Key messages for Habitat III

Reducing urban water risks by including wetlands as natural buffers in cities and their surrounding landscapes

Cities in their surrounding landscape

As cities are connected to their surrounding landscape, water-related disasters like floods, and droughts are often caused by mismanagement of natural environmental buffers like wetlands. This means that interventions related to land, water and natural resource upstream or on the coastal fringe, may affect water risks faced by communities in the city.

Natural infrastructure solutions

Ecosystem management and restoration can play a key role in reducing urban risk by increasing the buffering capacity e.g. by storing water or absorbing wave energy.

Water and coastal zone management schemes, city flood protection schemes and coastal infrastructure developments (like highways) can become more sustainable and more adaptive to climate change, when natural infrastructure is used as an integral part of their design.

Conversely, hasty, business-as-usual solutions to managing disaster risks in expanding coastal cities can undermine sustainable development and actually put people, their livelihoods, urban infrastructure and valuable land at greater risk.

Civil society can help connect key players

Civil society can help drive inclusive and ecosystem smart solutions for sustainable urban development – by facilitating the connection of different players e.g. via multi-stakeholder platforms; working alongside government to create an enabling policy environment + collaborating with private sector e.g. engineering companies on innovative designs.

Towards inclusive and ecosystem smart solutions for sustainable urban development

Knowledge and social requirements for using wetland solutions to reduce water risks in cities:

- Environmental root causes of water risks and mal-development (e.g. embankments, irrigation, deforestation) and the understanding of how risk is expressed at different spatial scales (e.g. within a river basin, along coastlines).
- The needs and perspectives of all actors involved, including local communities – and how the local economy connects to the landscape – land and water use.
- The adverse consequences of unsustainable practices regarding disaster risk and community vulnerability.
- Possibilities for designing and implementing improved ecosystem management (green) solutions as part of the development programme, which can be combined with grey solutions (hybrid-engineering). This depends on the planning process and enabling policy environment – providing opportunity to bring environmental expertise and civil society issues to the table in early stages of planning.

Contact Person:
Ms. Jane Madgwick, CEO Wetlands International
jane.madgwick@wetlands.org
www.wetlands.org

Wetlands International
@WetlandsInt
Wetlands International