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Chapter XX

Urban risk readdressed: Bridging resilience-seeking practices in African cities

Abstract

Throughout the global south, urbanisation is increasingly coupled with the production of risk accumulation cycles or urban 'risk traps', which are not exclusively driven but exacerbated by climate change. This is the case across many cities in Sub-Sahara Africa, where biophysical and socio-economic risk drivers combine to produce vicious cycles of unequal risk exposure and displacement, with severe impacts on the lives, livelihoods and assets of the urban poor and the city's ecological and socio-economic future.

Focusing on two case studies characterised by different approaches to the governance of Disaster Risk Management (DRM) - Freetown (Sierra Leone) and Karonga (Malawi) - this chapter seeks to untangle the processes that drive risk accumulation over time and to appraise the resilience-seeking practices deployed and resources mobilised to mitigate, reduce and prevent risk. It reflects on the findings from an action-research project conducted in the aforementioned cities, as part of a wider programme entitled 'Urban Africa Risk Knowledge' (*Urban ARK*). As such, it provides fresh insights into how the governance of urban resilience currently works in both contexts and on how to enhance the **capacity to act** of those most vulnerable to become trapped in risk accumulation cycles to disrupt these traps strategically, inclusively and collectively.

Our central argument is that the capacity of emerging DRM governance frameworks to disrupt urban risk traps is defined by the extent to which resilience-seeking is actually practiced in a relational way – that is acknowledging the multiple practices that converge in responding to risk and their relative capacities to disrupt the risk accumulation cycles that impact the most vulnerable. We further hypothesise that the differential ability of ongoing resilient-seeking practices to disrupt risk traps is shaped by the extent to which their governance expands the political space to enable abridged collective action among the urban poor, customary authorities, local governments and external agencies.

Key words: resilience-seeking practices, urban risk accumulation, political space, decentralised disaster risk management, Freetown, Karonga. Sub-Saharan African cities

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Reframing urban resilience

Urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa is increasingly associated with the production and reproduction of risk accumulation cycles or urban '**risk traps'**, which are still poorly understood and tackled. This framing encapsulates both the cumulative impacts of what are termed 'extensive risks' (including everyday hazards such as infectious disease, and small disasters such as localized floods and fire outbreaks) and 'intensive risks' (larger, less frequent disaster events such as tropical storms and earthquakes).

While intensive risks are receiving increasing attention in Disaster Risk Management (DRM) and climate resilience debates, in most African cities the accumulation of preventable extensive risks remains unattended, while accounting for a high proportion of all disaster-related injuries, impoverishment and damage or destruction of housing and social and physical infrastructure. As a result, risk accumulation is often normalised as part of life and quietly confronted through a combination of individual and collective coping strategies by those most affected. Overtime, these cumulative efforts erode the capacity to act of poor women and men who find themselves locked in risk traps.

We define 'risk traps' as the vicious cycle through which various environmental hazards and episodic but repetitive and often unrecorded disasters not only accumulate in particular localities, but tend to grow exponentially over time (Bull-Kamanga et al, 2003; Allen et al, 2015a). Just as urban poverty traps are produced through combined aspects of urban deprivation that over time undermine the potential benefits offered by cities, we argue that urban risk traps undermine the multiple resilience-seeking efforts and investments made by the urban poor and state agencies to disrupt risk accumulation cycles (Allen et al, 2017).

The slow-burn effects of risk traps have significant consequences not just for those caught in this vicious cycle but for the present and future development of a city as a whole, as over time multiple risk traps at various scales lock urban systems and dwellers into intractable risk trajectories. But as argued by Coaffee and Lee (2016: 243), "…path *dependency* need not be path *determinacy*." Capturing risk accumulation and resilience-seeking strategies across space and time is thus a necessary step towards the disruption of risk traps. This requires engendering grassroots-led processes to assess not only how, where, why and with what consequences risk accumulates but also what and whose responses are adopted. We therefore argue that it is not enough to look at the question of resilience of what and whom, but also **by whom**.

The discussion focuses on what and whose capacities to act are embedded in resilience-seeking practices and explores the processes and relations that expand or constrain the **political space** to bridge the resilience-seeking practices adopted collectively and individually by those most vulnerable to risk with those of the state and external support agencies. Over time, the notion of 'political space' has been developed by different scholars with different but interconnected meanings and aims. Webster and Engberg-Petersen (2002) define political spaces as the institutional channels, political discourses and social and political practices through which the poor and their supporting organizations can pursue poverty reduction. McGee (2004) takes this notion as a means to examine specific moments or junctures where citizens and policymakers come together, and the opportunities arising from such moments to abridge actions and interactions "… sometimes signifying transformative potential" (page 16). Cornwall and Coehlo (2006) conceptualise such spaces as opportunities that might advance democratizing effects,

enabling ordinary women and men to claim citizenship and affect governance processes. Buildng upon these conceptualisations, we use the notion of 'political space' to explore the whereabouts of the nexus between power, space and the networked boundaries that delineate fields of possible action (Hayward, 1998). This entails an interrogation of how the resilience-seeking discoursive and material practices adopted by national and local governments, external support agencies (ESAs) and local communities converge into specific geographies and the social, political and material resources deployed in the process by different actors.

Where risk accumulation cycles manifest and where actions are taken to mitigate, reduce or prevent such cycles has significant consequences for who is effectively reached by DRM practices. Interrogating such practices at different scales unveils the real scope of decentralised approaches to DRM not only to reach those most vulnerable to risk but also to include their experience, learning, voice and capacity to act. This involves travelling across the scales that delineate (a) the policy 'boundaries' of decentralised DRM bodies; (b) the actual 'boundaries' under which DRM practices take place and articulate collective and individual resilience-seeking practices; and (c) the micro scale at which risk is experienced. Travelling across these three scales enables an understanding of why certain risk accumulation processes remain more invisible than others – both socially and spatially – and therefore restrict the capacity of localized resilience-seeking efforts to tackle urban risk traps.

Another key consideration in the analysis is that of **time**, or, in other words, the need to understand both risk trajectories and resilience-seeking practices in historical perspective. Doing so allows capturing not only who tends to become trapped in risk accumulation cycles but also what factors and processes shape their mobility in and out of risk trajectories. Such an approach also enables the understanding of how risk is perceived and experienced, what learning is acquired and applied to act upon risk and how such learning travels or not from individual to collective and city-wide resilience-seeking practices. Furthermore, a historical perspective also allows us to understand the socially constructed processes that often result in the production and reproduction of risk. Such processes might be connected, for instance, with the way in which low-lying areas or steep slopes are built-up, or man-made infrastructure developed in a way that disrupts the ecological infrastructure of the city resulting in multiple hazards of frequent occurrence such as localized floods, landslides and mudslides. Examining the way in which specific risk-prone areas have been intervened over time reveals the actual drivers of risk accumulation and the way in which ongoing resilience-seeking practices need to be reworked.

The chapter reflects on the approach adopted to co-produce actionable knowledge on how risk traps work and can be disrupted in collaboration with local communities in Freetown (Sierra Leone) and Karonga (Malawi). The experience was part of the Urban Africa Risk Knowledge (Urban ARK) project, and led by a team from the Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU), University College London, the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) and the Mzuzu University in Malawi, in collaboration with a city-wide network of collectives of the urban poor, NGOs and local authorities. A similar methodological approach has been adopted in Lima (Peru) (Allen et al, 2017).

The next section examines how risk accumulation works in the two contexts under study. This is followed by a discussion of policy trajectories seeking to decentralise DRM. Section 3 offers a critical examination of the junctures and disjunctures for transformative change emerging along the process. This is followed by some final reflections on the challenges faced to widen the political space of DRM governance and resilience-seeking practices in a relational and inclusive way.

1. Setting the context: What and who is to be made resilient?

While our understanding of urbanisation in risk across Africa has been significantly expanded in recent years – and to a large extent indirectly explored through the examination of the region's 'urban turn' – the bulk of the knowledge produced in this field focuses on mega-cities at the expense of small and medium cities (Jaglin et al, 2011; Resnick, 2014; Satterthwaite, 2016; Dodman et al, 2017). Addressing this gap, our choice to focus on Freetown and Karonga is based on three considerations: the demographic significance of small and medium cities in Africa, their under-investigated political, social and environmental specificities; and the challenges these cities face in building resilience.

Karonga is a township in the Karonga District in Northern Region of Malawi, located on the western shore of Lake Nyasa. Its population has almost trippled between 1966 and 2008 and estimated at 63,000 people by 2018 (Manda et al, 2016). At the national level, Karonga is currently the fifth largest and one of the most rapidly growing towns in Malawi and is situated in one of the top five districts experiencing frequent disaster events.

In the 19th century, Karonga was the stronghold of Arab slaver Mlozi and became a consolidated agricultural and trading centre after slavery was abolished. However, soon after independence, Karonga and the entire northern Malawi became known as the 'dead north' until the late 1980s. Then, the civil war in Mozambique promted the construction of large infrastructural projects to connect Malawi to the coast, creating the 'Northern Corridor'. As a result of improved connectivity, Karonga witnessed accelerated demographic and physical growth and became the first major stop from the port of Dar es Salaam. Over subsequent years, the town also become a receptor of refugees and asylum-seekers displaced from neighbouring countries.

Major disasters include flooding, earthquakes and droughts, though the incidence of everyday and small hazards is significant, such as those related to inadequate provision for water and sanitation (diarrhoeal diseases and cholera), traffic accidents and fires, as well as politically linked violence. Between 2009 and 2016 Karonga experienced frequent floods, with a major flooding disaster destroying most of the old town along the lakeshore in the 1980s. Over the years, this prompted a number of infrastructural interventions to make the town resilient to floods, including a major flood control project and Secondary Centres Development Programme to redevelop the town. These interventions attracted migrants and investments, leading to the town's declaration as a township and also as a planning area under Town and Country Planning Act in 1992.

In December 2009, four large Richter magnitude earthquakes experienced within two weeks caused fatalities and significant damage to housing and infrastructure. The earthquakes also compromised the integrity of the dyke, which over time become further damaged by soil mining for brickmaking and via erosion, thus increasing flood risk. Considering the full spectrum of risks facing Karonga's inhabitants, Manda and Wanda (2017) contend that everyday risks may be causing more premature deaths than disaster events; and that the cumulative impact of small-scale events is larger than that of major disasters. A household survey by these authors revealed that despite the widespread impact of preventable diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera and malaria, 56 per cent of households interviewed consider floods as the most serious hazard in Karonga, with the majority living in flood-prone areas along the river where flooding is

annual. Another key problem is the location of social infrastructure and facilities in flood risk areas. Furthermore, there is also evidence of a lack of awareness of the scale of risks to which inhabitants expose themselves when settling in areas which are attractive because of ease of accessing land and fertile soil.

Although the whole of Karonga is exposed to many various hazards, risk accumulation is most prevalent in three specific areas: the informal settlements, the areas along the river, and the town center. Informal settlements house the largest proportion of the population, and are mainly settled on customary land on the flood plain along the North Rukuru River, the lakeshore, and encroachments in the artificial flood-control drainage channels constructed in the late 1970s. Their inhabitants are highly vulnerable due to a combination of factors including insecure secure, poor housing quality, lack of or blocked drainage, and limited access to statal infrastructure and service provision because they are informal. Many of these challenges are associated with urban development policy and practice that condemn the poor to occupy hazards-prone areas in high density permanent and traditional housing.

The city of **Freetown** has experienced rapid urbanisation and a significant population growth rate of about 3% per anum since 1985, in a country with the highest annual rainfall in Africa. The origins of the city towards the end of the eighteenth century are well-documented as the outcome of British philanthropists, abolitionists and entrepreneurs to establish a slave-free settlement in Africa (Banton, 1969; Adderley, 2006). Throughout the nineteenth century, Freetown grew through the settlement of released slaves from all across West Africa by the Royal British Navy's West African Squadron. This explains the foundations of today's largest segment of the Christian Creole population. After Sierra Leone's independence in 1961, Freetown received further migrants from all the region, most of whom were Muslim. In 1991 a civil war that lasted 11 years destroyed much of Freetown's infrastructure and economy, while ethnic violence in the countryside forced mass migration into the city.

Freetown currently has a population of just over one-million residents, making it the most populous and densely settled city in Sierra Leone. Its rapid urbanisation has contributed to the proliferation and expansion of pockets of informal settlements. Today, this process is underpinned by other factors than migration, notably, by a growing demand for proximal living to business centres and markets, coupled with unaffordable land and housing in formalised areas.

The topography of Freetown, a peninsula constrained between the sea and the hills, limits the spatial expansion of the city, forcing low-income groups to settle mostly on marginal lands. The city has developed in three geographic areas: coastal settlements along rocky beaches of the Atlantic Ocean; sprawling inland settlements along the Sierra Leone river estuary; and thirdly, hillside settlements in the steep peninsula hills of the city, which are rapidly encroaching into the vital forestland towards the eastern end of the city. In these settlements, flooding, rock-falls, building collapse, and landslides are common phenomena, which result in significant economic and social losses. The incidence of disease epidemics, especially those that are water borne is also significantly high. The geographic location and spatial distribution of informal settlements (on hillsides, coastal or inland) present unique sets of challenges. Only four out of the 34 recognised informal settlements in Freetown have been studied in-depth (Macarthy and Koroma, 2016), although Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) estimates that the city is home to at least 61 informal settlements, many of which are perched on the last vestiges of land and artificially banked land along the sea, while others sprawl over the hillsides of the city.

Irrespective of the obvious difference is scale between these two urban centres, the commonality of risk occurrence and accumulation makes it is clear that both small and medium urban centres in Africa equally need urgent attention to make them resilient. And within these contexts, the non-uniform distribution of the burdens on the urban poor and informal settlement dwellers places a critical lens on who is most at risk and why.

2. Policy trajectories: Emerging DRM decentralised structures in Sierra Leone and Malawi

African cities have notoriously weak governance systems and outdated and highly bureaucratic structures and regulatory regimes, conditions which often make these systems unresponsive to the needs and demands of ordinary citizens and, in particular, those of poor and impoverished dwellers (Simone and Abouhani 2005; Myers 2011; Parnell 2016; Pieterse and Parnell 2014). Among other normative visions, in recent years the resilience agenda has being pushed forward to gain a prominent role in urban governance across the region. Internationally endorsed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN-Habitat Urban Agenda, a political discourse calling for 'inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' cities is galvanising across many African countries, reframing risk management and climate adaptation as part of integrated development planning.

As part of this process, the national governments of Sierra Leone and Malawi – among several other African countries – have subscribed to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015 – 2030) and adopted new policy measures and institutional channels advocating for the integration of DRM into wider development strategies. While seeking societal resilience through decentralised governance features highly in policy rethoric, in practice efforts are still highly reactive and largely trigerred in response to large scale disasters. Furthermore, the institutional architecture of building resilience in urban areas remains an ad-hoc matter, generally left to the coping efforts of those most affected.

Malawi only developed a National DRM Policy in 2015 in reaction to external pressure following a devastating flood in the south of the country but, up to present, only the 1991 Disaster Preparedness and Relief Act is operational. The weaknesses of the 1991 Act have been acknowledged for decades, particularly in regards to its elusive focus on disaster relief and lack of linkages with prevailing global legal frameworks such as the Hyogo Framework and more recently the Sendai Framework. This justified the need for the formulation of a new DRM legal framework, which still remains at draft stage. Thus, the 2015 DRM Policy is currently the main reference document, which explicitly acknwledges the need of enhancing disaster resilience through a wider integration of DRM in development planning and programming.

DRM policy implementation falls under the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA) which from 2018 is under the Malawi Ministry of Home Affairs, recently renamed as Ministry of Homeland Security. This might suggest that disasters are now framed as a national security concern, although it unclear if the transfer strengthens the role of DoDMA or obscures it into an already heavy loaded bureaucracy. Furthermore, it is feared that shifting lines of reporting might lead to loss of both institutional memory and key documentation. For implementation purposes a national decentralized framework that seeks to support the Local Government Act has been adopted and relies on the National Disaster Preparedness and Relief Committee (NDPRC). NDPRC calls upon a national disaster risk management platform (DRM Platform) every two years to deliberate on selected themes and agreed

recommendations and demands to NDPRC. Platform members are drawn from Government, NGOs, media, academia, private sector, local UN and donor agencies.

The DRM Committee also establishes several technical subcommittees referred to as 'clusters'. However, despite the apparent flexibility, these technical subcommittees have becomed almost permanent and no new ones have been accepted. Calls for the creation of an urban DRM subcommittee have not been implemented with the usual argument being inadequacy of resources. So far, the focus of the policy and its implementation has been on rural areas. Only in recent times have steps been taken to include issues on urban DRM and there are strong demands from the DRM Platform to revise the policy. The debate is probably one of the reasons for the delay to finalise the DRM Bill.

Another challenge is that in general Malawi relies heavily on external support to implement its policies and the functioning of the National Platform. In the absence of a supportive and updated legal framework, DRM projects are merely squeezed through to appease external organisations that provide the funding. In this process the DoDMA plays only a coordinating role and as disasters escalate countrywide the institution gets overstretched. At the lower level, DRM structures have been established only in rural areas up to village level but their functionality is negatively impacted by limited resources, knowledge and capacity. In urban areas attempts have been made to establish disaster committees but only at city level. Little progress has been made in establishing DRM structures at the ward, neighbourhood and block level, despite the fact that it is at this level, especially in informal settlements, that disasters tend to have more serious impacts. In Karonga, a different approach has been pioneered. Despite the fact that the town still lacks a local government, 'village' or 'neighbourhood disaster risk management committees' (NDRMCs) have been established as an initiative of projects such as Urban ARK, an experience that has also been replicated in Mzuzu City.

A similar process characterizes DRM governance in Sierra Leone, where resilience building has been institutionalized as a national security issue. The legal instrument dealing with disaster management is the 2002 National Security and Central Intelligence Act No. 10, which established the Office of National Security (ONS) mandated to coordinate the management of all national emergencies. In 2004 the Disaster Management Department (DMD) was created within ONS to coordinate actions in response to natural and man-made disasters to build 'safe and resilient societies.' Thus, the DMD is meant to play a pivotal role, supporting the development of DRM national policies and coordinating the implementation of local activities.

At the strategic level, the country drafted a National Disaster Management Policy (NDPM) in 2006, which gives strategic directives on the steps to be taken before, during and after disasters and recognises community participation as a good practice. This policy is further supported by a National Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan that maps out the roles of different stakeholders. According to these documents, community leaders should play a key role in coordinating local responses prior, during and after disaster events. However, these instruments are not fully operational, and therefore lack official status despite the country's commitment to the resilience building agenda. At present, there is no comprehensive policy or legal framework to enable government agencies to mainstream resilience-seeking activities into their cross-sectoral development strategies, plans, and programmes. In addition, local government councils do not have legal responsibility and budget allocation for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Like in Malawi, DRM governance relies on multi-sectorial. A National Platform (NPF) for DRM and Climate Change Adaptation was launched in 2011, with the aim to bring together a wide range of stakeholders to promote the integration of resilience-seeking strategies into national development policies, plans and strategies, yet implementation on the ground remains patchy. In 2013, the GoSL with support from UNDP commissioned a further study to assess DRM capacities to act in three districts, including Freetown (IFRC, 2013), yet plans to pilot capacity-building and to expand the initiative to the rest of the country are still to be implemented. Despite these and similar initiatives, the residents of informal settlements still respond to extensive risks on their own and through their collectives – notably the Freetown Federation of the Urban Poor (FEDURP) and through the establishment of local DRM structures, such as Community-Based Disaster Management Committees (CDMCs) and Community Health Workers (CHWs).

DRM decentralisation has also featured high in national attempts to re-structure the sector in Sierra Leone. As shown in Figure 1, institutional channels are expected to work at various levels from national through district government, reaching the chiefdom level as the lowest governance level. Like in Malawi, this structure is conceived to mirror the governance of rural areas in an effort to invigorate and acknowledge customary authorities and structures de-amalgamation, with currently 190 chiefdoms forming what the media has defined as a 'new map of Sierra Leone'.[1] Different ethnic groups are poorly diffused spatially in the country and remain dominant and concentrated in particular regions. However, the opposite is true in Freetown, where ethnic diffusion is higher than in other parts of the country. Here, ethnically heterogeneous community-based organisations (CBOs) represent the lowest governance level. This is not to claim that customary authorities do not play an active role in shaping urban development, rather it is their legitimacy as interlocutors that is treated differently in urban and rural settings. While CBDMCs or local DRM networks – which include customary authorities - are acknowledged in the urban DRM structure, they are considered 'volunteer groups' and thus ad-hoc of mainstream DRM structures. However in reality, local communities account for the bulk of resilient-seeking efforts and investments in Freetown. The latter are often in the form of non-financial contributions (labour and manpower) and one-off investments to meet identified shared needs, frequently pooling together household contributions, in addition to project-based resources from ESAs.

[INSERT Figure 1]

CBDMCs are vital for communicating information and knowledge on DRM, reporting disasters to relevant authorities and helping to build coherent localised responses; however, they operate without legal acknowledgement and support by the government coordinating agency. Local resilience-seeking practices in informal settlements are also supported by organisations such as Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Red Cross, World Food Programme (WFP) and the Centre of Dialogue on Human Settlement and Poverty Alleviation (CODOHSAPA), often involved in coordinating disaster relief efforts. They are engaged in development aid in shaping both the national adoption and ground implementation of DRM policy models and ideals. Informal networks established by ESAs mostly operate in response disaster events but also play an important role in assessing damages and conducting scoping activities, feeding their findings through to ONS and other NGOs to guide relief/recovery efforts. A preventative approach would require

[1] Before the colonial era, there were 217 chiefdoms and 13 districts in Sierra Leone. Owing to the amalgamation process by the colonial regime, the chiefdoms were reduced to 147 and later increased to 149. Post-independence de-amalgamation efforts have reinstated a total of 190 chiefdoms with 16 districts.

the development of an enabling legislative framework and procedures for action endorsed by the DRM National Platform to support interfacing organisations working with local communities.

The previous discussion shows that policy efforts to frame the governance of resilience-seeking practices in both countries have been typically framed within the DRM sector as national security issues. A number of further similarities can be observed through the above policy trajectories. First, we can see emerging frameworks adopted to enhance resilience against those hazards that are frequently documented and monitored – such as large-scale floods – but without sufficient attention to the combined impacts of everyday risks and small-scale episodic disasters that result in obdurate risk trajectories. Second, there is prevailing concentration of state efforts on rural areas. To a large extent, urban local authorities remain the missing link in resilience-seeking and sectoral approaches still prevail, limiting the scope of interventions to reactive responses to large scale disasters.

However, in the two contexts under analysis, it is possible to observe a number of processes that are starting to disrupt these policy trajectories. While this process can be characterised in Karonga as a policy-driven attempt to decentralise DRM through the creation of Neighbourhood Disaster Risk Management Committees (NDRMC); in Freetown, the search for more agile and effective DRM arrangements appears to be grounded on Community-Based Disaster Management Committees (CBDMC), which in informal settlements are driven by the Federation of the Urban Poor (FEDURP). These grassroots structures fill the critical gap left by the local government authorites at the lowest level and more importantly straddle the formalized-informalised spaces which challenge the current operartion of DRM. Even without the necessary formal recognision and allocation of resources to these community-based structures, the growing evidence of their unitity in mobilizing awareness and action at scale demands recognition and futher study.

3. Junctures and disjunctures for transformative change

The previous sections reveal not only how risk accumulation works but also why and how certain resilience-seeking policy narratives and practices have matured in a particular way – often and paradoxically reproducing risk. As argued in the introduction, it is then particularly useful to scrutinisise specific moments or junctures when discoursive and material practices have changed, expanding or limiting the political space to tackle risk traps. Such moments could be seen as what Capoccia and Keleman (2017) defines as 'critical junctures'[2] encompassing accelerated moments of decision-making with potential impacts for transformative change.

The action-research work conducted by the authors in Karonga and Freetown sought to expand the room for manouvre opened by policy commitments at the national level towards the decentralization of DRM and a shift from risk mitigation to resilience-building. The rest of this section reflects on key moments along this process.

Grouding political spaces

[2] For a detailed discussion of this notion, see chapter X by Wesely in this volume.

Carving poltical spaces to advance the decentralization of DRM governance involved building upon the apparent fragilities of the institutional channels in place to ground a more proactive approach incorporating the experience, voice and learning of those most at risk.

In Karonga the project identified the Neighbourhood Disaster Risk Management Committees (NDRMCs) - or 'civil protection committees' as termed within the national DRM decentralization framework - as the lowest level of decision making to tackle risk accumulation. The NDRMCs were seen as the best entry point to consolidate decentralized governance structures due to their pseudo-networked nature in the town, especially in the absence of other recognized grassroots collectives, ever since the failed attempt to integrate Karonga into the Malawi Federation of the Urban Poor. Four NDRMC were therefore established encompassing 44 existing local committess in order to comply with decentralizing DRM policies. This initiative was endorsed by local customary authorities as a way to overcome the defunct role of existing DRM committees due to lack of governmental funding and support. The chiefs identified eight resident school leavers with an equal gender split to champion the data collection and action-planning process promoted by Urban ARK. These champions were also responsible for supporting the NDRMC meetings and participated in a series of capacity-building events. Throughout the project, the NDRMCs were instrumental in driving tangible changes to tackle the risk exposure and vulnerabily of residents.

In Freetown, DRM decentralization was also ubiquitous on paper but vaguely operationalized in practice. As previously explained, Community-Based Disaster Risk Management Committees (CBDRMCs) were identified as the lowest DRM governance level in policy documents but on the ground operated sporadically to implement awareness-raising and post-disaster relief in ad ad-hoc manner and in response to specific disaster events, such as the ebola crisis. In 2014, a new city-wide platform emerged called the "Pull Slum Pan Pipul" (PSPP) or "Freetown Urban Slum Initiative". Initially funded by Comic Relief (a UK-based international charity organization) this platform brought together five non-governmental organizations (Restless Development, Youth Development Movement, BRAC Sierra Leone, CODOHSAPA, and YMCA, together with SLURC and FEDURP. This development offered a fruitful juncture to invigorate the CBDRMCs, to expand their scope and articulate their role with other collectives of the urban poor. In discussion with the PSPP platform, communities from 15 informal settlements across the Western, Central and Eastern districts of Freetown joined Urban ARK as a means to understand risk accumulation and to seek new ways to respond to their problems.

Throughout the process, the above local bodies in Karonga and Freetown acquired new capacities to act and became recognized as legitimate local structures in the wider architecture of DRM governance. The pivotal role of organisations such as SLURC and Mzuzu University was essential to carve and sustain active interfaces between these decentralized bodies and various government levels. In Karonga, the NDRMCs have been officially recognized and participate in the District Disaster Risk Management Committee (DDRMC) that bring together over 30 organisations and government departments. In Freetown, the strategic action plans developed through these structures led to their recognition by the Mayor of Freetown City Council. As a result, four of the settlements entered an unprecedented agreement to develop settlement-wide strategic action plans as part of the updated Freetown Structural Plan. This and other outcomes are discussed later in this section.

Reframing what is to be made resilient

Carving political spaces to advance the scope and impact of resilience-seeking practices requires however more than DRM decentralized structures. As argued before, risk accumulation is highly invisible, even to those who are directly caught in risk traps (Osuteye et al, 2016). Thus, activating new capacities to capture risk accumulation processes across time and space is essential to break the normalization of such processes. Through the aforementioned decentralized platforms, a bold attempt at co-producing community-led knowledge on risk accumulation was adopted covering the whole of Karonga and 15 informal settlements in Freetown. Workshops led by the Urban ARK project team brought together community residents and other stakeholders involved in urban planning and risk governance and fieldwork was led by the communities and their collectives over a six-month period. The findings were fed into collective discussions and exchange visits across settlements and into action plans co-designed with governmental and non-governmental organisations. To prioritise the community-voice and experience, three participatory methods were adopted to capture risk accumulation across time and space and to identify what capacities to act and practices converge in efforts to tackle risk traps. (Allen et al. forthcoming)

First, settlement timelines were used to plot risk events over time, outlining demographic change and the actions adopted to improve housing and the provision of protective services and infrastructures. These timelines revealed moments of significant change or landmark events that shape local risk perceptions and experiences. A forensic approach to these turning points helped to understand when and why these changes triggered different ways of acting. For example, eviction threats were often found as junctures that activated new social contracts and actions towards risk prevention.
Second, DRM 'wheels' were used to map out whose resilience-seeking practices converge around a particular challenge and to assess the scope and impact of ongoing practices and interventions.

[INSERT Figure 2]

Figure 2 shows the wheel produced from initial multi-actor discussions on what is done to deal with flooding risk across different informal settlements in Freetown. The wheel highlights the important role of ESAs and the implicit dependency on intermittent projects and donor funding. Attributing weight to the resources devoted to each practice showed gaps between what is planned and done in reality. It also revealed overlapping efforts concentrated on awareness-raising and disaster-relief actions. Iterated discussion of the wheel facilitated understanding why certain practices prevail despite implicit knowledge that little will change or that they will not be sustained beyond the life of a project. By discussing what could be done differently, how and with whom, the wheel provided a relational map of practices and allowed visioning alternative options and what they would entail.

Third, community-led mapping built upon the previous methods to produce geo-referenced information and a risk profile of each covered settlement in Freetown and the whole of Karonga Town through transect walks, observation and collective discussions. The information collected fed automatically into 'ReMapRisk'[3], an online platform created by the authors to document and monitor how risk accumulation cycles materialise over time, where and why. Hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities to act were captured using co-designed surveys through open source mobile phone applications such as Survey 123, which community dwellers were trained to use (see Figures 3 and 4).

[3] ReMapRisk Freetown and Karonga and accompanying demo video can be accessed at: https://www.urbanark.org/remaprisk

[INSERT Figures 3 and 4]

As an opened risk assessment tool, ReMapRisk eliminates the temporal constraints of data that only provides a snapshot of events or at best, an archive of historical entries. The user-friendly interface of the web-based tool 'tells the story' of the community risk profile in different formats and allows the visualisation of multi-variable enquiries through maps. For instance, users can explore why certain areas are more vulnerable to specific hazards than others. ReMapRisk further enables interactive assessment of the capacity to act of local residents, authorities and support organisations in relation to specific or multiple hazards and vulnerabilities and records the type of interventions implemented to reduce risk threats and their spatial distribution.

Figure 5 shows the mistmatch between the location and density of disaster events and mitigating interventions in Karonga. This indicates that resilience-seeking efforst tend to concentrate on those areas where local communities have higher political capacity to attract investments rather than on those areas where risk accumulation is higher.

[INSERT Figure 5]

The mapping process was also essential to visibilise the ongoing internalisation of various hazards that over time consolidate risk traps. As previously discussed, while shock events are tackled through the different means available within existing DRM structures, slow-burn risks tend to be invisible even to local dwellers. As explained by a female dweller from Susan's Bay – a coastal informal settlement in Freetown: "We live with these events as part of our everyday life, they are so common and frequent that one tends to think that they are individual problems." The community-led mapping process in Susan's Bay revealed that although fires were perceived by local residents as a low occurrent threat, localised fire outbreaks are in fact a regular event with devastating consequences. Typically triggered by a combination of factors associated to energy poverty and exacerbated by overcrowding and housing materials, fire outbreaks are associated with common coping practices that rely on the use of inflammable fuels for cooking and precarious and overcharged electricity connections.

Doing things differently

Strategic action-planning was instrumental in inducing ways of 'doing things differently', expanding the scope of existing resilience-seeking practices. The reframed diagnosis built by local communities fed into the design and implementation of specific projects to tackle risk accumulation. These included five action plans prepared by the four NRMCs in Karonga, Malawi and a fifth in the Zolozolo West Ward, in the northern city of Mzuzu. Additionally, 14 strategic action plans were produced in Freetown by local community organisations from 15 informal settlements, roughly a quarter of all informal settlements in the city. While the first action plans tended to reproduce reactive and isolated responses in each area, an iteration of the process evolved them into more strategic and collaborative plans. The total number of direct beneficiaries from these projects amounts to about 120,000 people in Freetown and over 60,000 in Karonga (the entire township).

[INSERT Figure 6]

As discussed in section 1, risk accumulation in Karonga is associated with urban development policies that condemn the poor to occupy prone-hazard areas. Specific attention went into including informal seetlements into the design of new initiatives to reduce risk. These initiatives included small infrastructure interventions to improve drainage systems and tree planting to reduce river flooding by controlling siltation, water kiosks and toilet blocks to reduce cholera, and afforestation at household level to deal with strong winds.

In Freetown, the PSPP established governance arrangements to support the implementation of the pilot initiatives co-design by local communities. FEDURP assumed responsibility for managing the funds disbursed, monitoring and reporting progress on their implementation and challenges. This process helped to build a shared vision based on local needs and promoted local discussions on equally shared responsibilities and benefits. A process of iterative planning and exchange across all settlements enabled a shift from reactive interventions to more strategic resilience-seeking actions to tackle risk accumulation. The latter included slope stabilization and tree planting to reduce the risk of landslides and rock falls, improved drainage infrastructure to reduce flooding risk and a combination of actions to improve solid waste handling, safe sanitation and water access to tackle the incidence of water borne diseases, among others. The process set up valuable precedents for collective interventions across more than one settlement and raised awareness of the wider actions required at the city level, for instance, identifying hot spots outside the settlements where poor waste disposal or infrastructural works obstruct the flow of water into the sea.

Some initiatives focused on developing 'soft' embedded collective actions to address multiple critical challenges. The residents from many of the coastal informal settlements in Freetown faced long-standing threats of eviction due to the designation of these areas as 'risk prone' (mainly due to floods and disease outbreaks), but also because of the ongoing encroachment of ecological conservation areas through the practice of land banking. The latter is practiced as a speculative strategy by those settled along the coast but also represents the only option for young tenants to free themselves from overcrowded housing conditions and high rents in central locations.

Over the years, some community leaders in the coastal settlement of Cockle Bay attempted to limit further expansion to avoid confrontation with the National Protected Area Authority (NPAA), whose responsibility is to promote conservation and management of wetland resources. However, this practice was conflictive and difficult to enforce by community leaders alone. Through the strategic action planning process, the Cockle Bay community developed an innovative mechanism to control the ongoing encroachment of the wetlands and the consequent risk of flooding and eviction threat. A co-management committee was established with representatives from the community, FEDURP and NPAA and tasked with the responsibility of enforcing community by-laws for the protection/wise use of the wetland ecosystem. To achieve this, all structure owners settled along the coast were enumerated and demarcating pillars built along the coast to keep track of any further embankment. A zero growth pact was endorsed by those already settled along the coastline, with fines to be levied from further land banking earmarked to implement collectively identified projects to consolidate the settlement.

The above initiative and further actions supported by SLURC opened a juncture for the local community to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the NPAA in October 2018. The MoU actively endorsed the zero growth pact activated by the local community of Cockle Bay and has expanded this practice to include all coastal informal settlements across the municipality of Freetown. However, this

strategy will block the land banking practices undertaken by newcomers – typically tenants - to free themselves from insecure tenancy agreements elsewhere in the city. This raises the need for wider strategies to secure access to safe land and housing in proximity to trading areas. While not free of challenges, this is just one example in which a juncture has been productively exploited by linking local practices and community bylaws with governmental bodies to articulate social and environmental objectives and ultimately the reproduction of risk accumulation along the coast.

The action planning process has paved the way for SLURC and PSPP to play a key role in a new city-wide initiative led by the Office of the Mayor, dubbed *Transform Freetown*. This expanded the political space for collectives of the urban poor to strategically engage with urban resilience planning, highlighting the value and potential of participatory processes and community generated data. The outcome of such an engagement promises to deliver more inclusive and sensitive interventions to tackle risk accumulation at scale and marks a significant juncture in urban governance and planning discourse in the city.

Both in Karonga and Freetown, the process examined above has enabled not only concerted action but also the emergence of expanded political to articulate informed local demands, shifting the status of many from being passive beneficiaries to become recognized as entitled citizens.

4. Expanded political spaces for abridge resilience?

Throughout the chapter we have explored how risk traps become solidified over time in specific locations, often with disproportional impacts upon the most vulnerable groups. This reinforces the need to re-evaluate the actual impact of resilience-seeking practices across time and space, as it is through such analytical perspective that risk trajectories become visible and therefore amenable to more transformative approaches.

Looking at risk accumulation reveals that the question of **resilience to what** typically points to a wide risk continuum, where large hazards represent only tipping points and yet attract the bulk of governmental and ESAs resources and efforts. This confronts us not only with slow-onset disasters but, more significantly, with slow-onset risk cumulative trajectories. Exploring the question of **resilience by whom**, reveals that while typically the urban poor account for the bulk of collective and individual resilient-seeking efforts and investments, over time such efforts often erode their capacity to act, particularly when assuming the form of individual coping strategies. Furthermore, even collective resilient-seeking efforts may unwillingly reinforce patterns of risk consolidation, externalisation and inclusion.

The analysis reveals that the political space within which urban resilience-seeking practices operate in African cities might be bounded in a number of ways. The first and most obvious one refers to the adoption of what could be defined as an 'instrumental' approach to DRM decentralisation, by which local community collectives are faced with additional implementation responsibilities but often without the required recognition and resources to feed into wider city resilience-seeking visions and planning strategies.

A second challenge refers to the way in which power dynamics might reproduce patterns of exclusion even within what might be externally regarded as decentralised 'local community structures'. In Karonga, this is the case for refugees and asylum seekers, who are not included in the NDRMCS led by customary

authorities. For more than two decades, the Government of Malawi has hosted a sustained stream of refugees and asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia and Somalia. Many of them are settled at the Karonga transit shelter, which is seen as a temporary location for refugees in transit to the Dzaleka Camp in Dowa – a former prison and the largest refugee camp in Malawi located about 50 km from Lilongwe. However, policy inertia and the already overcrowded conditions at Dzaleka camp keep 'transit' refugees in Karonga for years, with many of them settled there since the 1990s. Despite their long-term presence and the vulnerable conditions of those living in the camp, refugees are either perceived as a temporary floating population or wealthy enough to protect themselves.

In Freetown, a large proportion of those living in informal settlements are tenants. Contrary to widespread perception, many tenants are not recent migrants but have lived in the city for long. They typically live in precarious and overcrowded structures and are at the mercy of sudden price increases due to the high demand for rental accommodation particularly in the most central informal settlements. This means that many often move from one settlement to another over short periods. This is turn makes it difficult to consolidate their affiliation with local community organisations. Thus, tenants remain the weakest link in the grounded networks working to address risk accumulation. This is the case even for grassroots platforms such as FEDURP. While the federation continues to make concerted efforts to include tenants in their rituals, federated members report the difficulty of engaging tenants in self-enumerations and collective savings.

A third challenge refers to the boundaries of decentralised bodies or, in other words, the evolving architecture of these political spaces. In both case studies analysed, efforts to decentralise DRM rely on highly centralised bureaucratic agencies, while bypassing local government authorities. Some of the assumptions embedded in DRM governance are that technically well-functioning bureaucratic arrangements need to be in place to deliver resilient outcomes. However, such arrangements often have little relation to the lived practices of DRM adopted on the ground by state actors, ESAs and ordinary citizens. This points to the need to further understand the disjuncture between Western idealisations of what states should be and do and take into account the multiple histories, trajectories and practices through which state actors go about DRM practices in relation with other actors of civil society – particularly those deemed to be more vulnerable to risk. It also points to the need to acknowledge that statutory and customary systems are deeply imbricate in the running of everyday affairs in African cities – DRM included - and the influence of external support agencies engaged in development aid in shaping both the national adoption and ground implementation of DRM policy models and ideals.

To conclude, the analysis suggests that the ability of emerging decentralized DRM structures to tackle risk accumulation is shaped by their evolving political space to enable inclusive, abridged and strategic resilience-seeking practices in a relational way and across multiple scales.

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