I examine two different perspectives of MCSR: those of disaster management actors in Kisumu, Kenya, and UN-affiliated program coordinators’ experiences working with SSA cities. Specifically, MCSR coordinator interviews center on programmatic introduction and implementation in Kisumu; Dire Dawa, Ethiopia; and Kampala, Uganda. I then systematically compare these perspectives to understand commonalities and differences of the equity outcomes of MCSR among SSA cities.

Kampala, Dire Dawa, and Kisumu stand as viable candidates for several reasons. For one, their significantly different population numbers offer a suitable spread for comparison. Kisumu and Dire Dawa are mid-tier cities, supporting metropolitan area populations of 355,000 and 408,000, respectively. Conversely, Kampala maintains a metropolitan area population of 3.3 million. The UN posits that secondary towns and cities are the centers of urban growth in SSA. However, they note that “many of the urban development and governance interventions have focused more on primary and mega cities, presumably with the expectations of trickle down of social, economic and physical developments to other tiers of towns and cities, including secondary towns and cities” (UNICEF 2020, i). Kisumu, a mid-tier city plagued by flooding where 60 percent of residents live in informal settlements, was lauded by UNDRR as a model example of MCSR’s work in SSA (Simiyu, Cairncross and Swilling 2018; United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction - Regional Office for Africa 2019).

3.1. Data Collection

Data on MCSR’s engagement with Kampala, Dire Dawa, and Kisumu drew from seven semi-structured interviews with one UN SDG Advocate, two MCSR coordinators, and five disaster management actors (hereafter referred to as DMAs) in Kisumu consisting of NGO officials and public authorities at the municipal and county levels.
Interviews with MCSR personnel covered a variety of themes related to MCSR’s development and rollout beyond issues of social equity and justice; questions focused on their roles in the program, perceptions of MCSR’s objectives versus in-situ outcomes, challenges faced in the SSA city partnerships, and the extent to which social equity was considered in the program. The interview with the SDG Advocate centered around the UN’s visions for implementing sustainable development in emerging sub-Saharan African cities. I filtered my choosing of disaster management actors based in Kisumu by limiting my outreach to technocrats and administrators holding strategic disaster management or disaster risk reduction related functions during MCSR’s local rollout. These interviews focused on roles held with regards to disaster management and perceptions of the disaster risk reduction policymaking and practices of Kisumu’s local governing bodies over the past five years. No translators were required for any interviews. In addition to interviews conducted over Zoom, I gathered and analyzed documents relevant to my thesis including policy documents, technical reports, and draft DRR action plans.

Given that interviews were conducted with relatively well-positioned actors, it should be noted that the data I collected reflects the perceptions of local elites of and UNDRR. Moreover, as interviews and document gathering occurred within a year of MCSR’s completion, limited data exist on the program’s implementation and final impacts. Efforts were made to access Kisumu and other SSA city’s finalized DRR action plans for deeper content analysis, however neither UNDRR nor city officials made these materials accessible during the duration of my research. Finally, it is important to note that the program was often introduced and developed alongside other municipal initiatives, leading to difficulties disentangling and analyzing the specific results of MCSR and ultimately a less robust analysis.

3.2. Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed, anonymized, coded, and subjected to comparative analysis to establish linkages between relevant themes. Data collected were analyzed via a mixed method plan evaluation; directed content analysis was supplemented with inductive methods by which coding was derived directly from transcriptions (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). A plan evaluation is a means of systemically evaluating the process, structure, and results of a project (Guyadeen &
This plan evaluation served to answer the question: How do primary actors in sub-Saharan cities assess the pilot rollout and the social impact of the United Nation's Making Cities Sustainable and Resilient initiative? I asked this question with the intention of understanding MCSR’s equity in city-level and transmunicipal contexts; in other words, I wanted to understand how the program dealt with equity both between and within cities.

My deductive coding scheme was derived from the literature on resilience and justice in cities (see Section 2.3) as articulated and framed by Meerow, Pajouhesh, and Miller (2019), who reframe the three pillars of justice — recognitional, distributive, and procedural — in the context of urban resilience planning. Inductive coding served to identify perceived barriers which hindered the introduction and implementation of MCSR. Figure 3 depicts the analytical framework used to guide this study’s analysis and discussion.

Figure 4. Analytical framework. Equity components adapted from Meerow, Pajouhesh, and Miller (2019).

With a consideration of the foundational arguments in the normative and social fields of justice and equity my argument is as follows: had MCSR addressed social (in)equity in its
implementation in sub-Saharan African cities, it would have facilitated the specific identification of vulnerable social groups while providing the structure to rectify their marginalization by including them in the development processes that might influence their situation.

4. ‘Making Cities Sustainable and Resilient’ Overview

Supported by funding from the European Commission, UNDRR and UN-Habitat launched ‘Making Cities Sustainable and Resilient: Implementing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 at the Local Level,’ a three-year initiative (2016-2019) associated which aimed “to improve understanding and capacity to address disaster risks and build resilience at local levels, with a focus on crisis-prone cities,” (Schofield and Twigg 2019, 3). UNDRR and its Regional Offices oversaw its introduction and implementation. Key objectives of the program included the establishment of DRR baselines, gathering risk profiles, and building resilience-building data and information pathways. To further this aim UNDRR and partners supported over 200 cities and local governments globally in finding their DRR weaknesses and establishing means of addressing them. MCSR also worked with twenty “crisis-prone” cities to provide active guidance to local governments in building and assisting in the implementation of disaster risk reduction action plans for resilience, hereafter referred to as DRR action plans. Five of these cities are in SSA and include: Praia, Cape Verde; Yaoundé, Cameroon; Kampala, Uganda; Dire Dawa, Ethiopia; and Kisumu, Kenya. The future of MCSR’s resilience efforts – particularly with respect to its multi-stakeholder engagement in SSA, a key focus of this paper – is unclear. As such, this research presents important insights taken from MCSR’s engagements with SSA cities that can help ensure future resilience-building activities sought by the United Nations, large-scale TMNs, and local resilience planning efforts.

Pilot cities took part in a four-year process of developing a DRR action plan based on a semi-standardized process (Figure 5). Regional kick-off workshops ran between October 2016 to March 2017, followed by a ‘Training of Trainers’ on 'Making Cities Resilient: Developing and Implementing Disaster Risk Reduction Action Plans' workshop in January 2017 in Incheon,
South Korea. Local workshops during the Preliminary Resilience Assessment (PRA) phase centered around filling out the Disaster Resilience Scorecard for Cities (Schofield and Twigg 2019). It replaced past versions of the scorecard and the Local Government Self-Assessment Tool (LG-SAT). A shortened version of the assessment, consisting of 47 indicators to which cities must attach a 0-3 score, served as the primary means of DRR guidance for the general program, while a more detailed assessment consisting of 117 indicators to which cities attached a 0-5 score was used as well for the pilot city program. UNDRR advocated for a “multi-stakeholder approach” to filling out the scorecard, “which reflects the range of actors with a role to play in maintaining and developing city resilience,” (Schofield and Twigg 2019, 7). As one MCSR coordinator stated:

“We tell [pilot city governments], you have to bring in not only the emergency management or the civil defense, it’s also the health department, the education department, the utilities, the budget office, everyone has to sit in the room.”

Figure 5. Timeline of the ‘Making Cities Sustainable and Resilient’ development process.
The DRR action plans, developed to leverage the strengths and target the weaknesses of local governance capacities, were intended to align with and support existing city initiatives, bringing them under a common umbrella (disaster risk reduction) to foster integration and reduce siloed governance. Both the Disaster Resilience Scorecard for Cities and resultant action plans are modeled off UNDRR’s Ten Essentials for Making Cities Resilient (see Box 1) which is meant to guide city governments in resilience planning and decision making (Schofield and Twigg 2019).

While intended to run until 2019, MCSR’s final workshops were planned into 2020. However, a global experience sharing workshop in Incheon and a workshop intended to guide cities towards means of funding DRR activities were cancelled due to the COVID pandemic.
The program provided platform partnerships and technical guidance to pilot city governments, which were responsible for identifying a focal point who would serve as the intermediary between UNDRR and the city. ICLEI Africa, the regional outfit for a global network of local and city governments “committed to sustainable urban development,” served as the implementing partner for the sub-Saharan African portion of the MCSR initiative (ICLEI 2021).

Focal points were tasked with identifying, reaching out to, and coordinating with pilot city stakeholders. Focal points served as local champions of the DRR sought by MCSR. Their work

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**Box 1: Ten Essentials for Making Cities Resilient**

The Ten Essentials for Making Cities Resilient tool was developed to accelerate implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) at the local level. UNDRR asserts that these “are the critical and independent steps that need to be undertaken to build and maintain resilience” (UNDRR 2019).

**Corporate/City Governance**

1. **Organise for disaster resilience**: Put in place an organizational structure and identify the necessary processes to understand and act on reducing exposure, its impact and vulnerability to disasters.
2. **Identify, understand and use current and future risk scenarios**: City governments should identify and understand their risk, including hazards, exposure and vulnerabilities, and use this knowledge to inform decision making.
3. **Strengthen financial capacity for resilience**: Understand the economic impact of disasters and the need for investment in resilience. Identify and develop financial mechanisms that can support resilience activities.

**Planning Integration**

4. **Pursue resilient urban development and design**: The built environment needs to be assessed and made resilient as applicable, informed by risk identified in essential 2.
5. **Safeguard natural buffers to enhance ecosystems’ protective functions**: Identify, protect and monitor critical ecosystems services that confer a disaster resilience benefit.
6. **Strengthen institutional capacity for resilience**: It is important to ensure that all institutions relevant to a city’s resilience have the capabilities they need to discharge their roles.
7. **Understand and strengthen societal capacity for resilience**: Cultivate an environment for social connectedness which promotes a culture of mutual help through recognition of the role of cultural heritage and education in disaster risk reduction.
8. **Increase infrastructure resilience**: Assess the capacity and adequacy of, as well as linkages between, critical infrastructure systems and upgrade these as necessary according to risk identified in essential 2.

**Response Planning**

9. **Ensure effective disaster response**: Ensure the creation and updating of disaster response plans are informed by risks identified in essential 2 and communicated to all stakeholders through use of organizational structure as per essential 1.
10. ** Expedite recovery and build back better**: Ensure of sufficient pre-disaster plans according to risks identified and that after any disaster, the needs of the affected are at the centre of recovery and reconstruction, with their support to design and implement rebuilding.
over the 3-year guidance period centered around facilitating communication and coordination across city departments to develop DRR policy and practices; bringing new and existing city initiatives under the umbrella of disaster risk reduction; and, leading public outreach and engagement in MCSR workshops.

My analysis found that stakeholders involved in MCSR workshops within SSA cities included a mix of internal (city departments) and external (civil society organizations (CSOs), international nongovernmental organization (INGO) regional outfits, business associations, etc.) stakeholders, the extent of these stakeholders’ involvements varying significantly between cities. These groups determined local strengths and weaknesses which were ultimately profiled in DRR action plans.
5. Urban Risk Profiles

The background to each city provided below highlights the underlying factors which render communities within the three cities vulnerable to hazards. By nature of the multitude of factors which define a city, each has a different level of hazard, disaster risk, and capacity to manage and respond.

5.1. Kisumu, Kenya

Kenya’s third largest city, Kisumu, has an estimated population of 366,510 residents and has grown by 3.22 percent since 2015 (World Urbanization Prospects 2021). Per Kenya’s national Urban Areas and Cities Act of 2011, Kisumu should be self-governed by a City Board. However, the County Government of Kisumu has not established the Board and instead exercises direct control of City Management through the City Manager and City Department, their associated office. The City is thus dependent on the County Government for financing, has weak capacity in middle management, and lacks technically qualified staff (Onyango and Agong 2018). The Assistant City Manager served as MCSR’s focal point in Kisumu (Fuller 2019).
Kisumu has one of Kenya’s highest poverty levels and worst set of health indicators (Millenium Cities Initiative 2014); half of the city’s population lives in poverty as compared to the national average of 29 percent, and over half of the city reside in a poor living environment (County Government of Kisumu 2019; Onyango 2018). Kisumu is situated on Lake Victoria, north-west of Nairobi and growing rapidly, mainly through expansion of peripheral informal settlements (see Figures 6 and 7). (Simiyu, Cairncross, and Swilling 2018). Extreme weather, poverty, poor infrastructure, and population pressure are the main drivers of risk exposure and vulnerability (Development Initiatives 2019). Flooding is the most frequently reported disaster, indirectly affecting 96 percent of the total population within the city and surrounding peri-urban areas.
Resource and service provision to Kisumu’s slums is especially weak (e.g., poor road management, see Figure 8), resulting in increased vulnerability (Onyango 2018).

Figure 8. Typical roads in Kisumu’s informal settlements. Source: Onyango (2018)
5.2. Dire Dawa, Ethiopia

With a population of 426,000, Dire Dawa city is the second largest city in Ethiopia and has grown by 4.42% annually since 2015 (UN World Urbanization Prospects 2018). The city’s poverty is relatively low, at 11 percent, versus Ethiopia’s rural poverty rate of 23 percent.
Situated 500 kilometers east of Addis Ababa, the city lies on the East Ethiopian Plateau, serving as a watershed for the surrounding mountain escarpments (see Figures 9 and 10). Rainfall variability, intensive rainfall around the city, solid waste dumping in city rivers, and encroachments of informal settlements on the riverbanks are the primary drivers of Dire Dawa’s risk profile, making floods the most significant hazard for the city followed by droughts (Erena and Worku 2018; Desinventar 2019). In 2006, devastating flash floods swept through the city, resulting in the deaths of more than 300 people, which disproportionately affected the urban poor and those living in informal settlements (Fuller 2019). Those living in riverside shacks were instantly swept away when the Dechatu River burst its banks, and dozens more were buried alive when the riverbanks collapsed (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Dechatu River’s eroded banks in 2006. Source: BBC News (2006).

Dire Dawa is organized under the federal democratic republic of Ethiopia “Dire Dawa administration charter proclamation No. 416/2004” and is governed by two tiers of administration – the Municipality, which is responsible for service delivery and city administration, and the kebeles, which are responsible for “administering local issues, including organising and mobilising the community in development activities, social and security issues” (UN-Habitat 2008). Local government funding is derived directly from the federal government.
The MCSR program worked through a focal point in the Municipal Disaster Risk Management Coordination office.

5.3. Kampala, Uganda

Located on northern shores of Lake Victoria, Kampala, Uganda’s capital and largest city, hosts a population of 3.47 million residents which has grown by approximately five percent annually (see Figure 12) (UN World Urbanization Prospects 2018). Inappropriate land-use planning, including encroachment on the city’s wetlands and expansion of informal settlements, contributes to the vulnerability of the urban population, especially poor residents, to flooding and landslides (Kampala Capital City Authority 2019; Fuller 2019). Kampala’s case is unique, as its slums, which house roughly 60% of the total population, are widely dispersed throughout the city (see Figure ) (UN-Habitat 2017).
The Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), led by a centrally appointed executive director, supervises and manages the city (LSE Cities 2018). KCCA commands significant power over city planning and reports directly to the Government of Uganda, however its administrative boundary covers only a fraction of the urban area. A risk manager working with KCCA served as MCSR’s local focal point (Fuller 2019).
6. MCSR Coordinator Interviews

6.1. MCSR Framework

MCSR coordinators believed MCSR to center around the need to build pilot cities’ technical capacity for DRR at the government and institutional level. Interviewees pointed to a programmatic focus on increasing stakeholder engagement at the institutional and governance levels; this largely comprised of increasing involvement of city government departments in the DRR workshops and action plan development. Resilience was felt to be best achieved via increased horizontal connectivity, in which a wide diversity of stakeholders at the government, institutional, and civil society levels were consulted. The extent to which stakeholders outside of the government were included in the MCSR introduction was ultimately determined by the focal points and their respective city governments; MCSR coordinators served in a guidance role.

The Scorecard was not intended to simply produce a “grade” on a city’s DRR practices; rather, its perceived importance lay in its multi-stakeholder process and “unpacking the Sendai Framework in simpler language, [...] making it more tangible for the government,” as one MCSR coordinator noted. Scorecard results were intended to inform the city government where the DRR action plan would focus; for instance, if the stakeholders involved with scoring found a city’s engagement with civil society and international NGOs to be low, this would theoretically be addressed in a city’s DRR action plan.

6.2. MCSR Introduction

MCSR coordinators noted that the representation of vulnerable community groups was consistently marginal in program workshops within SSA pilot cities. However, they noted that the extent to which local city governments sought to recognize and include vulnerable populations varied significantly.

Of the five SSA pilot cities, MCSR coordinators saw the highest levels of civil society engagement in Kampala. During the Scorecard process and DRR action planning phases, the city’s focal point proved capable of bringing in a diverse assortment of residents representing of
the elderly, the disabled, women, and the youth, among other city stakeholders frequently most at risk from natural disaster. In addition, coordinators noted the inclusion of local NGOs, CSOs, and figures from academia.

Coordinators found the recognition and inclusion of vulnerable groups in Kisumu’s MCSR workshops to be laudable as well. They observed the attendance of representatives from the city’s youth communities as well as advocates for those with disabilities.

Contrary to the workshops in Kampala and Kisumu, MCSR coordinators noted especially low levels of inclusion and participation of representatives, NGOs, and CSOs specifically advocating for local vulnerable communities in Dire Dawa. One MCSR coordinator alleged that “two out of the fifty people in the [workshop] room were from CSOs.”

6.3. MCSR Implementation

MCSR coordinators spoke little on the extent to which the DRR action plans considered social equity. However, coordinators noted differing degrees to which SSA pilot city governments were prone to share developed plans internally and publicly. Coordinators perceived MCSR as encouraging the publication of the Scorecard’s results “at least locally or shared with civil society” as an objective of MCSR, “so that there can be some validation.” The extent to which the MCSR initiative encouraged cities to publicly publish their plans was not made clear.

MCSR coordinators largely felt unable to speak on the equity of local initiatives born from the program, as interviews took place a few months after the final stages of MCSR. However, coordinators specifically pointed to Kisumu City’s inclusion of the youth population in sanitation and waste programs as a notable example of equity. However, coordinators perceived the programmatic outputs of the MCSR in Kisumu to be short-term as opposed to their objective of institutionalizing multi-stakeholder engagement within DRR policy development and implementation.
6.4. Catalysts and Barriers

Recent natural disasters were perceived to induce higher enthusiasm and involvement in the MCSR initiative. When communities were recently scarred by fatalities and infrastructural damage as a result of flooding – the most common hazard faced in Dire Dawa, Kampala, and Kisumu – local governments, including those on the more authoritarian end of the spectrum, were more considerate of vulnerable communities during the MCSR process.

Inefficiencies among actors involved in local disaster risk reduction was the biggest challenge coordinators faced introducing and implementing MCSR. Coordinators found themselves having to continually cajole city focal points into including wider ranges of government departments, among other stakeholders. Moreover, once the focal points did reach out to DRR-related government departments, they frequently received pushback over involvement, leading to the slower rollout of MCSR. UNDRR staff perceived Kisumu’s CSOs to be largely response-oriented to natural disaster, rather than guided by efforts to reduce disaster risk. In the case of Kisumu, where CSOs were given the space to act in tandem with the City government, this was believed to distract and reduce the effectiveness of transitioning cities’ governing structures towards reducing disaster risk. MCSR coordinators failed to mention the same difficulty with CSOs in Dire Dawa or Kampala.

Local government autonomy was persistently mentioned as a major factor in accomplishing the MCSR initiative. The autonomous nature of the Kampala City Authority proved advantageous to ensuring local resources were available for the MCSR initiative. MCSR coordinators believed that the city’s ability to advocate for and command their own budget allowed them to better allocate funds to identified DRR issues. In Dire Dawa, whose governance arrangement was similarly nationally connected, supplementary budget requests for DRR activities were approved by the national government within three weeks. On the other hand, Kisumu City government’s capacity to engage effectively with MCSR coordinators was hampered by its position beneath the Kisumu County government. The two parallel governments with similar geographic jurisdictions resulted in deep inefficiencies in programmatic engagement.
The politicization, rather than institutionalization, of DRR, was a theme UNDRR staff noted as pervasive in several SSA pilot cities, many of whom had become inactive because the “mayor who signed up is no longer the mayor.” Cities with a technocratic layer, allowed to develop DRR policy without significant political influence, were seen as more efficient at building a city’s DRR capacity. In contrast, MCSR coordinators expressed frustration at city governments whose high staff turnovers resulted in those they had trained on DRR and guided through MCSR leaving. This experience left UNDRR staff feeling that a “top-down” approach to DRR may be more helpful in building city capacity for DRR, rather than the “bottom-up” approach they perceived the MCSR campaign to be. Kampala and Dire Dawa governed through pre-existing DRR legislation at the local or national level, which MCSR coordinators perceived led to better programmatic rollout. When SSA pilot cities had no previous DRR frameworks to rely upon, such as in Kisumu, the MCSR initiative commanded less leverage. 

“In Dire Dawa, when we filled out the disaster resilience scorecard, even though they don’t have a DRR strategy, they already have like a mechanism in place, the national strategy that they follow very strictly [...] And so when we did the disaster analysis using that scorecard and they realized that they had more gaps than the budget they had for that year, all they did was just to request for a supplementary budget, which they got within three weeks.”

- MCSR coordinator

Selection of vulnerable groups for inclusion in the MCSR process was highly influenced by these groups’ pre-existing organization. In Kisumu, this resulted in the significant inclusion of an urban youth group, who one MCSR coordinator noted “was able to get a voice because they came together and said, ‘we're tired of being idle. We don't want to cause trouble, but we need a job.’” Coordinators noted that this hampered the extent to which vulnerable groups were included in MCSR, as this selection process put the onus on CSOs (civil service organizations), already stretched from their own agendas, to identify “the voices we wouldn’t necessarily hear in the workshop room.” It was not within the MCSR initiative’s resource allocation to organize unidentified vulnerable groups. In hindsight, coordinators noted that they would have spent more time in mapping out a city’s CSOs in order to gauge a city’s pre-existing DRR capacity outside of the government.
The enthusiasm of government actors for disaster risk reduction was perceived to be a significant factor to accomplish disaster risk reduction policy. Problems associated with cross-departmental disconnect were reduced if UNDRR was able to “get the mayor on board [with DRR].”

Moreover, focal points committed to a holistic DRR agenda on a personal level were noted as more successful at fostering stakeholder involvement, as opposed to focal contacts who were perceived to be involved in MCSR for alternative reasons, such as opportunities for travel.

The pivotal role of the focal point was apparent with regards to how well MCSR coordinators felt they were able to reach civil society through MCSR-related engagement. Efforts at guiding the focal point through the MCSR process, including mapping of relevant stakeholders (e.g., government departments, INGOs, NGOs), captured a sizable portion of UNDRR resources devoted to MCSR. This distorted the objectivity of the Scorecard results, which asked questions about city governments’ inclusion of vulnerable populations and civil society engagement.

UNDRR believed the extent to which a SSA pilot city’s focal point reached out to civil society and vulnerable groups was determined by several reasons, including pre-existing governance norms, the size of their respective city, and the extent to which they were aware of how their city’s communities were segmented and organized.

The pre-existing culture of inclusion within cities heavily impacted the equity of MCSR’s processes, outputs and outcomes. For instance, MCSR coordinators felt that civil society engagement in Dire Dawa was hampered by the government’s authoritarian relationship with communities, noting that “CSOs have very little space” in the city. In cases such as Dire Dawa’s, MCSR coordinators had to persistently push for increased stakeholder involvement. In urban cases operating with less restrictive practices, organizations and groups advocating for vulnerable groups were more vocal, included, and involved in the MCSR process. However, coordinators noted that institutional recognition, inclusion, and cooperation with communities ran far deeper than what was seen in MCSR; staff portrayed institutional communication with village elders and communities as a “way of life” in Dire Dawa, and inclusive organization within Kampala as stemming from “the culture of the working class” in Kampala.
MCSR coordinators also found that **structural injustices** hindered the diversity of workshop meetings. They noted that MCSR meetings in the SSA pilot cities were oftentimes disproportionately dominated by male department heads, with very few women at the table. This was attributed to deeper gender issues within SSA governance structures, an issue UNDRR staff believed to be outside of their program’s capabilities to remediate.

The role of MCSR as a guidance program, rather than a funding organization, was frequently misunderstood by SSA city governments. An MCSR coordinator noted that city governments oftentimes believed “it’s the UN bringing this [program]. So they should have money. They should give us money.” Indeed, the capacity of SSA pilot cities to fund MCSR was seen to be a significant factor for success. Cities with the authority of requesting and budgeting their own funds for DRR-related activities were perceived as more capable of implementing the DRR action plans they developed with the guidance of UNDRR, while DRR action plan development in cities with less financial autonomy was felt to be a somewhat futile process; how useful could an inclusive DRR action be with no money to support it? As one coordinator noted:

> “You can come up with priorities, **but if you’re not pointing at the money then that is as good as going onto a shelf** [...] which is what’s going to happen with at least three of the five [SSA beneficiary cities].”

Moreover, when a city commanded a stronger budget, like Kampala, UNDRR perceived their staff and focal points to be better trained in DRR, leading to better MCSR outcomes. However, this did not necessarily translate to greater vulnerable community group recognition and involvement.

**Availability of data** was felt to be a key factor in facilitating civil society engagement. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and other agencies sought data on previous baseline studies, among other data needs, during the MCSR process, and its inexistence was perceived to funnel resources away from further vulnerable community inclusion. UNDRR staff noted that when a pilot city was not able to provide data on past DRR programs, previous organizations with whom they collaborated, or previous DRR reports, the MCSR program suffered.
Resource constraints also existed from the UN’s perspective. The MCR Campaign experienced difficulties in mission implementation in 2016, changing UNDRR priorities and resulting in the loss of the Campaign’s full-time staff member. Management of the MCR Campaign and its components, such as the MCSR initiative, concomitantly fell on UNDRR staff already assigned other duties. A primary MCSR coordinator in SSA lamented the program “literally was just a one man show for me.”

7. Kisumu Disaster Management Actor Interviews

7.1. MCSR Framework

A focus on building DRR capacity at the institutional level – within and between government departments - was felt by DMAs to be the primary objective throughout the initiative. MCSR was perceived as intending to increase interdepartmental communication, foster knowledge of DRR within County Government departments, and to identify pathways for infrastructural improvements. MCSR sought to “sensitize us [to DRR] to work from our end,” as one City official noted.

MCSR provided the City with a framework to address waste and sanitation issues, a central issue within Kisumu. Residents, lacking nearby waste collection facilities, had resorted to dumping their trash in the river and streets, clogging the city’s inadequate drainage systems. Through MCSR, the City decentralized garbage collection centers and prompted the Environment and Engineering Departments to dredge the river bifurcating multiple informal settlements. The city’s broken drainage system, which was a significant factor behind prior informal settlement flooding, was pushed to be fixed through MCSR. MCSR also provided a pathway to move a dumpsite which stood as a chronic issue for the City.

A bridge in Kisumu’s peri-urban region was built over a frequently swollen river under the MCSR initiative using funds from the French Development Agency. Previously, area flooding prevented pregnant women from reaching the hospital, children attending school, and farmers bringing produce to market.
While other security issues were addressed, such as a project to fund streetlights, flooding was perceived as the most significant focus of MCSR. Specifically, DMAs believed MCSR’s primary function in Kisumu was to facilitate the building and management of physical infrastructure - bridges and drainages - within the city.

7.2. MCSR Introduction

DMAs noted that vulnerable community groups were actively consulted throughout much of the Preliminary Resilience Assessment and Strategy Development phases. Only in the last meeting coordinated via MCSR were community representatives invited; a young woman and man from each of the City’s fourteen administrative units attended. However, representatives were perceived as being dispassionate and lacking leverage within their communities.

Stakeholder engagement with a broader range of DM/DRR organizations was sought by the City through MCSR, such as with insurance providers who could cover farmers’ peri-urban plots, however these networks went unrealized due to funding limitations

7.3. MCSR Implementation

Interviews pointed to a culture of understanding within the City that vulnerability to disasters was a multi-sectoral issue, exacerbated by root socioeconomic stressors. The City was able to leverage the political attention to DRR, triggered by MCSR, to promote and enact DRR programs and actions which frequently served to benefit the most vulnerable communities, including underserved informal settlement residents and the city’s youth population. County Government officials perceived much of work stemming from MCSR to focus on specifically reducing the risk disaster posed to informal settlements.

Leveraging what the City Manager termed “social capital,” the City developed a partnership with the city’s unemployed youth to keep the streets and river free of waste, ceding financial resources and a programmatic backbone directly to vulnerable residents to take care of their neighborhoods and encourage their communities to do the same. The City recognized those who depended on scavenging the dumpsite for a living as vulnerable, negotiated with the group, and
employed them to help move the dumpsite. Waste and sanitation programs were noted by multiple DMAs as highly successful – “when [the youth groups] know it is their responsibility to dredge the rivers, they don’t go throwing garbage in it, because by the end of the day, it will up to them to remove.”

While publication of the DRR action plan developed through MCSR was noted as having been encouraged by MCSR coordinators, Kisumu’s DRR action plan was not made public.

7.4. Catalysts and Barriers

DMAs perceived significant flooding events to pose as a catalyst for the creation and implementation of DRR policies and programs. A severe flooding event in 2018, which resulted in the loss of three lives, was felt to point the attention of both legislators and informal settlement residents toward the need for improved drainage and more effective waste programs and resulted in significant shifts towards DRR.

Kisumu’s governance structure was perceived by Kisumu disaster management actors as a barrier to achieving equitable DRR outcomes for several reasons. City officials lacked the autonomy to reduce disaster risk as advocated for by the MCSR initiative. Rather, the City was obliged to work through the County Government. Moreover, the high staff turnover of the County Government and City Departments, which included administrative and technical positions, was felt to significantly hinder the institutionalization of DRR. Generally, a lack of coordination between government departments, NGOs, and CSOs was perceived to hinder the accomplishment of DRR activities, resulting in unequal resource provisions between communities and inefficiencies in managing disasters within the city. ICLEI Africa, MCSR’s partner institution, was brought in to the city to foster new initiatives, however the INGO had issues navigating Kisumu’s complex governance structure and mistakenly believed local funding could be acquired for DRR programs.

Many County policymakers originally lacked an understanding of what the concept of DRR entailed and were thus hesitant to budget for the MCSR initiative. Including policymakers when the detailed Disaster Resilience Scorecard was filled out and providing them means to
discuss risk reduction with City Department officials was found to be successful in securing DRR funding. Legislators are now “doing something every year in the budget” for DRR, namely by providing funding for improved drainages.

“If [the legislators] are looped in at least one day discussing policies and the budgets, they know better what to do. So we trained part of the staff, the city staff, especially the ones working in the department of environment. And those are the ones working with the department of engineering.”  

- Kisumu City official

The understanding and pursuit of DRR demonstrated by the City proved to be a primary driver behind the programs and policies developed through MCSR. As opposed to the City’s recognition of the need for DRR-based policy and programs, multiple DMAs perceived the County Government’s focus to center around disaster response over DRR. Moreover, it was felt by interviewees that County response efforts were haphazard and ineffective at providing affected residents with necessary supplies and resources. This attitude was felt to contribute to the shortage of funding vital for the City’s DRR programs.

Funding issues were also noted as significantly hindering the implementation of DRR actions. At the County level, limited financial resources translated to the financing of short-term measures for infrastructure needs which often needed to be re-addressed. Budgeting for DRR proved complicated and inefficient throughout the MCSR process; the County failed to recognize the initiative’s calls for a holistic approach to Kisumu’s disasters, instead choosing to continue its previous method of financing specific Departments and projects in a piecemeal manner. City officials seeking funds for the MCSR process were obliged to lobby for increased, separate funding for County Departments and organize the fragmented funding themselves. The lack of DRR legislation at the national level was felt to pose as a barrier for funding pathways through the government.

As a result of weak local-level funding for DRR, Kisumu’s governments are rendered dependent on external organizational actors to accomplish major infrastructural changes and provide guidance. UNDRR’s role as a guidance agency, rather than as a funding entity for DRR, was cited as reducing local incentives to implement related policy and programs.
“It looks like we don't [understand DRR] because nobody, nobody can bring you down for not implementing the action plan when [UNDRR] didn't fund you.”

“The capacity building was enough and good, but if [UNDRR] could do it differently, they could fund at least a project to make an impact”

- Kisumu DMA

8. Findings

Overall, the data collected suggest that MCSR has not inherently focused on issues of social equity. Actions featuring a focus on inequality and justice are piece-meal across participating cities and their programs, suggesting that the decision to prioritize or ignore equity may not be a direct result of the MCSR program structure.

Furthermore, I have identified several threats to social equity and justice and appear in the program’s structure and the way MCSR was introduced and implemented introduction and in SSA pilot cities. There are two primary findings which inform this assertion: 1. MCSR’s provision of DRR guidance and expertise can be properly acted upon only by participant cities with pre-existing financial and political resources, and 2. Few cities explicitly offered vulnerable residents an opportunity to self-identify their needs, priorities, and portrayal. In my Discussion and Recommendations section, I go on to suggest alternative pathways to these challenges.

8.1. Flaws within MCSR’s Framework

Perceptions of MCSR objectives were consistent across MCSR coordinator and KDMA perspectives. Both actor groups saw MCSR as a program centered on building government capacity to reduce disaster risk. These groups’ interpretations differed primarily in terms of emphasis. MCSR coordinators leaned on the importance of cities being able to withstand and/or adapt to acute shocks (e.g., floods, fires) in their definitions of DRR while also frequently citing infrastructural issues as chronic stresses. KDMAs agreed with this perception of MCSR’s form
of DRR. However, KDMAs also frequently cited socio-economic disparities specific to Kisumu as chronic stresses to resilience.

The frame of resilience sought by MCSR, centered around the strengthening of existing institutions and infrastructural improvements, reflects the perceptions of the UN SDG Advocate interviewed:

“I think that the patterns of urbanization in general can be towards greener, more productive, less congested, and less resource intensive cities. And for low-income countries potentially a huge benefit because they don’t even have to aspire to follow the Los Angeles model - get your car and drive 20 miles - but can think about a very, very different kind of spatial organization that requires a lot less resources but will actually lead to more pleasant life and and greener cities.” ... “And there are many, many other aspects of city life that can be made far more efficient through smart technologies. So if we have a smart grid, smart transport, smart infrastructure, and design cities thinking of sustainability and finding low resource cost solutions to urban life [...]”

MCSR may mirror what de la Poterie and Baudoin (2015) see to be a broader shift in negotiated international agreements and related programs toward investments in technological solutions. Indeed, scholars have pointed out that “green” and “smart” development agendas have been driving new forms of displacement and gentrification in the Global South (Kaike 2017; Pieterse 2011).

As such, the MCSR framework poses a long-term threat to equity in emerging SSA cities, located at pivotal points in their development. MCSR seeks to encourage the sustainability of its own form of resilience by guiding cities in the development of DRR action plans founded on UNDRR’s Ten Essentials, a checklist which emphasizes the strengthening of governing institutions over targeting city residents’ root sources of vulnerability and multi-stakeholder inclusion. While analyzing MCSR’s long-term impacts lie outside the scope and timeframe of this analysis, it can be assumed that the development of these action plans will have some sort of lasting impact on how the pilot SSA cities prioritize their resources to foster resilience.
8.2. Uneven City Capacities to Leverage MCSR

My sample included three SSA cities with characteristics typical of primary and secondary cities in the Global South. Smaller SSA cities with fewer resources and autonomy, like Kisumu, found it difficult to mobilize taxes and secure funding for the introduction and implementation of guidance and capacity-building provided by MCSR. In contrast, cities with stronger institutional capacity, such as Kampala, or possessing stronger means of deriving financial support, such as Dire Dawa, were more likely to leverage MCSR’s guidance successfully. The MCSR process could thus widen the resilience gap between primary and secondary cities in SSA; city governments that are institutionally weak or abjectly impoverished also have the lowest capacity to realize MCSR’s guidance on recovery from acute shocks and chronic stresses. Simply put, MCSR was successful in terms of achieving the program’s objectives of DRR institutionalization in cities with strong pre-existing institutions and financial pathways. The most vulnerable SSA cities were effectively left behind.

“I think to some extent, I would say [DRR in Kisumu] has not been institutionalized because otherwise we wouldn’t be having such problems. I have somebody, ... or whatever things would just flow. Because if something is institutionalized, you have no choice, right. You come and find it in place, find the policies working, the money there, and then you simply go, but in a situation where you are the one to work extra hard to [implement DRR], it's very difficult. And most of the times we use money for other things like for operation and maintenance to deal with the disaster when they come.”

- Kisumu City official

While the City Department and focal point were passionate about DRR under MCSR in Kisumu and sought to include vulnerable residents in their policies and programs (e.g., an insurance program for impoverished peri-urban farms; building out youth group involvement in sanitation programs), their drive to implement resilience policy involving multiple community stakeholders was stymied by the city’s governance structure. The City’s lack of autonomy led to its inability to raise funds for DRR programs, while a lack of top-down guidance from the national level further hindered the transfer of funds to the County and City governance levels. Consequently,
the outputs and processes of MCSR failed to gain long-term traction in Kisumu and the city was left with the same chronic issues with which it had begun the program.

Dire Dawa’s municipal authority was able to provide funding for MCSR based on its close-knit coordination with the federal government, however an administrative culture which encouraged the omission of vulnerable residents hampered the efforts of MCSR coordinators to foster multi-stakeholder engagement.

In contrast, Kampala Capital City Authority was able to take full advantage of MCSR’s guidance structure by providing the funding necessary for well-attended workshops, while its robust institutional structure – DRR programs were left to career technocrats rather than political appointees - ensured that the program’s DRR action plan could be properly acted upon.

8.3. Engagement of Vulnerable Residents

MCSR failed to spur active efforts by participating SSA cities to address recognitional equity. While participation of vulnerable community groups was encouraged via programmatic emphasis on “multi-stakeholder engagement,” efforts by cities to identify particularly at-risk
populations varied. Rather, interview data suggest that the identification of disenfranchised groups was often left to the groups themselves.

“As long as [vulnerable community members] join as a group or they [...] join their voices together, then they get [involved in MCSR programming]”

- MCSR coordinator

The inclusion of youth populations in Kisumu seemed to occur largely due to their ability to organize and present themselves as a distinct entity with which MCSR should engage. In Kampala, a relatively large range of vulnerability community groups were identified, standing in contrast to the marginal recognitional efforts made in Dire Dawa. When external stakeholders were identified in pilot SSA cities, they primarily consisted of CSOs and DRR “experts” such as university officials. There is no indication that the general public were consulted via open meetings or community outreach in MCSR’s engagement with pilot SSA cities.

MCSR’s focus on developing the robustness and efficacy of physical urban infrastructure, such as fostering government capacity to improve drainage systems, could result in significant benefits to disenfranchised communities within pilot SSA cities. Informal settlements are frequently located in the least-desired areas within a city, such as on floodplains, low-lying areas, and unstable terrain (Baker 2012). Efforts at developing pathways towards infrastructural improvements within pilot MCSR city governments have especially benefited these cities’ most vulnerable residents. Furthermore, Kisumu City’s negotiations with and use of the city’s underemployed youth population in dredging and sanitation programs reflect an understanding of the need to distribute resilience-focused goods and services to the disenfranchised. However, MCSR’s structure failed to ensure that its efforts to build resilience were explicitly designed to improve the welfare of vulnerable communities, in conflict with Scholsberg’s (2007) understanding of distributive equity.

Several cities collaborated mainly with elite stakeholders (e.g., government department officials) and only engaged the general public in a limited way, the prime example in this evaluation’s case being MCSR’s introduction in Dire Dawa, where a marginal number of CSO organizations represented any sense of public involvement in MCSR workshops. As discussed in Section 2.3., this presents a challenge for fostering procedural and recognitional justice because the concerns
of vulnerable groups were interpreted and communicated by actors that do not belong to those groups.

External stakeholder involvement within MCSR’s introduction to SSA cities varied across cities. Kampala engaged a wide variety of CSOs, academics, and citizens’ associations in addition to key government stakeholders, while others opted to largely limit engagement with the public. As an example, Dire Dawa’s workshops comprised almost entirely of stakeholders from multiple government departments.

Note, however, that the MCSR pilot cities sampled maintain different sociocultural and political protocols toward the subject of “participation” compared to Western cities. The scholarly interpretations of recognitional, procedural, and distributive justice that have shaped this analysis were constructed and published in the West. In this context, it is accepted that encouraging the participation of vulnerable communities in governance processes can mitigate inequalities. In Dire Dawa, a city with unique ethno-political tensions and cultural norms different than those of Europe and North America, the government has sought to reduce disaster risk with a top-down approach to managing implementation of MCSR’s guidance (Feyissa 2018). This is an important consideration, because while Western principles of justice have shaped the criteria used in this analysis, these ideas are by no means universal.

While the extent to which public contributions were sought varied between Kisumu, Dire Dawa, and Kampala, interviewees frequently cited some form of representation during MCSR’s workshops to be the primary tool for inclusion. While this is an important step with which cities can distill urban community networks and organize public opinion, it rarely provided meaningful opportunities for collaboration or co-creation (negotiations of resilience) and restricted the agency of residents to have their voices heard in decision-making. To frame this finding in terms of Arnstein’s formative Ladder of Citizen Participation, including public representatives in workshops may translate to a level of engagement akin to “consultation”: in other words, MCSR encouraged the status quo in power relations but did not offer vulnerable communities or other residents decision-making power or creative control (Arnstein 1969).
These findings suggest that MCSR and pilot SSA cities could have done more to make the program’s rollout more inclusive without having to fundamentally rearrange municipal governance and authority structures. My conclusions mirror criticisms of “participation” by Cooke and Kothari (2001), Brownhill and Carpenter (2007) and other scholars: while MCSR coordinators contended that multi-stakeholder inclusion was a goal of the program’s process, evidence suggests that vulnerable community involvement in pilot SSA cities was realized only in cities with institutional backing (e.g., NGO experts, government staff). The framing of MCSR as inclusive of city stakeholders is thus only partially true. Lay-residents were largely precluded from involvement in the processes which would ultimately determine the development of their city and ways of life.

6.3. Additional Considerations

With regards to MCSR’s success at considering, including, and distributing benefits to vulnerable communities, context matters. The pilot city program primarily targeted rapidly developing cities in SSA and other Global South regions. Secondary SSA cities face particularly acute governance challenges – local governments frequently suffer from a lack of authority (Kisumu) and political cultures of top-down policymaking (Dire Dawa). Kampala stands apart from these examples by its independent capacity to manage its own jurisdiction and KCCA’s understanding of DRR as an inherently multi-stakeholder issue from both public and private sector aspects.

It is important to note that “inclusiveness” is only one of the multiple, interconnected dimensions of resilience (Simonsen et al. 2013; Foundation and Arup 2015). According to Gaillard and Mercer (2012, 95), “actions at different scales, from the top down and from the bottom up, are necessary to reduce the risk of disaster in a sustainable manner”. Strengthening collaboration, communication, and coordination within and between local governments and institutions is undeniably linked to both resilience and the SDGs. These efforts may be necessary to strengthen existing power structures’ capacity to create long-term, equitable resilience measures.
7. Discussion and Recommendations

The extent to which the cities in this comparative analysis approached issues of social equity and justice varied significantly. Ultimately, the overall focus on inequality and justice in the SSA pilot cities was piecemeal. I do not find evidence that MCSR’s program offerings are what encouraged participating city governments to seek socially equitable urban resilience actions; efforts by participating cities to recognize, include, and act with vulnerable community groups stemmed from local policy and norms. Rather, the form of resilience emphasized by MCSR steers cities away from engaging with vulnerable communities while strengthening the institutions which contribute to unequal divisions of power in emerging SSA cities. Moreover, as MCSR solely provided guidance and expertise on UNDRR’s conception of resilience and DRR while relying on city resources and capacities for funding and implementation, the program may also aggravate the divide between primary and secondary SSA cities.

It should be noted that there were instances where social equity was considered; Kisumu made efforts to include community representatives in MCSR workshops and engaged the city’s particularly vulnerable youth population to help improve the city’s drainage infrastructure and dredge frequently flooding rivers. The City actively worked with those whose livelihoods were tied to a problematic dumpsite for its relocation, sustaining this change via a sanitation program leveraging the same vulnerable group. These efforts were made under MCSR’s programmatic umbrella. Moreover, Kampala included a wide range of stakeholders during MCSR’s workshops and recognized the need to address the issues of the city’s most vulnerable communities.

That being said, it is likely that the municipal actors in Kisumu and Kampala were amenable to the idea of addressing urban DRR issues which most affected the cities’ vulnerable groups and may have chosen to involve them without the support of this pilot program. This speculation is supported by the fact that social inequity is not a consideration embedded into the Ten Essentials, MCSR’s guiding framework (see Box 1). While MCSR coordinators did encourage focal points to reach out to community stakeholders, the decision to focus on equity (or not) was decided by focal points and pilot city governments. This suggests that there are other underlying factors that influence the degree to which MCSR pilot cities considered social equity.
In the meantime, my recommendation for future resilience-building activities by UNDRRR, and other global actors such as TMNs, is to embed equity-focused tools and analyses (such as the CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance’s Equality Indicators) into the Ten Essentials and other program materials from the start, and to make them necessary steps for all participating cities. At the very least, this could trigger SSA city governments to consider social equity in their resilience planning, examine how their proposed actions may have imbalanced impacts, and potentially devise solutions to mitigate these impacts.

On a broader scale, international actors could propose context-specific, systemic changes, steering SSA urban projects away from standardized, cookie-cutter outcomes, such as promulgating UNDRRR’s inflexible form of resilience. These could include both “top-down” actions, such as working with national governments to supplement urban DRR policy with funding provisions, and “bottom-up” processes like helping organize a city’s CSOs around DRR. They can also help select local contacts, consultants, and implementing partners which align with a defined set of inclusive and sustainable outcomes who are recognized in the local area. They can also ensure that sites which sorely need additional resources, like Kisumu, are prioritized, funding resilience-building projects in worse-off secondary cities while ensuring that the most vulnerable populations are consulted at every stage of the process.

8. Conclusion

Building resilience has become a ubiquitous objective of countless urban governments. The SDGs, 2030 Agenda, and resultant UN frameworks such as the New Urban Agenda are clear: resilience, inclusiveness, and equity are inextricably linked. However, emerging critiques of resilience in academic literature find issue with its abstract form and its use in frameworks which skirt around questions of equity. This paper examines the extent to which these concepts hold in the case of SSA resilience planning via an evaluation of the Making Cities Sustainable and Resilient pilot city initiative. Specifically, I asked: how do primary actors in sub-Saharan cities
assess the pilot rollout and the social impact of the United Nation's Making Cities Sustainable and Resilient initiative?

In this paper I present a novel framework, one which leverages emerging urban resilience and social science scholarship to critically evaluate MCSR’s framework, introduction, and outputs against resilience equity principles. I conducted interviews with key MCSR actors and filtered generated data through my equity framework. My findings suggest that considerations of social equity across participating SSA cities varies significantly. Moreover, my analysis and review of the literature has identified several threats to social equity. For example, MCSR’s resource provisions widen the gap between primary and secondary SSA cities through its funding omissions, and few city governments offered vulnerable residents significant opportunities to self-identify their needs, priorities and portrayal.

Moving forward, global actors in sub-Saharan Africa can learn several important lessons from MCSR about how to approach urban resilience at the planning and programming levels. Specifically, they could promote distributive equity at a global scale by prioritizing underresourced secondary cities for participation and funding, designed around equity. At the project level, they could work to identify context-specific systemic challenges and build solutions with the use of tools such as the Equity Indicators. Although truly equitable resilience building in SSA will undoubtedly prove more complex, it is necessary if actors seek resilience for all.

While conducting research for this project, I came across a number of unexplored questions which I encourage future scholars to explore, for sake of encouraging sustainable development practices in SSA’s emerging cities. Future research could focus on unearthing what prompts cities to focus on justice issues in their resilience planning. For example, researchers could explore the causal link between degree of social equity found in MCSR processes, programs, and outputs and the work/educational background of the focal points involved in guiding local implementation of MCSR. Future research could also look at the medium- and long-term equity results of MCSR’s engagements with SSA cities, as well as how equity is embedded in other resilience programs and frameworks.
While MCSR may not have sufficiently embedded equity into its programming, my analysis of the emerging scholarship around urban resiliency gives me hope that vulnerable communities in key developing urban areas will increasingly be given a say in how their city grows.
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