

Climate change adaptation/mitigation planning in Bogotá, and its implications for environmental and climate justice

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Rapid urbanization characterizing the recent growth of Colombian cities has accentuated pre-existing levels of poverty, and limited access to basic infrastructure and services. In general, there has been a lack of meaningful community engagement in traditional top-down urban planning policy and practice, and a lack of long-term planning frameworks to structure and orient a safer future for vulnerable groups across the country.

According to the World Bank, Colombia concentrates the highest number of people that are vulnerable to potential earthquakes in the Andean Region, where this number accounted for 22.3 million people in 2009 -- roughly more than half of the total population, and more than in Ecuador and Bolivia combined. The same occurs with landslides and draught. There were 25.6 million people vulnerable to landslides (more than double the number of people vulnerable to this phenomenon in Bolivia and Ecuador combined) -- and there were 8.2 million people vulnerable to draught in Colombia that year. Despite these levels of vulnerability, the level of awareness in

Colombia remains very low, and the level of response from the general population, incredibly low. A more recent survey documents that only 82% of the total population of the country feels threatened by some type of risk. Out of those who feel at risk, 61% think they have to take action, but only 35% of them has done something about it (World Bank, 2012). In addition, climate change impacts pose significant additional threats to public health and the environment, exacerbating existing levels of community vulnerabilities (e.g. poverty, chronic public health conditions, etc.) In order to address this, creating resilient communities to natural and man-made disasters has been set as a goal across different scales of government -- but here has been very little emphasis on the need to create meaningful strategies for community engagement to reduce local vulnerabilities, and increase the community capacity to prepare, respond and recover from emergencies.

Over the last three decades, many government and non-governmental constituents have emphasized the need for stronger public participation in long-term planning and decision-making processes (Velásquez Et al., 2003). This need has been clearly articulated as a requirement to fully take advantage of the decentralization process that the national government initiated with the constitutional amendments of 1991 -- legislation that resulted in the Organic Law of Territorial Order, requiring the establishment of departmental and municipal long-term goals, as well as local strategies to guide future decisions affecting land use, infrastructure, natural resources, and/or public investment (Ministerio Colombiano del Interior y de Justicia, 2011).

However, as stated by the World Bank and the Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction and Recovery, Colombia still experiences a historic lack of clear national policies to reduce community vulnerability, where government has absorbed the sole responsibility for risk management, resulting in a disincentive for other aspects of civil society to action (World Bank, 2012). The participation of external actors is mainly constituted by individual invitations to certified experts, on a case by case basis. The only opportunities for local participation take place at the micro local level. However, local stakeholders do not engage in substantive decision making, but rather are

engaged to promote and coordinate the implementation of national policies, programs and projects (Congreso de la República de Colombia. 2012).

This is the case with the National Risk Management Law that was approved by the Colombian Congress in 2012. This framework identifies “diversity”, “local engagement” and “community participation”, as part of some of the priority actions, but falls short in providing clear guidelines for local implementation. Over the last decades, various mayoral administrations have set similar frameworks to build resilience and sustainability in Bogotá. But as discussed by Utría, urban development has been characterized by the lack of effective and comprehensive urban planning, incapable of balancing public needs with private interests: “Growth and development in Bogotá have been pressured by forces that deter efficient and organized development: an aggressive real estate market, and the pressing needs of low-income residents. All of this in the lack of a political city and (an equitable and sustainable) regional project (...)” (Utría, 2011).

At the local level, efforts to improve the effectiveness of comprehensive planning in Bogotá and the State of Cundinamarca have resulted in the “Plan Regional Integral de Cambio Climático, Región Capital” (PRICC). This framework is designed as a platform to coordinate the identification and implementation of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies (CAEM, 2014). This paper evaluates its achievements and limitations, as they relate to environmental and climate justice issues, through the following research questions: a) How has civil society and affected communities engaged in the decision-making process? b) What role have technical and academic researchers played in establishing the vulnerabilities and risks addressed? c) To what extent are the needs of vulnerable disenfranchised communities prioritized over other economic and political pressures, and what are the consequences of these findings to inform long-term resiliency building planning processes in Bogotá?

This research uses a combination of various methods to answer the research questions above. This includes the review of primary and secondary sources, and documenting the structure of existing policies, as articulated in official documents authored by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (ISDR), the

President's Office of the Colombian Government, and various state and mayoral administrations in the State of Cundinamarca and the City of Bogotá. This information will be supplemented with semi-structure interviews with government representatives and community-based planners, among other non-governmental stakeholders. In addition, the research will use primary sources documenting community vulnerability - including public health-related indicators, as published by the World Health Organization's Data Observatory, among other government and non-governmental sources.

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