Conceptual Framework
Urban Climate Resilience in Southeast Asia Partnership (UCRSEA)

This conceptual framework provides overall intellectual guidance to project participants.

The Urban Climate Resilience in Southeast Asia Partnership (UCRSEA) project is designed to address a critical gap in understanding the role of regionalization and urbanization in the growing risks posed by climate change in the countries of Southeast Asia. As such, we are committed to **undertaking research that interrogates urbanization as a transformative process** in terms of poverty, vulnerability, growth, and climate change impacts. In particular, our approach is historically contextualized and based on a political economy or political ecology framework. We seek to understand ecology-human society interactions, primarily based on an actor-oriented approach. A key principle of the Partnership is to support work that puts the unfolding transformation of urbanization, at the both local and regional scales, as a central concern.

The UCRSEA is based in **four regional partner countries**, all of whom are experiencing dramatic urban and economic growth following a period of conflict (UNDP 2012). In each, a fundamental social transformation., involving population shifts to urban areas and away from traditional agriculture, is underway. The expansion of urbanization in coastal zones, deltas, and river basins has exacerbated climate related vulnerabilities in areas that are already ecologically fragile (UN-Habitat 2011; Tanner et al., 2009).

Another guiding intellectual principle is that of supporting innovative research, particularly scholarly inquiry that accords with our focus on urbanization as dependent on complex systems. Complexity theory suggests that better governance **requires flexible and adaptive institutions capable of dealing with uncertainty and risk** in ways that are representative and participatory (Folke et al. 2005; Tyler and Moench 2012).
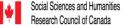
The primary concerns of the Partnership are summarized by the **three research questions** that form the core of the IPaSS research project. These questions emerge from our concern with patterns of rapid urban growth, weak governance, and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change in the Mekong region:

1. How will climate change impact the poverty and vulnerability of urban residents in Southeast Asia?
Much of the climate change literature argues that the poor are most vulnerable to climate change (World Bank 2010). Current definitions and measurements of poverty in urban areas are widely critiqued as being inaccurate and incomplete

(Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2013). Cities are also associated with increasing levels of inequality. At the same time, climate change creates new sources of vulnerability that put those who are not currently poor at risk. The nature of urbanization creates a new set of dependencies on complex systems of water, food, energy, and transport, and these systems are often beyond the capacity of individuals and administrations to manage (Friend and Moench 2013). The disruptions caused by climate change create vulnerabilities, thus threatening ambitions for equitable sustainable development. Moreover, all social organizations become more complex in multi-ethnic, multi-class urban spaces. To ensure effective public policy for poverty reduction, economic growth, social inclusion, and disaster risk reduction, we need to develop practical methodological frameworks for assessing current urban poverty and well-being as well as future vulnerability.

2. What does knowledge, from both academic literature and action research, tell us about creating climate resilient urban governance that is both inclusive and equitable?

Both urbanization and the challenges of climate change require new forms of governance that highlight the importance of citizen rights and accountable institutions (UN-Habitat 2011; Giddens 2009; Harvey 2008). Resilience theorists argue that the risks and uncertainties of climate change require a shift from policy and planning processes of 'prediction and action', towards more learning oriented, flexible and adaptive processes (Tyler and Moench 2012; Lebel et al., 2006). As such, there is a need for more informed, deliberative governance processes that bring together diverse disciplines and experience to create flexible, adaptive, and learning-oriented institutions (Folke et al., 2005; Munton 2002). This approach has been applied elsewhere to create a template for sharing complex scientific information with lay people in terms that are relevant to their situations. Shared Learning Dialogues represent a process whereby different stakeholders and different knowledges (including scientific disciplines and 'local knowledge') are brought together in a facilitated, informed public dialogue that assesses trends and trajectories, emerging vulnerabilities, and future climate change risks.[1] In this way, SLDs put urbanization and climate change in the public domain, while promoting social learning and innovation. However, the continuing research challenge is how to create public spaces where informed and inclusive discussion can take place in different political contexts.
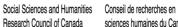
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[1] The initiative builds on work that is ongoing in Thailand, Vietnam, India and Indonesia and supported by the Rockefeller Foundation Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network (ACCCRN) program, and USAID-funded Mekong-BRACE (Building Climate Resistant Asian Cities) project (Thailand and Vietnam). The SLD approach has been applied in both these projects to create a template for sharing complex scientific information with lay people in terms that are relevant to their situations.

3. How can we strengthen the agency of individuals, groups and institutions to improve economic, physical and social well-being in urban areas, particularly in response to climate change?

Scholars identify a number of reasons why governments in Southeast Asia have been unsuccessful at aiding natural disaster victims. These include poor coordination, lack of monitoring and evaluation, rigidity, lack of transparency, corruption, and processes through which well-connected individuals (elites) can dominate and corrupt community-level planning and governance (Lebel et al. 2011; Manuta et al. 2006; Dasgupta and Beard 2007). At the same time it is clear that governments cannot be expected to independently solve the challenges of adaptation for the region's urban poor. The challenge lies in how governance actors and institutions can improve adaptive capacities to climate change (Lebel et al. 2011). In urban areas, which are characterised by a diversity of ethnicity, class, and interest, supporting social justice through collective adaptation means that actions must be framed in terms of rights and governance. The ways in which urban actors can create new mechanisms of collective decision-making, engagement, and linkages to formal state institutions, remains a pressing research concern.